**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 that several 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 I feel overwhelmed and can’t decide.
* **Compliant** – I think it is best if someone else who knows more about the subject (e.g. parent, teacher, sibling, friend, 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?

What is a positive aspect of your approach?

What is one potential negative aspect of your approach? What steps might you take to overcome this aspect?

**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 situations (e.g. choosing a major, buying a car) and a different style for smaller ones (e.g. what to wear, what to eat).

Decision theorist William Coscarelli determined that how you *gather* information and how you *analyze* it afterwards 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 judgement 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 about your major or why you decided to change your major. 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 was:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Spontaneous** | **OR** | **Systematic** |
| * I changed 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.
 |  | * 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** | **OR** | **Internal** |
| * I talked to my parents and friends about what to do.
* I consulted with my teachers & counselors.
* I considered the advice of others when choosing to remain undecided.
 |  | * 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 change my major was:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Spontaneous** | **OR** | **Systematic** |
| * My other major 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.
 |  | * 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** | **OR** | **Internal** |
| * I talked 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.
 |  | * I am changing only after a great deal of thought.
* I thought about my situation for some time before consulting others.
* I am still reflecting on my decision to change and will continue to do so.
 |

Circle the style you think you used in deciding to change your major:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Spontaneous External | Spontaneous Internal | Systematic External | Systematic Internal |

Which style do you consider most effective in making realistic major decisions? Why?