

Status Quo of College Students' Career Indecision from the Perspective of Planned Happenstance

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Abstract This study explores the application of the planned happenstance theory in college students' career planning and its impact on career indecision. Traditional career theories emphasize self-awareness and the demands of the work environment but overlook the influence of serendipitous events on individual career development. In contrast, the planned happenstance theory highlights individuals' receptivity and ability to leverage unexpected events, viewing them as potential turning points in career progression. Research indicates that students with higher levels of planned happenstance skills exhibit greater career decision-making competence and lower levels of career indecision. Through a survey of 312 students from university A in city X, this paper analyzes the current state of career indecision among the student population and proposes strategies and recommendations, including maintaining a positive mindset, establishing a sound career planning perspective, enhancing planned happenstance skills, and improving career decision self-efficacy. Additionally, the study finds that the revised Strategies for Coping with Career Indecision Questionnaire (SCCI) demonstrates strong reliability and validity among Chinese college students, making it suitable for localized research.

Key words Planned happenstance; Career indecision; Career planning; College students; Career decision-making; Serendipitous events; Strategies for Coping with Career Indecision Questionnaire (SCCI)

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1 Literature review

The traditional career theory mainly focuses on the requirements of self cognition and work world, and emphasizes the individual learning and summarizing of events, but the impact of accidental events on individual career is rarely mentioned. Krumboltz's social learning theory of career decision making is taken as an example, which believes that individuals can actively accumulate learning experience under the constraints of congenital conditions and environment, and then obtain growth. The stereotyped impression of an individual will promote the individual to have obvious positive or negative tendencies in the process of facing a neutral stimulus, and then subjectively believe that the stimulus received also has positive or negative characteristics (associative learning experiences). In general, Krumboltz's social learning theory of career decision making points to the individual's ability to actively adapt to the rapidly changing environment. However, the four aspects of "learning experience, self-observation inference, world outlook inference, and work oriented skills" will affect each other. It is still very difficult for individuals to make career choices^[1].

The rapid change of social environment has impacted on the

original career decision theory, and the planned happenstance theory has made up part of the blank of social learning theory of career decision making. The planned happenstance theory refers to not excluding the occurrence of accidental events, and the basic framework includes "planned – happen – stance". The planned happenstance theory emphasizes the individual's acceptance of happenstance. It is believed that any happenstance has a turning point. It encourages individuals to cultivate the skills of discovering and seizing opportunities, and maintain an open, confident and curious attitude towards happenstance^[2]. Krumboltz's career belief theory points out that a series of comprehensive assumptions about future career development constitute an individual's career belief^[3], emphasizing the cognitive role of individuals in the relationship chain of "self – career-relationship between self and career"^[1]. To sum up, the individual's cognition of events will affect the individual's experience summary and learning of events, even prior to the latter, that is, the individual's attitude to happenstance and fixed events determines the individual's learning effect after the event to a certain extent. At present, there are increasingly unpredictable and unexpected incidents in the process of college students' career development, which has become an inevitable trend in college students' career planning and career decision-making. Therefore, it is of great theoretical value and practical significance to explore the impact of the planned happenstance theory on college students' career planning for improving current college career planning classroom.

Planned happenstance can strengthen college students' individual career decision-making level. It emphasizes the positive

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value of happenstance on individual career decision-making, and can improve the level of individual career development^[4]. Every college student will encounter happenstance, but not all college students can seize and make good use of the opportunities brought by happenstance to further improve their career decision-making level^[5]. Kim *et al.* pointed out that in the single intermediary relationship chain of college students' "career participation – career decision-making self-efficacy – career decision-making certainty", planned happenstance played a regulatory role. The higher the level of planned happenstance, the more college students' individual career participation can positively predict the certainty of career decision through career decision-making self-efficacy. This study has confirmed that planned happenstance can have a positive impact on individual career decision-making^[6]. The research by Kim *et al.* also showed that planned happenstance is negatively correlated with career decision-making self-efficacy, which can slow down the decline of the latter^[7]. The planned happenstance theory can be applied to career counseling and related classroom planning, which can strengthen the individual's career curiosity level^[8]. On the other hand, there is a significantly negative correlation between planned happenstance and career barriers. Individuals with higher levels of career barriers are prone to lose interest in things around them, such as poor interpersonal skills, lack of optimism and risk-taking spirit, lack of confidence in career, *etc*^[9]. At the same time, the higher the individual's level of planned happenstance skills, the less vulnerable the individual's level of life adaptation to career barriers^[10].

2 Definition

Career indecision refers to the failure of an individual to make a decision about the career he wishes to pursue. Career identity, state anxiety, trait anxiety, locus of control, depression and bad career thinking are all related to career indecision. Career decision-making difficulties and related measurement activities are important ways to measure career indecision. Gati *et al.* divided the process of career decision-making into three types: lack of preparedness (including lack of motivation, hesitation, and bad beliefs); lack of information (including lack of understanding of decision-making process, lack of understanding of oneself, lack of understanding of career and lack of understanding of access to other information); inconsistent information (including unreliable information, internal conflicts and external conflicts)^[11]. Lack of preparedness occurs before the decision-making process, while lack of information and inconsistent information occur during the decision-making process. To sum up, the information gap between individuals and the outside world is one of the important factors that lead to individuals' encounter with career indecision. With regard to the career indecision questionnaire for Chinese college students, Xiao Yitao *et al.* measured the reliability and validity of the Chinese version of *Strategies for Coping with Career Indecision*

Questionnaire (SCCI) in Chinese college students. Xiao Yitao *et al.* tested 1 354 college students with the SCCI Chinese version, the career decision-making scale, the career decision-making difficulty questionnaire and the problem oriented coping style scale. The last three scales were used to test the criterion-related validity, and 105 college students were randomly selected for retest after two weeks. The results show that the revised Chinese version of SCCI has good reliability and validity, and is suitable for use among Chinese college students^[12]. Therefore, college students should improve in psychological construction, interpersonal communication, time management and other aspects, which will help students better understand their interests and advantages, avoid blind choice, improve career satisfaction, and better deal with the current employment situation.

3 Research motivation

Previous studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between planned happenstance and the level of career decision-making. The higher the level of planned happenstance, the higher the level of career decision-making; and vice versa. At the same time, there is a significantly negative correlation between planned happenstance and career barriers. Therefore, the career indecision scale developed by foreign scholars is used in this paper to conduct a questionnaire survey and quantitative analysis on the degree of career indecision of university A in city X. Based on the planned happenstance theory, the countermeasures and suggestions for the overall situation of college students' career indecision in the university are put forward. At present, under the background of the gradual popularization of new quality productivity and artificial intelligence, the distribution of social resources and posts is becoming more and more flexible, and college graduates are also facing a more complex and changeable employment situation. The traditional concept of employment and college career class require college students to determine a relatively stable employment direction based on their professional fields and professional skills. The contemporary employment environment and the concept of employment in the new era require college students to also have stronger adaptability to job hunting and good employment mentality based on mastering professional skills. Through the research on the indecision level of graduates of university A in city X in this study, it can preliminarily determine the overall job-hunting mentality of graduates of the university, and provide theoretical guidance for the career planning of graduates of the university. At the same time, because the questionnaire used in this study was prepared by foreign scholars, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire in university A in city X need to be verified. Therefore, this study takes into account the localization revision of the questionnaire. In the follow-up study, the questionnaire will be revised locally based on the data obtained from this study to make the questionnaire more suitable for the graduates of university A in

city X.

4 Research methods and data analysis

4.1 Subjects The convenient sampling method was used to investigate college students. A total of 500 questionnaires were sent out, and 312 valid questionnaires were recovered after eliminating invalid questionnaires caused by regular answers, missing data and other reasons, with an effective recovery rate of 64.2%. The subjects' ages ranged from 18 to 29 years old, and the standard deviation of age was 1.344. There were 187 boys and 125 girls. All subjects were informed of the purpose and characteristics of the study and signed the informed consent form. All invited participants are voluntary and ensure confidentiality. The main testers were the seniors who were about to graduate from university A in city X. The test was conducted with the consent of the school leaders, teachers and the subjects themselves. The collective test was adopted, emphasizing the principles of voluntary filling, confidentiality of information, anonymity and so on.

4.2 Research tool Strategies for Coping with Career Indecision Questionnaire (SCCI) was prepared by Lipshits-Braziler, Gati and Tatar^[14], and is used to measure the way to deal with career indecision. There are 45 questions in total, including 1 warm-up question and 2 validity questions. The remaining 42 questions are divided into 3 second-order factors (effective coping, seeking support and ineffective coping) and 14 first-order factors. Each first-order factor is composed of 3 questions. Richter's 9-point scoring is used, 1 stands for "not like me at all", and 9 stands for "very like me". The theoretical structure of the original questionnaire is good ($\chi^2 = 2\ 650.16$, $df = 799$, $RMSEA = 0.053$, $CFI = 0.90$, $TLI = 0.90$, $SRMR = 0.09$). The internal consistency reliability of the three second-order factors of effective coping, seeking support and ineffective coping are 0.86, 0.92 and 0.88, respectively^[13].

This paper uses the SCCI questionnaire revised by Chinese scholar Xiao Yitao *et al.* Xiao Yitao *et al.* tested Chinese college students and verified that the Chinese version of SCCI questionnaire had good reliability and validity (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.91$, 0.87 and 0.86, respectively). Compared with the original questionnaire, the Chinese version of SCCI deleted questions 8 and 23 in the first-order factors of authorization, and incorporated question 38 into the first-order factor of seeking instrumental help. Therefore, the revised questionnaire has 43 questions, including 1 warm-up question and 2 validity questions, and the remaining 40 questions are divided into three second-order factors: 18 questions for effective coping, including six coping strategies; 7 questions for seeking support, including two coping strategies; 15 questions for invalid coping, including five coping strategies. The score value of the questionnaire is positive distribution, that is, the higher the score, the lower the career indecision level, and the higher the overall level of college students' individual career planning^[12]. In this paper, the Cronbach α coefficient of the scale was 0.942 and

KMO was 0.767.

4.3 Results and analysis

4.3.1 Descriptive statistics of variables. In general, the questionnaire scores of graduates from university A are above average, and the average scores of most subjects are high (Fig. 1). The graduates' career indecision level from the university is generally low, and the students' career planning ability is strong. However, there are some difficulties in dealing with the influence of others and the complexity of decision-making.

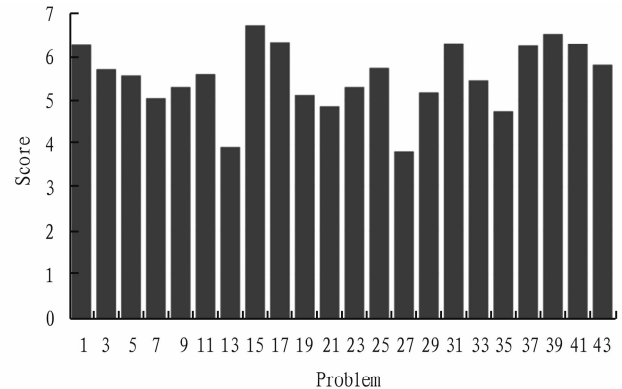


Fig.1 Average score for each question

4.3.2 Structural validity test and topic revision of the questionnaire.

(1) Reliability and validity test of questionnaire. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire is 0.942, greater than 0.9, which indicates that the reliability quality of the research data is very high. For the "item that has deleted α coefficient", 4. I put off making career decisions until later, if it is deleted, the reliability coefficient will increase significantly, so it can be modified or deleted.

The CITC values of the following questions (4. I put off making a career decision until later; 14. I can relieve the pain of making career decisions; 18. I am putting off making a decision, hoping that the passage of time will make it easier; 29. If I choose an inappropriate occupation, it will not bother me) are less than 0.4. So these problems can be deleted, and then a formal questionnaire survey is conducted. To sum up, the reliability coefficient of the research data is higher than 0.9. It comprehensively indicates that the reliability quality of the data is high, and it can be used for further analysis.

(2) Project analysis. The purpose of item analysis is to determine whether the research items of the questionnaire are effective and appropriate. The principle is to sum the analysis items first, and then divide them into high-score and low-score groups (with 27% and 73% quantiles as the boundary). After that, T-test is used to compare the differences between high-score and low-score groups. If there is a difference, it indicates that the scale item design is appropriate, otherwise, it indicates that the scale items cannot distinguish information, and the design is unreasonable. So it should be deleted; 4. I put off making a career decision later; 18. I am putting off making a decision, hoping that the passage of time will make it easier. A total of 2 items could not

show significance ($P > 0.05$), which means that these 2 items are poorly differentiated, and should be deleted.

(3) KOM value inspection. The communality values of all research items are higher than 0.4, indicating that the research item information can be effectively extracted. In addition, the KMO value is 0.767, greater than 0.6, illustrating that the data can be effectively extracted. In addition, the variance interpretation rates of the 10 factors are 14.097%, 13.164%, 10.069%, 7.775%, 7.589%, 6.607%, 5.505%, 4.637%, 3.968%, and 3.469%, respectively. The cumulative variance interpretation rate after rotation is 76.879%, greater than 50%. It means that the information of research items can be effectively extracted.

In conclusion, based on the results of multiple tests, the overall reliability and validity of the questionnaire is good. It is believed that the questions 4 and 18 of the questionnaire need to be revised or deleted in order to make the questionnaire more suitable for the graduates of university A in city X.

5 Discussion

In view of the current situation of the career indecision level of graduates, this paper gives the following suggestions:

5.1 Maintaining a positive attitude and broadening view

From the perspective of planned happenstance, college students should actively cultivate open thinking about the surrounding environment and various events. This means that it should break through the traditional thinking mode which is limited to the established planning and expectations, and treat all kinds of contingencies that may occur in life with a more inclusive and receptive attitude. For example, for an occasional academic lecture, if the field involved is not directly related to your major, you should not easily ignore it. Instead, you should remain curious and explore the potential opportunities or enlightenment that may be contained in it, which may open up a new path for future career development.

5.2 Establishing a correct concept of career planning College students need to deeply reflect on their interests, values, strengths and weaknesses, and clarify their positioning in the professional field. For example, by participating in various practical activities, internship projects and self reflection exercises, we can constantly examine our performance and feelings in different situations, so as to more accurately grasp the career direction we are suitable for. In terms of career cognition, it should comprehensively understand the characteristics, requirements and development prospects of different occupations. This includes paying attention to the dynamics of the industry, understanding the rise of emerging occupations and the evolution trend of traditional occupations.

5.3 Improving the level of planned happenstance College students should focus on training their ability to find opportunities. This requires keen observation and insight, and the ability to capture potential opportunity signals from daily learning, life and social activities. In daily life, when find that a project is related to one's own interests and majors, and may be further expanded into an achievement with practical application value, so it is necessary to seize this opportunity in time, actively participate in it, and ac-

cumulate experience and resources for career development.

5.4 Improving the level of career decision-making self-efficacy

College students should actively participate in various career related activities, such as career planning courses, internship projects, enterprise visits, *etc.*, and enhance their career participation through these practical activities. In the process of participation, it should continue to accumulate experience and improve the understanding of the career world, so as to enhance one's confidence and ability in the process of career decision-making. It should focus on developing career decision-making skills. For example, by learning some career decision-making theories and methods, such as SWOT analysis and decision tree model, these methods are applied to the actual career decision-making process to improve the scientificity and accuracy of decision-making.

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