

## **Overview of Career Development Theory**

The career development movement in the United States has paralleled other factors critical to the nation's growth. It is just within the past few years that the career selection strategies selected by school counselors have been called into question. The impact that career development has upon young persons is long-term and inestimable. For it is through the process of career development that an individual fashions a work identity (Tiedeman & O'Hara, 1963).

However, in today's world, "fashioning a work identity" may well be translated into "fashioning an identity." In the American culture, we are what we do. More frequently we are asked "What do you do?" rather than "Who are you?" For the young, this decision is critical in determining the outcome of their lives.

Reviewed below are some of the most frequently cited career development theories. Some of these theories have long tenure while others are newly evolving to address the emerging issues that gender, race and social class present.

### **Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad and Herma Theory – 1951**

Recognizing that vocational choice is influenced by four facts: the reality factor, the influence of the educational process, the emotional factor and individual values this theory proposes that it is a development path that leads to career choice. Starting in preteen and ending in young adulthood, individuals pass through three stages: fantasy, tentative and realistic. In the fantasy stage, the child is free to pursue any occupational choice. Through this process the child's preferred activities are identified and related to future career choices. Beginning in the preteen years and continuing through high school, the young person further defines their interests in, capacity for and values of an occupational choice. The cumulative effect of the process is the transition process in which the adolescent begins the career choice process, recognizes the consequences and responsibility of that choice.

The realistic stage, spanning from mid-adolescence through young adulthood, has three sub-stages: exploration, crystallization and specification. In the exploration stage the adolescent begins to restrict choice based on personal likes, skills and abilities. In the crystallization stage an occupational choice is made. Followed by the specification stage where the individual pursues the educational experiences required achieving his career goal.

Does this theory fit with every adolescent's career choice process? No. It has been recognized that issues of gender, race and social class come into play to open or close doors of occupational choice.

### **Super's Theory of Vocational Choice – 1954**

Donald Super has generated a life span vocational choice theory that has six life and career development stages. These six stages are:

1. The crystallization stage, ages 14-18
2. Specification stage, ages 18-21
3. Implementation stage, ages 21-24
4. The stabilization stage, ages 24-35
5. Consolidation, age 35
6. Readiness for retirement, age 55

One of Super's greatest contributions to career development has been his emphasis of the role self-concept development plays. Super recognized that the self-concept changes and develops throughout people's lives as a result of experience. People successively refine their self-concept(s) over time and application to the world of work creates adaptation in their career choice.

Although the career development theory provides a foundation for the professional work force it's research has omitted women, people of color and the poor. With the changing work force and nature of work the theory has been called into question.

## Holland's Career Typology – 1959

John Holland's theory is grounded in what he calls modal personal orientation or a developmental process established through heredity and the individual's life history of reacting to environmental demands. More simply put, individuals are attracted to a particular occupation that meets their personal needs and provides them satisfaction.

Holland's theory rests on four assumptions:

1. In our culture, persons can be categorized as one of the following: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising or Conventional.
2. There are six modal environments: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional.
3. People search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles.
4. Behavior is determined by an interaction between personality and environment.

A hexagonal model was developed to illustrate the relationship between personality and occupational environment.

Much research supports Holland's typology. The strongest criticism is based on gender bias because females tend to score in three personality types (artistic, social and conventional). Holland attributes this to our society that channels females into female-dominated occupations.

## Lent, Brown and Hackett's Social Cognitive Career Theory – 1987

The Social Cognition Career Theory (SCCT) has grown out of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory and attempts to address issues of culture, gender, genetic endowment, social context and unexpected life events that may interact with and supersede the effects of career-related choices. The SCCT focuses on the connection of self-efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goals that influence an individual's career choice.

SCCT proposes that career choice is influenced by the beliefs the individual develops and refines through four major sources: a) personal performance accomplishments, b) vicarious learning, c) social persuasion and d) physiological states and reactions. How these aspects work together in the career development process is through a process in which an individual develops an expertise/ability for a particular endeavor and meets with success. This process reinforces one's self-efficacy or belief in future continued success in the use of this ability/expertise. As a result, one is likely to develop goals that involve continuing involvement in that activity/endeavor. Through an evolutionary process beginning in early childhood and continuing throughout adulthood, one narrows the scope to successful endeavors to focus on and form a career goal/choice. What is critical to the success of the process is the extent to which one views the endeavor/activity as one at which they are successful and offers valued compensation. The contextual factors come into play by influencing the individual's perception of the probability of success. If the person perceives few barriers the likelihood of success reinforces the career choice, but if the barriers are viewed as significant there is a weaker **interest and choice actions**.

By adolescence, most people have a sense of their competence at a vast array of performance areas, along with convictions about the likely outcomes of a career. Through a process of intervening learning experiences that shape further one's abilities and impacts self-efficacy and outcome beliefs, one's vocational interests, choices and performances are shaped and reshaped.

The SCCT differs from the majority of existing career theories in its dynamic nature. Through its focus upon the role of the self-system and the individual's beliefs the inherent influence of the social and economic contexts are addressed.

Sources: Savickas, M. & Lent, R. (1994). *Convergence in Career Development Theories*. Palo Alto, California: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc. and Stitt-Gohdes, W. (1997) *Career Development*. Columbus, Ohio: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education.