

CHAPTER 2

THEORIES OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Competencies

Minimum Competencies for NCDA

- Career Development Theory: Theory base and knowledge considered essential for professionals engaging in career counseling and development.

CACREP Standards

- a. Career developmental theories and decision-making models
- g. Career counseling procedures, techniques, and resources including those applicable to special populations

Chapter Overview and Discussion

This chapter provides a discussion of the career development theories that have been most instrumental in providing the foundation for research in vocational behavior. The major categories of career development theories are Trait-Oriented Theories, Social Learning and Cognitive Theories, Developmental Theories, and Person-in-Environment Perspective. Career development theories have been criticized by both students and practitioners as being vague about how findings and conclusions can be used and are thought to be “out of touch” with what counselors really want and need—a more direct link between theory and practice.

A career development theory is not a step-by-step, how-to-do career counseling method; however, what is learned from the results of concepts and propositions of theories does provide the guidelines for counseling procedures and interventions discussed in the next chapter’s career counseling models.

Trait-Oriented Theories

This first group of theories evolved from the measurement movement in the early part of the 20th century. Trait-Oriented theories are embedded in Parsons’s (1909) vocational counseling paradigm of matching individual traits with requirements of occupations. This became the foundation of many vocational counseling programs in the early part of the 20th century. The trait-and-factor theory evolved from early studies of individual differences and developed closely with the psychometric movement.

Person-Environment-Correspondence (PEC)

This theory has a long history, and as late as the early 1990s, it was referred to as the theory of work adjustment. PEC theory has always emphasized that work is more than step-by-step task-oriented procedures. The basic assumption is that individuals seek to achieve and maintain a positive relationship with their work environments. This theory assumes that job satisfaction is a significant indicator of work adjustment. For example, job satisfaction is an indicator of the individual’s perception of work and the work environment and is highly related to tenure in a work situation.

John Holland's Typology

According to Holland, career choice is an expression of, or an extension of, personality in the world of work, followed by subsequent identification with specific occupational stereotypes. Central to Holland's theory is the concept that one chooses a career to satisfy one's preferred modal personal orientation. Holland stressed the *importance of self-knowledge* in the search for vocational satisfaction and stability. Holland proposed that personality types can be arranged in a coded system following his modal-personal-orientation themes such as R (realistic occupation), I (investigative), A (artistic), S (social), E (enterprising), and C (conventional). Holland's hexagonal model introduces five key concepts: *consistency*, *differentiation*, *Identity*, congruence and calculus. The *Self-Directed Search* (SDS) (Form R) (Holland, 1994a) is one of the most widely used interest inventories; it has more than 20 foreign language versions, can be administered by a computer that includes computer-based reports, and is available on the Internet.

Social Learning and Cognitive Theories

The theories in this section focus on a wide range of variables that affect career choice and career maintenance over the life span. In general, social conditioning, social position, and life events are thought to significantly influence career choice. Key elements in the career choice process are problem-solving and decision-making skills. Career choice also involves the interaction of cognitive and affective processes. Individuals must be able to process information effectively and think rationally.

Krumboltz's Learning Theory of Career Counseling

A social-learning theory approach to career decision making was first proposed by Krumboltz, Mitchell, and Gelatt (1975). Their theory is an attempt to simplify the process of career selection and is based primarily on life events that are influential in determining career selection. The process of career development involves four factors: (1) genetic endowments and special abilities, (2) environmental conditions and events, (3) learning experiences, and (4) task approach skills. Krumboltz and associates emphatically stress that each individual's unique learning experiences over the life span develop the primary influences that lead to career choice. The factors that influence individual preferences in this social-learning model are composed of numerous cognitive processes, interactions in the environment, and inherited personal characteristics and traits.

Cognitive Information Processing

Cognitive information processing (CIP) theory was developed by Peterson, Sampson, and Reardon (1991). CIP theory is applied to career development in terms of how individuals make a career decision and use information in career problem solving and decision making. This model emphasizes the notion that career information counseling is a learning event. One major difference between CIP theory and other theories discussed in this chapter, however, is the role of cognition as a mediating force that leads individuals to greater power and control in determining their own destinies. In this theory, *problem solving* is considered to be a series of thought processes that eventually lead to solutions of problems and remove the gap between a current situation and a preferred one.

Social Cognitive Perspective

The underlying assumptions and constructs of this theory are embedded in general social cognitive theory which blends cognitive, self-regulatory, and motivational processes into a lifelong phenomenon. Goals are to find methods of defining specific mediators from which learning experiences shape and subsequently influence career behavior. This theory focuses on the social, cultural, and economic conditions that shaped learning opportunities to which individuals were exposed, interpersonal reactions experienced for performing certain activities, and the future outcomes that have been generated. The personal determinants of career development have been conceptualized as *self-efficacy*, *outcome expectations*, and *personal goals*. The “big three” are considered to be building blocks within the triadic causal system that determine the course of career development and its outcome.

Developmental Theories

These theories are viewed as a lifelong process that is very inclusive. One major concept of developmental theories suggests that individuals make changes during developmental stages and adapt to changing life roles. A system of developmental tasks over the life span provides key points for counseling interventions. Super’s life-role approach suggests that work is very pervasive, to the point that that life role may affect others, explaining the current interest in multiple life roles. Self-concept theory is the centerpiece of Super’s approach to vocational behavior. Within this position the principle of “know thyself” becomes a prerequisite for optimal career choice. The career maturity concepts developed by Super have far-reaching implications for career education and career counseling programs.

Developmental Theory of Occupational Aspirations

The development of occupational aspirations is the main theme of Gottfredson’s (1981) theory. Incorporating a biosocial developmental approach, her theory describes how people become attracted to certain occupations. Gottfredson suggested that socioeconomic background and intellectual level greatly influence individuals’ self-concept in the dominant society. As people project into the work world, they choose occupations that are appropriate to their “social space,” intellectual level, and sex-typing. A unique factor in this theory is the concept of compromise in decision making. According to Gottfredson, compromises are based primarily on generalizations formed about occupations or “cognitive maps” of occupations. Gottfredson suggested that people compromise their occupational choices because of the accessibility of an occupation or even give up vocational interests to take a job that has an appropriate level of prestige and is an appropriate sex-type. She stresses that career development is to be viewed as a nature-nurture partnership.

Person-in-Environment Perspective

Focuses attention on contextual interaction over the life span. Clients are viewed as products of an environment that is very inclusive but also unique. One’s career development is thought to be *influenced and constructed* within several environmental systems such as family, church or synagogue, neighborhood, school, neighbors, friends, workplace, community agencies, culture, and customs of the larger environment. The person-in-environment approach to counseling is touted as a more inclusive and balanced approach to the practice of career development. A greater understanding of person-in-environment perspectives includes an introduction to constructivism in the next paragraphs. Individual careers are constructed through

unique learning experiences in an ecological system. Personal constructs therefore are developed by individuals through the way they interpret and view their lives.

Career Construction Theory

Savickas (2002) expands and extends Super's theory of vocational development by using the psychological approach of constructivism, which suggests that individuals construct their own reality or truth. He also suggests that careers are to be viewed from a developmental contextual viewpoint that focuses on one's adaptation to an environment through the development of inner structure. Since individuals participate in their own development, which leads to perceptions of core roles, counselors can assist clients to consciously influence the direction of future life roles. Following Super's lead, Savickas illuminates the importance of self-concept development.

Discussion and Demonstration

There are many ways to reinforce the understanding of the different career theories.

- A. Students could be asked to write a paper or create a map on their own career development from the perspective of three different career theorists, or to synthesize their career development process into a poster that demonstrates the unique contributions of each career theory to their own development. You would start with their getting their history on paper, or illustrating it in a drawing or via symbols, and then having them analyze from the various perspectives.
- B. A very practical application is to have students role play career decision making from each theoretical standpoint. If observation rooms or video/audio taping is available, valuable feedback can be given to students. Another option is to divide students into triads, with one member offering feedback each time. This may take several class settings, but has been reported by my students as being very helpful in gaining competence and confidence. In addition, this need not be limited to individual counseling, but could be focused on group counseling and classroom guidance activities from a specific career development theory.
- C. Students could be given a name card with a theorist's name on it at the beginning of class, and told that they were invited to a party and follow up panel discussion of how people make career choices. This allows the instructor to focus in (via the panel questions) on the key variables of concern in career development, such as choice, development, issues for specific groups, indecision, satisfaction, the link to personal counseling, the process of career counseling, etc., in an active learning environment.
- D. Another useful tool that I have begun using when teaching career theories is to have students generate specific career counseling questions that might be used with a client when counseling from a given approach. After they have exhausted their list, I include other sample questions. For example, with trait/factor, these are some questions that a counselor might ask: What are your strengths; what experiences/tests have you taken that demonstrates those strengths; what occupations are you interested in; what do you know about those occupations; where did you learn about those occupations; and what

occupations seem to match your skills? Students report greatly appreciating the practical application of theory in the form of these questions.

- E. A helpful tool for demonstrating the inter-relatedness of life roles is to have students complete their own career rainbow. They can model their rainbow after the one in the book, varying the height within each role to reflect the amount of time/energy that role is currently taking. In addition, if colored pencils or markers are available, students can use bright colors to indicate roles they are enjoying, dark colors to show roles they are not enjoying, and neutral colors to indicate those with little emotional attachment. In addition, students could also complete a future-oriented rainbow and compare the differences.
- F. Have either a slide/overhead or to graphically present which theories address key issues in career counseling, such as career choice, satisfaction, self-knowledge, and decision-making, and how they address these. Use a concept wheel with the key issue in the center and the spokes representing each theory. By doing this, students can begin to visualize the unique contributions of each theory as well as the overlap among theories.
- G. To aid in the discussion of trait/factor approaches, I include a list of what it takes to be a successful vocational counselor, according to Parsons, which included:
Lists/classifications of industries and vocations; conditions of success in various vocations; general information about industries; up-to-date information; apprenticeship systems now in practice; state vocational schools/courses available; and employment agencies/opportunities. To have this much information in one person's head is unreasonable, especially given the amount of information available today. However, the point could be made that many of these informational pieces could be better handled by computers, with the further application that counselors need to be aware of how to access that information effectively and efficiently.

H. Give a brief case study (I have used samples from Niles, Goodman and Pope’s 2002 book *The Career Counseling Casebook: A Resource for Practitioners, Students, and Counselor Educators*) and then have students analyze the theory from the different theories. You can divide students into small groups and assign specific theories to each group. Provide a table for them to record results. I require them to write down only what a counselor would do from that particular theory—so, for example, you wouldn’t put down “explore values” as an indicator of Holland’s approach or the “C-DAC” model for PEC. You could keep the same examples or use new ones to expose to the variety of career problems that a counselor might see. An example of what I use is:

	Conceptualization of Problem According to This Theory	What Type of Assessment Might This Approach Suggest	What Questions or Next Steps Would be Suggested by This Approach?
Parsons/Williamson			
Holland			
PEC			
Super			
Happenstance Approach			

- I. Create a PowerPoint with internal links that has a brief case scenario, 3-4 theories for the person to “counsel” from, and theory specific questions. For example, if a person chose to counsel from Holland’s perspective, they would click on that and be linked to 4 counseling questions and asked to choose which question would someone counseling from Holland’s perspective be most likely to ask. If they choose the right answer, then they move to the assessment question, and are asked to choose 1 of 4 assessments, the one most closely related to Holland. Finally, they would be asked what follow-up or next step would be most “Holland-Like” and choose from there. This type of an exercise allows students to learn the basics of each theory. For an example of using PowerPoint in this way, refer to <http://careerresource.coedu.usf.edu/linkcareerlab/interactivelab.htm>, and click on “Virtual Career Counseling Experiment.”
- J. Matching quizzes or games also provide practice at learning theories. To help bridge between what students already know, have them match general counseling theories to career counseling theories, or to write a comparison.
- K. Have students share or write down their personal career story, and then have them choose two to three theories to analyze their path.
- L. Have students brainstorm what questions they might ask from each theory.

- M. Use the mix and match approach, where half of the class is given a term and the other class is given the name of a theory. Tell them they have to get up and find their match. This is a low-threat quiz, in a sense—and it's a great way to break up a lecture and to get people moving.

Supplementary Learning Exercises

The exercises in this chapter center on helping students integrate their knowledge about specific career theories into their developing and understanding of the goals and process of career counseling in general. Exercises 3, 8, 9 and 10 ask students to answer questions specific to their own career development or their emerging personal theory of career development. Exercises 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7 focus on questions specific to the individual theories discussed in the chapter, while exercise two helps students reflect on the main difference between trait/factor and developmental approaches.

Resources

Blanchard, C. A., & Lichetnberg, J. W. (2003). Compromise in career decision making: A test of Gottfredson's theory. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 62, 250-271.

Reports on research of 119 participants, where they found partial support of Gottfredson's theory. Specifically, with moderate and high compromise situations, they found no significant differences between prestige and sex-type, although they were ranked higher than interests.

Chen, C. P. (2003). Integrating perspectives in career development theory and practice. *Career Development Quarterly*, 51, 203-216.

A philosophical piece on combining concepts from the various career theories, as well as bridging between objectivist/positivistic and constructivist approaches.

Dawis, R. V. (2000). The person-environment tradition in counseling psychology. In W. E. Martin, Jr.'s and J. L. Swartz-Kulstad's (Eds.), *Person-environment psychology and mental health: Assessment and intervention*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, Mahwah, NJ, 91-111.

This chapter reviews the historical and theoretical foundation of person-environment philosophy, including the scientific development of the "goodness of match" methods between people and environments.

Gati, I., Houminer, D., & Fassa, N. (1997). Framing of career compromises: How career counselors can help. *Career Development Quarterly*, 45 (4), 390-399.

This article relates somewhat to Gottfredson's theory, as the authors examine how people conceptualize career compromise. They identified three different framings that career counselors can provide, including career alternatives, the importance of different aspects, and within-aspect preferences.

- Holland, J. L. (1997). *Making vocational choices: A theory of vocational personalities and work environments* (3rd ed.). Odessa, Fla. : Psychological Assessment Resources.
Holland presents his current thinking about RIASEC theory and how it applies to career choice and vocational life.
- Lunneborg, P. W. (1997). Putting Roe in perspective. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 51* (2), 301-305.
Lunneborg highlights Roe's theory and classification system while identifying misconceptions about her theory and suggests areas for future research/methodology.
- Magnuson, S., Wilcoxon, S. A., & Norem, K. (2003). Career paths of professional leaders in counseling: Plans, opportunities, and happenstance. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development, 42*, 42-52.
A qualitative analysis of 10 counseling leaders' career paths provides support for the Happenstance Approach toward leadership development.
- Meeus, W., Dekovic M., & Iedema, J. (1997). Unemployment and identity in adolescence: A social comparison perspective. *Career Development Quarterly, 45* (4), 369-380.
These researchers examined the well-being 1,088 Dutch 18- to 25-year-olds who were categorized into three groups: employed young people, unemployed school-leavers, and unemployed young people who have working experience. They found that those who were employed had higher levels of psychological well-being, average relational identity and a strong work identity, as compared with the unemployed who had higher levels of psychological distress, average relational identity and a weak work identity.
- Miller, V. M. (1999). The opportunity structure: Implications for career counseling. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 36* (1), 2-12.
Argues that while traditional career counseling focuses on internal values, it neglects the nature of opportunity structure. In effect, only a few individuals actually experience the option of pursuing a "true" career choice.
- Mitchell, K. E., Levin, A. S., & Krumboltz, J. D. (1999). Planned happenstance: Constructing unexpected career opportunities. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 77* (2), 115-124.
Presents a theoretical rationale for the integration of chance into career counseling and decision-making. Suggests that counselors help their clients engage their curiosity by moving away from questions that limit creativity, such as "what do you want to do?"
- O'Brien, K. M., & Heppner, M. J. (1996). Applying social cognitive career theory to training career counselors. *Career Development Quarterly, 44* (4), 367-377.
The purpose of this article was to extend SCCT to the training of career counselors. An advanced career counseling seminar is presented as a sample intervention.

Osborne, W. L., Brown, S., Niles, S., & Miner, C. U. (1997). *Career development, assessment, and counseling: Applications of the Donald E. Super C-DAC approach*. Alexandria, Va. : American Counseling Association.

This book reviews Super's theory, related instruments and applications via case studies of the C-DAC model.

Oswald, F. L., & Ferstl, K. L. (1999). Linking a structure of vocational interests to Gottfredson's (1986) Occupational Aptitude Patterns Map. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 54 (1), 214-231.

These researchers classified items on the Strong Interest Inventory into Occupational Aptitude Patterns Map clusters. Using a principal components analysis, they found that the interest structure was generally supported, suggesting that potential exists for developing the OAP Map as a practical tool in improving person-job congruence.

Savickas, M. L. (1995). Constructivist counseling for career indecision. *Career Development Quarterly*, 43, 363.

The author describes practical application of constructivistic approach to counseling people with career indecision.

Savickas, M. L., & Walsh, W. B., Eds. (1996). *Handbook of career counseling theory and practice*. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing/Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.

These authors explore various factors that underlie the integration of theory and practice in career counseling.

Schultheiss, D. E. P. (2003). A relational approach to career counseling: Theoretical integration and practical application. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 81,301-10.

Provides a review of how career theory is translated into practice and presents a review of relational theory and how it extends to career counseling.

Skorikov, V. B., & Vondracek, F. W. (1997). Longitudinal relationships between part-time work and career development in adolescents. *Career Development Quarterly*, 45 (3), 221-235.

In a study of 483 high school students, the authors found that part-time work did not affect career indecision.

Arthur, N., & McMahon, M. (2005). Multicultural career counseling: Theoretical applications of the systems theory framework. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 53, 208

Betz, N. E. (2004). Contributions of self-efficacy theory to career counseling: A personal perspective. *The Career Development Quarterly*,52, 340

Blanchard, D. A., & Lichtenberg, J. W. (2003). Compromise in career decision making: A test of Gottfredson's theory. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 62,250-71.

Campbell, C., & Ungar, M. (2004).Constructing a life that works: Part 2, an approach to practice. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 53, 28-

- Campbell, C., & Ungar, M. (2004). Constructing a life that works: Part 1, blending postmodern family therapy and career counseling. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 53, 16
- Chen, C. P. (2003). Integrating perspectives in career development theory and practice. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 51, 203-216.
- Feller, R. W., Honaker S. L., Zagzebski, L. M. (2001). Theoretical voices directing the career development journey: Holland, Harris-Bowlsbey, and Krumboltz. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 49, 212-224.
- Flores, L. Y., & Heppner, M. J. (2002). Multicultural career counseling: Ten essentials for training. *Journal of Career Development*, 28, 181-202.
- Harper, M. C., & Shoffner, M. F. (2004). Counseling for continued career development after retirement: An application of the theory of work adjustment. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 52, 272
- Harrington T., & Harrington, J. (2002). The Ability Explorer: Translating Super's ability-related theory propositions into practice. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 50, 350-358.
- Sampson, J. P., Jr., Peterson, G. W., Reardon, R. C., & Lenz, J. G. (2000). Using readiness assessment to improve career services: A cognitive information-processing approach. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 49, 146-174.
- Schaub, M., & Tokare, D. M. (2005). The role of personality and learning experiences in social cognitive career theory. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 66, 304