# A Study of New Labor Market Entrants' Job Satisfaction Trajectories During a Series of Consecutive Job Changes

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A burgeoning body of research on the psychological effect of job change has revealed a honeymoon-hangover pattern during the turnover process (Boswell et al., 2005; Chadi & Hetschko, 2018; Zhou et al., 2021). The honeymoon effect refers to the fact that individuals typically experience a significant rise in job satisfaction when they first enter their new jobs. The hangover effect describes the ephemeral nature of this reaction, as job satisfaction tends to revert to the baseline after people have settled in the new environment. This pattern is consistent with set point theory (Headey & Wearing, 1989; Lykken & Tellegen, 1996) which emphasizes the stability of subjective well-being over the life course. From this perspective, a life event may shift well-being in the short term, but the impact will gradually wear off once people have adapted to the change.

By focusing on the impact of a single job change, previous research has overlooked the fact that most people change jobs more than once over their working lives. The National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth show that the average American worker has twelve jobs between 18 and 48, half of which are held before they reach 24 (Aughinbaugh et al., 2015). The Longitudinal Employee-Employer Data shows that an employee has seven jobs during his or her first ten years in the labour market (Topel & Ward, 1992). As a career consists of a sequence of path-dependent work experiences over time (De Vos, Van der Heijden & Akkermans, 2020), understanding how individuals react to a series of job changes will shed light on the person-job dynamics of career development across the life span. This study aims to extend the careers literature by theorizing and empirically examining the variations in the honeymoon-hangover effect over multiple job changes.

It must be noted that psychological adaptation to life events can occur in the short term and the long term. The majority of existing research on set point theory has focused on the former; that is, the fluctuations of well-being around a single life event (Clark, Diener, et al., 2008; Georgellis et al., 2012; Lucas et al., 2004; Lyubomirsky,

2012). In contrast, few studies have examined how people adapt to recurring life events in the long term, which requires repeated

assessments of well-being from the same individual over years or even decades. This study will distinguish adaptation to a single job change from adaptation to the *process* of job change. The former is captured by the honeymoon-hangover effect widely documented by previous research, whereas the latter is reflected by the change in the *amplitude* of the honeymoon-hangover effects over multiple job changes, which is the focus of the present study.

Based on set point theory, we expect that a honeymoon-hangover effect would occur during each job change. As set point theory does not allow for inferences of how this pattern may change over time, we draw on two alternative perspectives to theorise how individuals might react and adapt to multiple job changes in the long term. Drawing on social cognitive career theory which emphasizes the individual as the central career actor seeking challenges, responsibilities, and learning opportunities (Bandura, 1989; Lent et al., 2002), we argue that changing to a new job reflects an agentic career building process. Consequently, as a result of continuous exploration, learning, and improvement of person-job fit, individuals will experience a stronger honeymoon effect each time they move to a new job. This scenario contrasts with a more pessimistic prediction derived from adaptation level theory which argues that people demonstrate reduced sensitivity to repeated environmental stimuli (Helson, 1947). From this perspective, the honeymoon-hangover effect is expected to weaken over time as individuals psychologically adapt to recurring job changes. In other words, the magnitude of the honeymoon effect should decrease over time due to habituation to the process of job change. Under both perspectives, we expect the hangover effect to continue to occur, albeit constituting a larger drop back to the pre-turnover baseline for the agentic perspective (since the rise is higher) relative to the adaptation-to-life-events perspective.

Our analysis is based on two nationally representative longitudinal datasets from the UK and Australia: The British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA). As some of the largest and longest running longitudinal surveys in the world, the BHPS and HILDA provide a wealth of information on individuals' demographic characteristics, education and training, labour market activities, family lives, values and attitudes, physical health, and mental well-being.[i] The analytical sample for this study consists of new labour market entrants.

**Figure 1**

*Estimated Job Satisfaction Trajectory Across the First Four Job Changes, BHPS and HILDA*
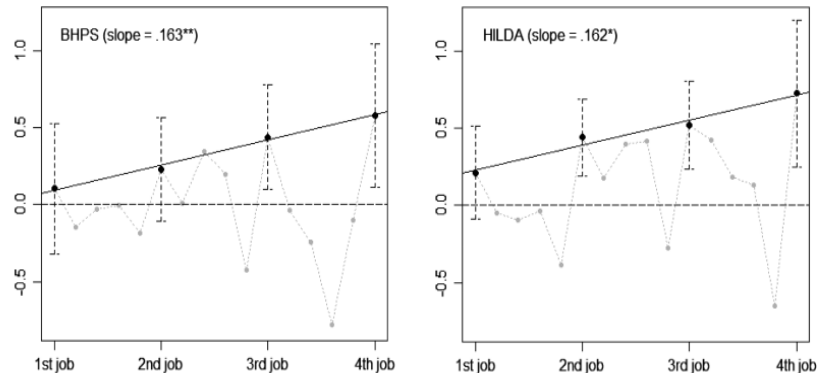


*Note.* BHPS = British Household Panel Survey; HILDA = Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia.
$^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$

Our fixed effect analysis shows that the honeymoon effect (represented by black dots in Figure 1) increased with each successive job change. In other words, people not only experienced a significant rise in job satisfaction each time they moved to a new job, but the magnitude of the honeymoon effect also increased over time. On the other hand, the pleasure generated by each job change is relatively transient. Within a year or two, the honeymoon effect dissipated and individuals returned to their baseline job satisfaction. In sum, the growing honeymoon effect followed by a correspondingly rising hangover effect which reverts individuals back to their baseline resulted in a general increase in the *amplitude* of the honeymoon-hangover pattern across a series of successive job changes. The evidence is fully consistent with social cognitive career theory.

This study makes two contributions to the literature. First, we extend set point theory from understanding the impact of single life events to recurring life events. The bulk of existing research has focused on how individuals adapt to singe events such marriage, divorce, childbirth, bereavement, job change, and unemployment (Clark et al., 2008; Lucas, 2007; Lucas et al., 2004; Zhou et al., 2019). In contrast, there is a dearth of evidence on how *the process of adaptation itself* may evolve over time. The distinction between short-term and long-term adaptation is important because well-being is not only influenced by isolated experiences and events, but also by the cumulative effects of recurring events across the life span. A better understanding of the variation in the amplitude of the honeymoon-hangover effect over multiple job changes can provide valuable insights into how individuals construct and negotiate their working lives to maximize their well-being. This approach can also be applied to understanding the impact of other recurring life events within and beyond the workplace. Second, we contribute to the literature by adopting a life span approach to understanding career development. While career researchers have long emphasised the importance of analysing careers from a dynamic, adult development perspective (De Vos et al.,

2020; Savickas, 1997; Super, 1990; Van der Heijden et al., 2020), empirical investigations on this subject are few and far between, possibly due to the daunting challenge of tracking individuals' career development over years or even decades. Utilising the large-scale, long-running nationally representative household panel surveys from Britain and Australia, our study is an early attempt to investigate the role of multiple job changes in career development from a life span perspective.

**Supplementary Analysis**

Although this study is focused on job satisfaction, we have carried out a range of supplementary analyses to explore how other key indicators of career success and subjective well-being have developed across a series of job changes to provide a more comprehensive picture of the implications of job change for new labour market entrants. The BHPS provides limited information on job quality apart from the level of pay, while HILDA has collected information on multiple dimensions of job quality such as skills, job autonomy, job complexity, time demands, and managerial responsibilities in addition to pay. Our supplementary analyses revealed a steady increase in all the indicators of job quality with each successive job change. T-tests show that the increases in pay, job complexity, and managerial responsibilities are statistically significant for each job change. In addition, our supplementary analysis shows that life satisfaction, a commonly used measure of context-free subjective well-being, increased significantly during two job changes in Britain and one job change in Australia. These results are largely consistent with our main finding of rising job satisfaction across multiple job changes and provide further evidence in support of the agentic perspective on career development and employee well-being. A more detailed discussion of the measures, analyses and results of the supplementary analyses can be found in Tables A2 and A3 in the OSF repository (https://osf.io/fjdm7/?view_only=5c1b286c673f46aabafdd0c48199db7f).

**Zhou, Y., Zou, M., Wu, C.-H., Parker, S. K., & Griffin, M. (2023). A Study of New Labor Market Entrants' Job Satisfaction Trajectories During a Series of Consecutive Job Changes.** *Journal of Applied Psychology.*

**https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0001121**

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[i] Information on the BHPS and HILDA can be found at
https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/bhps
and https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/hilda