

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Your Feelings About Decision Making

Whether you are undecided or considering a change in major, how you feel about making decisions in general plays an integral role in how you approach the process. Sometimes we ignore our feelings even though they may exert a strong influence on our decisions, consciously or unconsciously.

Activity: Discovering Your Feelings

How do you feel now about choosing or changing your major? Place a check next to the adjectives that best describe your feelings:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> anxious | <input type="checkbox"/> disappointed | <input type="checkbox"/> frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> pressured |
| <input type="checkbox"/> confused | <input type="checkbox"/> excited | <input type="checkbox"/> happy | <input type="checkbox"/> relaxed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> dejected | <input type="checkbox"/> fearful | <input type="checkbox"/> numb | <input type="checkbox"/> stressed |

How do these feelings affect your motivation for engaging in the activities required to choose or change your major (for example, When I feel stressed, it's difficult for me to feel motivated)?

If you are not motivated at this time, what do you think you could do to become motivated?

Your Decision-Making Strategy

Theorists in the field of decision making identify different strategies people use when they are faced with both daily choices and more important but infrequent life decisions. The following activity lists strategies theorists have identified.

Activity: Finding Your Strategy

Which of these decision-making strategies most closely resembles how you are approaching the decision of selecting or changing a major?

- Procrastinator – I know I must make a decision but will put it off as long as possible.
- Impulsive – I take the first choice that seems reasonable without looking at other majors or collecting information.
- Fatalistic – I will leave the decision to fate since I have very little control over it.
- Agonizing – I have invested so much time and thought into possible majors that feel overwhelmed and can't decide.
- Compliant – I think it is best if someone else who know more about the subject (e.g., parent, teacher, adviser) makes the decision for me.
- Intuitive – I will make a decision when it feels right.
- Planful – I will make a decision based on an orderly, rational process that requires solid information and reflection and involves both thinking and feeling.

How does the strategy you checked affect the way you did or will choose a major?

If you checked a strategy other than "planful," what can you do to overcome any negative aspects of your approach?

Your Decision-Making Style

Have you ever analyzed how you approach decisions? Over the years you have developed a personal decision-making style or set of behaviors that you use when confronted by a decision situation. Some styles are effective, while others may be counterproductive. You may use one style in major decision situation (e.g., choosing a major, buying a car) and a different style for smaller ones (e.g., what to wear, what to buy in the grocery store).

Decision theorist William Coscarelli determined that how you gather information and how you analyze it after you have collected it are important determinants of your decision-making style. You *gather* information either spontaneously or systematically; you *analyze* it either internally or externally. When these two dimensions are joined, four distinct decision-making styles emerge: spontaneous external, spontaneous internal, systematic external, and systematic internal.

- Spontaneous – You make a decision quickly, because it feels right; you know you can change it easily.
- Systematic – You collect all the necessary information first and then methodically weigh all the pros and cons before deciding.
- External – You talk with many people whose judgment you trust.
- Internal – You think about the situation and come to a decision on your own.

Activity: Understanding Your Style

Now apply these dimensions to your decision making to discover why you are undecided or why you decided to change your major or occupation. Complete “A” if you are undecided; complete “B” if you are considering a change in major.

A. My decision to be undecided about a major and/or occupation was

Spontaneous

- I change my mind so many times, I couldn't decide.
- It just felt right not to make a decision.
- I know that once I decide, I may change my mind, so it's not that important.

Or Systematic

- I collected a great deal of information from many sources, but still wasn't sure.
- I analyzed my skills and abilities to see how they matched certain majors, but I still wasn't sure.
- Once I make up my mind, I seldom change it, so I want to be sure before I make the decision.

External

- I talk to my parents and friends about what to do.
- I consulted with my teachers and counselors.
- I considered the advice of others when choosing to remain undecided.

Or Internal

- I thought a lot about my situation before choosing to be undecided.
- I really didn't seek the advice of too many people.
- I examined all the information by myself but still couldn't decide.

Circle the style you think you used in choosing to be undecided:

spontaneous external

spontaneous internal

systematic external

systematic internal

B. My decision to be undecided about a major and/or occupation was

Spontaneous

- My other major/occupation just didn't feel right.
- I lost interest quickly in my last choice and started to think about changing.
- If my next decision doesn't work out, I can always choose another.

Or Systematic

- I examined my situation carefully and decided to change.
- I gathered a great deal of information about my situation before deciding to change.
- I know it will take careful study and thought before I can make a new decision.

External

- I talk to many people about my situation before deciding to change.
- I weighed the advice of others who knew my situation and decided to change.
- My friends encouraged me to change.

Or Internal

- I am changing only after a great deal of thought.
- I thought about my situation form some time before consulting with others.
- I am still reflecting on my decision to change and will continue to do so.

Circle the style you think you used in choosing to be undecided:

spontaneous external

spontaneous internal

systematic external

systematic internal

What do you answers suggest about how you tend to gather and analyze information before making a decision?

Which style do you consider most effective n making realistic major and occupational decisions? Why?

Activity: Your Current Major Status

Complete "A" if you are undecided; complete "B" if you are considering a change in major.

A. I am undecided about a major. (Check all that apply.)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't have enough information about various majors. | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure of my values, so I don't know what is important to me in a major or career area. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't have enough information about possible career fields to which majors may lead. | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm afraid to choose a major because it might be the wrong decision. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure about my ability to succeed in the coursework for certain majors. | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure what jobs will be available to me if I graduate with a certain major. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have so many interests that I can't narrow my options. | <input type="checkbox"/> I have difficulty making decisions in general. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't have a strong interest in anything, so I'm not sure which to explore. | <input type="checkbox"/> Other people have suggested majors, but I'm not sure they are right for me. |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other reasons (be specific): _____ |

Examine the reasons you checked. In what areas do they indicate you need help (for example, self, academic or occupational information, decision making)? Why?

OR

B. I am considering a change in major. (Check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I didn't have enough information about this major when I chose it and have since found out it is not for me. | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not interested in the coursework required for this major. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I didn't want to enter college undecided about a major, so I signed up for one that seemed interesting at the time. | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure the values associated with this major to me now. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I chose this major because other people strongly encouraged me in that direction. | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't qualify for this program based on the major's entrance requirements. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I discovered that the occupations related to this major do not appeal to me. | <input type="checkbox"/> Other reasons (be specific): _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't have strong enough abilities to succeed in the required coursework for this major. | _____ |

Examine the reasons you checked. What influenced you to choose your last major? Are any of these strong reasons for you to explore other majors? Why?
