

Longitudinal Assessment of the Job Search Process for Dual-Career Couples

Williams, Smith & Gardner

Paper submitted to the 12th Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational
Psychology, St. Louis, MO.

Longitudinal Assessment of the Job Search Process for Dual-Career Couples

In last few decades, the United States workforce has significantly changed its composition with the influx of women into the workforce (Burke & Greenglass, 1987). The addition of women into the regular workforce has had profound influences on both the workplace and family structure. Work and family issues are becoming more intertwined as both partners in a couple are likely to be working. Even though 60% of the U.S. workforce in 1993 reportedly consisted of dual-career couples (Michaels & McCarty, 1993), the issues facing them have often been neglected in the workplace (Gupta & Jenkins, 1985). The majority of previous research has tended to focus on typologies of interaction and not empirical research (Hall & Hall, 1979).

Even two decades ago, researchers argued that the work and family domains can no longer be considered as separate entities (Kanter, 1977). Family and work have undeniable influences on each other. Some research in the work and family literature indicates that conflict exists when an issue in one role (such as work role) makes it difficult to fulfill responsibilities in another role (such as family role; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). A frequent criticism of the work and family conflict literature is that much of it does not deal with specific and measurable constructs (i.e., Higgins, Duxbury & Irving, 1992). Research has focused on such issues as gender differences (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991), work and family involvement (Yogev & Brett, 1985), and stress and strain (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984). While researchers have begun to take a more focused look at work-family issues, one content area that has not received enough attention is the job search process for dual-career couples.

In today's new environment, one critical issue is for members of dual career couples to balance their job search process with the job search process of their partner and with the needs of the family. The complexity of this process raises questions such as what job search strategy do

dual-career couples take when searching for a job? Does one partner's career take priority or do both careers receive equal consideration? Existing job choice research typically considers the job search process in terms of factors such as job content characteristics (i.e. pay, benefits, type of work), process issues (i.e. evaluating jobs in comparison to others and search intensity; Schwab, Rynes and Aldag, 1987), and actual job search behaviors (activity and preparation; Blau, 1994). A potential weakness of the research is that it fails to adequately consider the influence of social circumstances in favor of experimental control. Little to no attention has been given to external influences such as family issues on the job search process.

Kilduff (1990) has used social information processing theory to address one aspect of the social context. His study considered the influence of classmates going through an MBA job search process. He found that students who were friends or perceived each other as similar tended to interview with the same organizations. Kilduff found evidence that the job search process is influenced by social context. If friends can have a significant effect, family stakeholders (such as spouses or children) should exert an even stronger effect, since they will be directly impacted by the job search process and decision. In fact, some preliminary research has found that the career of a person in a dual-career couple is often constrained by the career and needs of the other member (Berger, Wallston, Foster, Wright, 1977).

The current study examines work/family issues facing dual-career couples in the job search process in two ways. First, we focus on the family-oriented factors that influence job search strategies in terms of whose career (if either) takes priority. Second, we examine how such factors and strategies eventually affect actual job decisions.

Research Study

In order to combine the job search and dual-career couples literature, we developed the following model and hypotheses concerning the job search process of dual-career couples (see Figure 1). This study addressed two primary research questions. The first question is: What impact do family-oriented predictors have on the development of a job search strategy for dual-career couples? Job search strategy here refers to deciding which partner's (one or both) career will take priority in the job search. Specifically, this investigates plans such as having one partner find a job and the partner follows them as well as having both partners search then choose the best mutual option. The couple's planned job search strategy is likely to be affected by the family variables discussed below. The second question is: How do relevant predictors and the planned job search strategy affect the actual job decisions? Specifically, the study considers whether the couples actually followed the planned job search strategy concerning which career (if either) took priority and which partner (if either) made a career sacrifice.

The model uses family-oriented variables to explain the impact of relationship/family influences on the job search process of individuals in dual-career couples. It also shows the effect of two of the variables and job search strategy on the actual job decision. This longitudinal model allows for the investigation of both behavioral intentions and actual behavior in a manner that is similar to theories of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The model hypothesizes that two objective, demographic variables (gender and children), one behavioral variable (previous relocation behavior), two attitudinal variables (perception of partner's career importance and career focus), and the prestige of the job should affect the planned job search strategy. Specific relationships and hypotheses are outlined below.

Planned Job Search Strategy

The first research question investigates the factors that influence the planned job search strategy. Job search strategy can be conceptualized as the level and importance of one's career within the couple. Is the individual's career the most important career in the couple (high), equally important with the partner's career (moderate), or secondary in the couple (low)?

Although both partners are constrained by the other's career, women tended to make more career sacrifices than men (Berger et al., 1977). Research shows that women are much more likely to sacrifice their career for family related issues such as marriage, child care and career development of their partner (i.e. Burke & Greenglass, 1987). Due to cultural and historical constraints, women are expected to have different expectations and behaviors in the search process, often placing the priority of their career after their partner's.

H1: Women will be less likely than men to choose a strategy that favors their own career.

Previous relocation behavior is used to assess behavioral patterns that have been established within the couple. If a pattern has been established, it is likely to be followed again, since people often fall back into pre-set patterns. Such previous behavior could also form an individual's perception of his or her career priority within the couple. Previous relocation behavior provides an objective indicator of how the couple approached other job search decisions in the past.

H2: The more often an individual has moved in the past to accommodate the partner's career, the more likely he/she should be to choose a job search strategy that favors the partner.

Children can have a major effect on any family. People without children have fewer constraints than people with children (Burke & Greenglass, 1987) and should have a greater opportunity to focus time and energy on career development. Meanwhile, parents must consider the needs of their partner and children in their job search. Their choices may become constrained

by day-care needs, caring for sick children, and financial demands. Such constraints may reduce an individual's career priority in favor of more flexible strategies to meet family-related issues.

H3: Individuals without children should be more likely to choose a job search strategy that places a high priority on their own career.

Prestige of the job is also an important variable in the job search. Job prestige involves a combination of highest degree level attained, expected salary and personal perception of job status. When a couple is trying to decide whose career should take priority all of these prestige elements could affect the decision. The amount of time, energy, and commitment spent to get to a certain educational and status level as well as the financial benefits of some jobs should impact the job search strategy.

H4: As job prestige increases, an individual should be more likely to choose a job search strategy that favors his or her own career.

In a dual-career couple, most decision making occurs within the context of the couple. Couples have different amounts of mutual support and influence that can depend on the career focus of each partner (Burke & Greenglass, 1987). For instance, if one partner is very career focused then the other partner might be more willing to make sacrifices for the other career. Relationships are full of compromise, and few people make critical decisions without considering the needs of their partner. In the job search process, a person's perception of his or her partner's career orientation could also affect the level of importance one gives to his or her career within the couple.

H5: The more an individual perceives the partner's career as important to the partner, he or she should be more likely to reduce the importance of his or her own career within the couple.

Since the career importance of the partner has been considered, it is also necessary to consider the importance of an individual's own career. A person who is career-focused or whose self-esteem and self-definition is based on their work accomplishments should be less likely to sacrifice his or her own career for the partner. They may consider the relationship secondary to the career or may be planning to get the career started before devoting more time to the relationship.

H6: As an individual's career focus increases, the individual should be more likely to choose a job search strategy that favors his or her own career.

Actual Job Decisions

The second research question concerned the job choices that were actually made by the couple. Job search strategy is expected to have a major influence on actual job search behavior. The research on the influence of behavioral intentions on behavior is extensive (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Based on this research, job search strategy should serve as a mediator between attitudes, demographics, and behavior (time 1 antecedents) and actual job decisions.

H7: Planned job search strategy should act as a mediator between time 1 antecedents and actual job decisions.

While job search strategy is expected to have a major influence on the actual job decision, there can be a difference between the planned job search strategy (behavioral intention) and actual job decision. In this context, gender is expected to account for some of that difference, since research shows that women often end up following the man in the job search process regardless of earlier intentions. One study considered the decision rules of the job seeking strategy for couples. They found that 42%-61% of the couples planned to use egalitarian decision making strategies in the job search process (Berger et al., 1977). Egalitarian strategies would be those in which both

members actively look for jobs and seek to make the best decision for both. However, only 25% of the couples actually made egalitarian decisions. Most of the couples ended up following a traditional model in which the man's career was given precedence.

H8: After controlling for job search strategy, men should be more likely than women to make a job decision that favors their own career.

Previous relocation behavior is also expected to have a direct impact on the actual job decision above and beyond strategy. While behavioral intentions have large influences on actual behaviors, past behavior can also influence actual behaviors beyond the attitude-intention relationship (Ajzen, 1991). Previous relocation behavior is an indication of what has occurred in the past, and when faced with pressure, people may rely on old patterns to guide their behavior. Even though the couple planned to try a new strategy, they may be likely to end up following the established routine.

H9: After controlling for job search strategy, individuals who have relocated in the past to accommodate their partner's career should be more likely to make an actual job decision that favors their partner's career.

Method

Sample

Participants were 198 individuals in dual-career relationships. Dual-career relationships were defined as relationships in which the individuals had been a couple for a significant amount of time and planned for the relationship to continue. In the sample, 59.6% of the participants were married. Each member of the couple was surveyed independently of his or her partner. At least one member of each couple was a student at a large mid-western university. Mean age was 28.4 (SD = 7.0) with ages ranging from 19 to 58 with 53.8% falling into the 22 year old to 28 year old

range. Complete data was received from 102 women and 96 men. Twenty-four percent (24%) of the participants had Ph.D.s, 26% had masters degrees and 44% had bachelors degrees as their highest degree. Participation in the survey was voluntary.

Procedure

The surveys were collected longitudinally at two points in time. The first survey was completed as participants were beginning their job search in the Fall of 1990. Recruited through the University Career Services department, the participants were required to be in a committed relationship in which one or both members would be graduating and doing a job search (preferably non-local) within the next six months. Both members of the couple participated in the study. The second survey was mailed to the participants approximately 12 months after their graduation date.

Measures

Gender. Participants reported their gender which was coded: 1=female and 2=male.

Previous Relocation Behavior. Two items from the survey asking about previous relocation behaviors were used to create the following variable: 0=partner has moved for individual's career, 1=both or neither has moved to accommodate the other's career, 2=individual has moved to accommodate partner's career.

Number of Children. Participants reported the number of children they have.

Job Prestige. A standardized index based on average t-scores was created using three components: (1) the highest degree level attained by the participant; 4=Ph.D., 3=M.A., 2=Bachelor, 1=Associates or high school, (2) self-report of expected level of salary, and (3) self-report of perceived status of occupation.

Perception of Partner's Career Importance. This variable was a one-item measure of the individual's perception of his or her partner's career importance. The item was coded on a five-

point scale with 1= other important aspects of partner's life almost always take priority over partner's career and 5=partner's career almost always takes priority over other important aspects of partner's life.

Career Focus. Career focus was measured using the Occupational Role Values sub-scale from the Life Role Salience Scale (Amatea, Cross, Clark, Bobby, 1986). This five-item scale measured the participant's self-reported career focus and was rated on a five-point likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The scale included items such as: It is important to me to feel successful in my work/career. The internal consistency estimates of reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was reported as .86 in the literature (Amatea, et al., 1986), but was .65 in this sample.

Planned Job Search Strategy. The planned job search strategy was based on two measures: a decision rules measure where individuals chose the description that best fit their circumstances and a self-report measure of whose career takes priority. This decision rules measure was developed by Berger, Wallston, Foster, and Wright (1977). The choices include many possible strategies with an "other" choice available for situations that did not fit the noted strategies. The choices included items such as "I look first then partner looks" to "locate where partner has the best offer." A three-point continuous scale was computed based on these items with 3=individual's career takes priority in the search, 2=both careers take priority in the search, and 1=partner's career takes priority in the search. The self-report measure asked individuals whose career takes priority on a five-point scale with 1=partner's career highest priority to 5=my career highest priority. A standardized index based on average t-scores was created.

Actual Job Decision. The measure of the actual job decision was based on the job search strategy item and was also developed by Berger et al. (1977). This measure was collected in the second wave of the study. Some of the seven choices included "I accepted a job offer first and my

partner followed” and “only my partner had an offer so I followed.” A three-point continuous scale was computed with 3=individual’s career took priority, 2=both careers took priority, and 1=partner’s career took priority.

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the study variables. Multiple regression was used to test the hypotheses. The first objective of the research was to examine the variables affecting an individual’s job search strategy in terms of the importance he/she placed on their career in relationship to their partner’s career. Table 2 presents the multiple regression results. The results indicated that participants were less likely to favor their own career in the planned job strategy when: they were female ($\beta = .27, p < .05$); they had relocated for their partner in the past ($\beta = -.32, p < .05$); they had more children ($\beta = -.13, p < .05$); they had less prestigious careers ($\beta = .27, p < .05$); they had less career focus ($\beta = .16, p < .05$); they perceived their partner’s career as being very important to him or her ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$). These six family-oriented variables explained 49% of the variance in the job search strategy ($R^2 = .49$). Hypotheses 1-6 were supported in the prediction of planned job search strategy.

The second objective of the research was to examine planned job search strategy as mediator of the relationship between the time 1 antecedents and actual job decision (partner followed me to I followed partner) made by the couples using hierarchical multiple regression. Table 3 presents the multiple regression results. With the exception of number of children, all variables displayed significant zero-order correlations ($p < .05$) with a significant R^2 when all variables were entered as a single block at step 1 in the regression ($R^2 = .276, p < .05$). Job search strategy was entered at step 2 of the regression which produced a significant change in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .064, p < .05$). When job search strategy was entered at step 1 of the regression, a

significant R^2 was obtained (.288, $p < .05$). When the time 1 antecedents were entered as a single block in step 2 of the regression, only gender and the index of previous moves maintained a significant effect on actual job decision, thus demonstrating both direct and indirect effects on actual job decision. The R^2 is still significant which also indicates partial mediation.

In addition, evidence for the hypothesized full path model including the mediated effects was tested by examining the significance and size of the hypothesized direct and indirect effects. LISREL 8 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993) was used to fit this model to the covariance matrix which resulted in a good fit as indicated by the fit indices $\chi^2 = 1.87$, $df = 4$, $p = .76$, adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) = .98, and the standardized RMR = .01. Figure 2 presents the model with standardized path coefficients which are all significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Discussion

In summary, the model presented in Figure 1 was well-supported by the current study. Gender, previous relocation behavior, number of children, job prestige, perceptions of partner's career importance, and career focus all had significant incremental influences on the job search process. Using multiple regression, standardized regression weights that represented partial weights were examined, thus demonstrating that each had an effect when the others variables were controlled. In addition, planned job strategy served as a mediator between the relationship of the six time 1 antecedents and actual job decisions, demonstrating a similar relationship to Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) theory of reasoned action. However, both gender and previous moves had a direct effect on actual job decisions after controlling for the indirect influence of the two variables on actual job decisions through job search strategy. This highlights the influence that past behavior and traditional gender roles can have on actual decisions.

Potential limitations of the current research include the restricted number of items in the archival data set for certain variables. For example, only one item was available to measure the perception of partner's career importance. Another potential limitation is the limited variability of number of children for the participants in the study. Only 47 individuals in the study had children and only 28 of them had preschool children, thus limiting the effect size for the influence of children. Other issues involve a potential problem with correlated errors in that in most cases both members of the couple were included as individuals in the data set. Supplementary analysis divided the sample in half, separated each partner into different samples, and examined the consistency of the beta weights and R^2 values in a cross-validity analysis. Both the beta weights and the R^2 values were similar in both samples and the results of such analyses are available from the authors.

In terms of future research, several directions could be taken. First, to be more consistent with traditional job search research, job content and process variables could be collected for the various job offers to examine the interaction between job characteristics (e.g., benefits) and external family variables. Second, job market and perceived behavioral control variables were absent from the current study. They could have an influence on the strategies and choices made if they create a pressure situation with limited options. Third, additional outcomes of the job search process could be examined such as satisfaction with search, changes in relationship quality, and stress of the search process. For instance, if the actual job decision was different than the planned job strategy, how does that affect one's beliefs and attitudes as well as relationship with one's partner. Finally, level issues could be explored by measuring the couple-level influences on the job search in addition to those at the individual level.

References

- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Amatea, E. S., Cross, E. G., Clark, J. E., & Bobby, C. L. (1986). Assessing the work and family role expectations of career-oriented men and women: The Life Role Salience Scales. Journal of Marriage and the Family, *48*, 831-838.
- Berger, M., Wallston, B. S., Foster, M., & Wright, L. (1977). You and me against the world: Dual-career couples and joint job seeking. Journal of Research and Development in Education, *10* (4), 30-37.
- Blau, G. (1994). Testing a two-dimensional measure of job search behavior. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, *59*, 288-312.
- Burke, R. J., & Greenglass, E. R. (1987). Work and Family. International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 273-320.
- Cooke, R.A., & Rousseau, D.M. (1984). Stress and strain from family roles and work-role expectations. Journal of Applied Psychology, *69*, 252-260.
- Duxbury, L.E., & Higgins, C.A. (1991). Gender differences in work-family conflict. Journal of Applied Psychology, *76*, 60-74.
- Gupta, N., & Jenkins, G. D., Jr. (1985). Dual career couples: stress, strains and strategies. In T. A. Beehr and R. S. Bhagat (eds.), Human Stress and Cognition in Organizations. New York: John Wiley, pp. 141-176.
- Greenhaus, J. H., & Buetell, N. J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. Academy of Management Review, *10*, (1), 76-88.

Hall, D. T., & Hall, F. S. (1979) The Two-Career Couple. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Higgins, C. A., Duxbury, L. E., & Irving, R. H. (1992). Work-Family Conflict in the dual-career family. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 51 , 51-75.

Joreskog, K., & Sorbom, D. (1993). Lisrel 8: Structural equation modeling with the SIMPLIS command language. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Kanter, R. M. (1977). Work and Family in the United States: A Critical Review and Agenda for Research and Policy. New York: Russell Sage.

Kilduff, M. (1990). The interpersonal structure to decision making: A social comparison approach to organizational choice. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 47 , 270-288.

Michaels, B., & McCarty, E. (1993). Family ties and bottom lines. Training & Development, March issue , 70-72.

Schwab, D. P., Rynes, S. L., & Aldag, R. J. (1987). Theories and research on job search and choice. In K. M. Rowland & G. R. Ferris (Eds.), Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management, (Vol. 5 , pp. 129-166). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Yogev, S., & Brett, J. (1985). Patterns of work and family involvement among single- and dual-earner couples. Journal of Applied Psychology, 70, 754-768.

Table 1
 Summary of Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Zero-Order Intercorrelations of Study Variables

Variables	Means	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	1.48	.50	---							
2. Previous Relocation Beh.	1.01	.56	-.28*	---						
3. Number of Children	.46	.84	.08	-.06	---					
4. Job Prestige	50.01	7.41	.30*	-.13	.22*	---				
5. Career Focus	3.40	.53	.21*	-.20*	-.05	.27*	(.65)			
6. Partner's Career Importance	2.82	.77	-.10	.29*	-.08	-.08	.00	---		
7. Planned Job Search Strategy	49.92	8.72	.47*	-.49*	-.03	.42*	.36*	-.27*	---	
8. Actual Job Decision	2.03	.93	.38*	-.41*	.04	.25*	.26*	-.15*	.54*	---

n=198; Gender: Female = 1 and Male = 2; * p < .05

Table 2

Result of Regression Predicting Job Search Strategy

Variable	Beta	F	R	R ²
Gender	.27*			
Previous Relocation Beh.	-.32*			
Number of Children	-.13*			
Job Prestige	.27*			
Career Focus	.16*			
Partner's Career Importance	-.14*	31.09	.703	.494*

* p < .05

Table 3

Result of Hierarchical Regression of Job Search Strategy as a Mediator between Time 1Antecedents and Actual Job DecisionA. Equation 1 Test of MediationStep 1

Variable	Beta ^a	F	R	R ²	R ² Change
Time 1 Antecedents		12.14	.525	.276*	

Step 2

Planned Job Search Strategy	.36*	13.99	.583	.340*	.064*
-----------------------------	------	-------	------	-------	-------

Table 3 continues

B. Equation 2 Test of Mediation

Variables

<u>Step 1</u>	Beta	F	R	R ²	R ² Change
Planned Job Search Strategy	.54*	79.47	.537	.288*	
<u>Step 2</u>					
Gender	.14*				
Previous Relocation Beh.	-.19*				
Number of Children	.03				
Job Prestige	.01				
Career Focus	.07				
Partner's Career Importance	.02	13.99	.583	.340*	.052*

* $p < .05$

^a Betas refer to the standardized regression weights assigned for each step of the Hierarchical regression

Figure Caption

Figure 1: Job Search Process of Dual-Career Couples

Figure 2: Job Search Process of Dual-Career Couples with path coefficients



