

Self-Determination Theory at the Workplace: Associations between Need Satisfaction and Employment Outcomes

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Abstract : The unemployment rate has been on the rise since the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2008. Especially labor market entrants suffer from economic downfall. Despite the abundance of programs and agencies that help to reintegrate unemployed youth, considerable less research attention has been paid to 'fit' between these programs and its participants that ensure a durable labor market transition. According to Self-Determination Theory, need satisfaction is associated with better (mental) adjustment. As such, three hypothesis were formulated: when workers' needs for competence (H1), relatedness (H2), and autonomy (H3) are satisfied in the workplace, they are more likely to remain employed at the same employer. To test these assumptions, a sample of approximately 800 young people enrolled in a youth unemployment policy participated in a longitudinal study. The unemployment policy was aimed at the development of generic and vocational competences, and had a maximum duration of six months. Need satisfaction during the program was measured, as well as their employment outcomes up to 12 months after completion of the policy. All hypotheses were (partly) supported. Some limitations should be noted. First, since our sample consisted primarily of highly educated white graduates, it remains to be tested whether our results generalize to other groups of unemployed youth. Moreover, we are unable to conclude whether the results are due to the intervention, participants (selection effect), or both, because of the lack of a control group.

Keywords : need satisfaction, person-job fit, self-determination theory, youth unemployment policy

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