Chapter 8
DECISION-MAKING MODELS
AND CAREER GUIDANCE

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Career-related choices are among the most important decisions people make during their lifetime. These choices have significant long-term implications for individuals' lifestyles, emotional welfare, economic and social status, as well as their sense of personal productivity and contribution to society. Therefore, it is only natural that individuals at different stages of their lives are preoccupied with career choices (e.g., Campbell & Cellini, 1981; Gati, Saka, & Krausz, 2001; Super, 1980). Moreover, although almost all people make career choices, many people face difficulties in this area (e.g., Amir, Gati, & Kleiman, 2008; Osipow, 1999; Rounds & Tinsley, 1984; Tinsley, 1992).

Although it seems natural to refer to career choices as acts of decision-making, and therefore to examine and analyse them in terms of decision theories, this approach has not been adopted as the dominant framework for career guidance and counselling, for reasons discussed below. Rather, other theoretical approaches dominate the field: (a) career development theories (e.g., Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, & Herma, 1951; Gottfredson, 1981; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1990; Roe, 1956; Savickas, 2005; Super, 1972, 1990), which tend to focus on the developmental circumstances in which decisions are made, including changes that occur in the individual’s preferences, career maturity and adaptability, and the effects of these changes on the career decision, and (b) the Person-Environment Fit (P-E Fit) approach (e.g., Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Holland, 1997), which typically focuses on the congruence between individuals and their environment, that is, on the outcomes of the decision-making process.

This chapter explores some of the shortcomings of these two approaches, namely, the lack of reference to the essence of the career decision-making process, and suggests ways of addressing these shortcomings by conceptualising career decision making from a decision-theory perspective. It is suggested to adopt the view that the goal of career guidance and counselling is helping clients make better career decisions. To achieve this goal, a theory that focuses on understanding the
processes involved is essential. This chapter shows the practical importance of designing procedures for making career decisions in specific situations requiring choices among alternatives along the developmental continuum described by career-development theories, and demonstrates how the goal of making adequate career choices (that is expected to lead to high person-environment congruence) can be better achieved by using a systematic decision-making model.

Furthermore, the complexities of the twenty-first century’s world of work, and the constant changes that characterise it, turn careers into multi-decisional, unpredictable, and unstable paths (Blustein, 2006; Bright & Pryor, 2005; Gelatt, 1989; Krieshok, Black, & McKay, 2006; Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999; Savickas, 2000, 2005; Van Esbroeck, Tibos, & Zaman, 2005). Hence, the empowerment of individuals as autonomous decision-makers is necessary for their career development, and requires that career counsellors help them acquire decision-making skills. By adopting decision theory, after adapting it to the unique features of career decisions, researchers can transform theoretical knowledge into practical interventions, providing career counsellors with tools for assisting deliberating individuals in carrying out the career-decision-making process actively and efficiently.

Indeed, decision theory has been reviewed and recognised as a potential frame of reference for career-decision-making for almost half a century (e.g., Brown, 1990; Gelatt, 1962; Jepsen & Dilley, 1974; Kaldor & Zytowski, 1969; Katz, 1966; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1984; Pitz & Harren, 1980; Sauermann, 2005). Nevertheless, these theoretical discussions and conceptualisations have rarely been translated into specific practices aimed at guiding counselees towards making effective decisions. Hence, one of the goals of this chapter is to contribute to the continuous dialogue between decision theories and the actual needs of counselees as they emerge from career counsellors’ experience.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the unique features of career decisions, highlighting the characteristics of the twenty-first-century world of work and its effect on the complexity of the process and the challenges involved in it. The second section briefly reviews traditional decision-making theories, with their advantages and disadvantages. It is suggested that one of the reasons that decision theory has not been embraced as a framework for career-decision-making research and guidance is that normative decision-making models, which were dominant in decision theories for many decades, are overly rational, as well as too abstract to be applicable to actual, real-life career-decision-making. In the third section it is therefore suggested to adopt prescriptive decision-making models, which minimise the disadvantages and maximise the advantages of decision theory, as a framework for facilitating the career-decision-making process. Then the PIC model (Prescreening, In-depth exploration, and Choice; Gati & Asher, 2001a) is presented to demonstrate the applicability and potential benefit of prescriptive models. The last section addresses the often-heard criticism of decision theories as “too cognitive” by discussing the role of non-cognitive factors in career-decision-making and career guidance. The chapter is concluded by exploring the implications of decision theories for career guidance and counselling.