

Psychologist examines worker fulfillment

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It can be tough to find the perfect fit in a career. Credit: Liza via Flickr.

To employees who have not yet found their "perfect fit" in a career: Take heart. There is more than one way to attain passion for work, USC Dornsife and University of Michigan researchers found in a recent study.

"The good news is that we can change our mindsets or our strategies and be just as effective in the long run at attaining well-being at [work](#)," said Norbert Schwarz, the Provost Professor of Psychology and Marketing and co-director of the USC Dornsife Mind and Society Center.

Testing two paths to contentment

The researchers explored two popular theories: one achieves a passion for work by following one's heart and one can develop passion for a vocation over time.

The series of four studies and a pretest survey involved 98 to 272 subjects—most of whom were in their 30s and 40s.

The scientists found that people can agree with both the "fit" and the "develop" theories, but they generally subscribe to one theory more than the other. Regardless of which they believe most, they can achieve an equal sense of fulfillment in their line of work, the researchers found.

The primary difference, however, was in how they arrived at a point of satisfaction, said Patricia Chen, a University of Michigan graduate student who led the project before she moved to Stanford University. People who believe more in the "fit" theory may change jobs more often than those who believe more in the "develop" theory.

"Fit theorists seek compatibility between their interests and their vocations. Hence, they prioritize enjoyment from the outset in their vocations because they consider that a sign of compatibility—or lack thereof," Chen said. "If it is not initially perceived as enjoyable, they are likely to conclude that there is a poor fit, which has a substantial impact on their overall work well-being.

"In contrast, 'develop' theorists anticipate their passion to increase over time," she said. "So they are generally more willing to prioritize goals other than immediate enjoyment in their vocational choices. That should also make them more likely to tolerate some lack of enjoyment early on."

Further testing needed

When asked how it's possible for someone to develop a [passion](#) for a job or a work environment that they despise or fear, Schwarz said that isn't yet clear to scientists, and cautioned against applying the study's results empirically until further testing.

He added, though: "We do think that people can grow into a challenging job by developing the skills needed and good relationships with their colleagues, but that may not necessarily overcome the negative impact of all bad working conditions, nor should it become a justification for bad working conditions."

Job-hopping is becoming more common for workers, the researchers noted. They advised that college students who will one day join the full-time workforce shouldn't feel intimidated.

Chen concluded with these words of assurance: "We understand that these life decisions can feel daunting. To help you make your decisions, think about what you want a fit in and what you can grow into. And take heart that it can work out fine both ways."

The study was published in the *Personality and Psychology Bulletin*.

More information: "Finding a Fit or Developing It: Implicit Theories About Achieving Passion for Work." *Pers Soc Psychol Bull* October 2015 41: 1411-1424, first published on July 31, 2015 [DOI: 10.1177/0146167215596988](#)

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