

# Age and education affect job changes, study finds

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New research reveals that people are more likely to change jobs when they are younger and well educated, though not necessarily because they are more open to a new experience.

A team from ETH Zurich in Switzerland and the University of East Anglia (UEA) in the UK analysed and compared the effects of individual characteristics and the economic context on [career](#) mobility.

The researchers investigated what is more important for people to change their job—the current [unemployment rate](#), their personal openness to new experiences, their age at the time of the job change, or their level of education.

They found that both individual characteristics and the labour market are factors in career mobility. The results, published in the *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, show that people were more likely to change their organisations, industries, and occupations when they were younger, with the age effect being strongest.

Contrary to the researchers' initial prediction, people's openness to new experiences did not play a role in them wanting to change their [jobs](#). However, higher levels of education and a lower unemployment rate were related to changing organisation, but unrelated to going into another occupation.

The results also showed that a good education was more important for

employees to change into another industry than a positive situation in the labour market.

In recent decades, employees' careers have changed significantly, with long-term employment with one organisation no longer the default career path.

Career mobility has important implications for organisations, for example in terms of their strategic HR management and their success in attracting and retaining talented staff. For employees, every successful job change potentially increases employability and future opportunities for advancing their career.

Study co-author Dr. Dana Unger, a lecturer in organisational behaviour in UEA's Norwich Business School, said: "Whether individuals make a career transition depends undoubtedly on a range of factors. Our findings have immediate practical implications by improving our understanding of opportunities and hindrances for different kinds of career mobility.

"Employees who aim to advance their careers by crossing organisational, industrial, or occupational boundaries may gain helpful insights about factors involved in these distinct types of mobility. For example, they might want to align the timing of their career advances with fluctuations in the labour market.

"For organisations, our results highlight the relevance of investing resources in career management programmes for employee retention. Investments in employees' career opportunities might especially pay off in times of a favourable external [labour market](#), when staff have many external options.

"Career counsellors could also use the insights about the relevance of

different predictors of career mobility to help their clients successfully plan career moves."

The researchers looked at different types of job changes to determine whether people are changing organisations, the industries they are working in, or even occupations. They surveyed 503 management programme alumni about their career histories dating back up to 44 years, level of education, and openness to [new experiences](#).

They also investigated the effect of yearly changes in the unemployment rate on mobility to address the economic context in which careers unfold.

**More information:** 'When do employees cross boundaries? Individual and contextual determinants of career mobility', Angelika Kornblum, Dana Unger, and Gudela Grote, is published in the *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* on July 6. [DOI: 10.1080/1359432X.2018.1488686](#)

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