

# CAREER DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND PROCESS

Career development theories help make sense of experiences. A theory is, in effect, a rationalized set of assumptions or hypotheses that allows you to explain the past and predict the future. As such, theories may provide "direction" and as theories are tested and prove "true", theories may be said to expand knowledge. There are two types of career development theories: structural and developmental.

## Two types of theories

1. Structural Theories: focus on individual characteristics and occupational tasks.
2. Developmental Theories: focus on human development across life span.

## Structural Theories

### Trait and Factor

This theory began with Parsons, who proposed that a choice of a vocation depended upon (1) an accurate knowledge of yourself, (2) thorough knowledge of job specifications, and (3) the ability to make a proper match between the two. He wrote: "In the wise choice of a vocation there are three broad factors: (1) a clear understanding of yourself, your aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitation; (2) a thorough knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work; and (3) true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of acts" (Parsons, 1909/1989, p.5).

Two major assumptions of trait and factor theory are: (1) that individuals and job traits can be matched, and (2) that close matches are positively correlated with job success and satisfaction. These ideas are still part of our career counseling approach today.

### John Holland -- Vocational Personalities and Environments

This typology theory was developed to organize the voluminous data about people in different jobs and the data about different work environments, to suggest how people make career choices and to explain how job satisfaction and vocational achievement occur. Holland suggested that "people can function and develop best and find job satisfaction in work environments that are compatible with their personalities" (ICDM, 1991, p. 4-4). Holland based his theory of personality types on several assumptions. People tend to choose a career that is reflective of their of their personality. Because people tend to be attracted to certain jobs, the environment then reflects this personality. He classified these personality types and work environments into six types which he labeled realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (often referred to by the acronym RIASEC). He suggests that the closer the match of personality to job, the greater the satisfaction.

All types are part of each of us. However, one type is usually evidenced most strongly. We may even resemble up to three of the types. Holland developed a hexagon model that illustrates some key concepts: consistency, differentiation, identity, and congruence.

A very brief overview of the six personality types, six work-related activities, and sample occupations is presented below.

<b>TYPE</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>OCCUPATIONS</b>
<b>Realistic</b>	<b>Working with things, i.e. tools and machines</b>	<b>Farmer Carpenter Mechanical Engineer</b>
<b>Investigative</b>	<b>Working with information i.e. abstract ideas and theories</b>	<b>Chemist</b>
<b>Artistic</b>	<b>Creating things</b>	<b>Painter Writer</b>
<b>Social</b>	<b>Helping people</b>	<b>Social Worker Counselor</b>
<b>Enterprising</b>	<b>Leading others</b>	<b>Sales Representative Entrepreneur</b>
<b>Conventional</b>	<b>Organizing data</b>	<b>Night Auditor Secretary</b>

For an in-depth description, refer to The Self-Directed Search Professional Manual listed in the reference section.

"Holland's theory places emphasis on the accuracy of self-knowledge and career information necessary for career decision making" (Zunker, 1994, p.49).

Although the theory appears to be applicable to both male and female workers, there is some question of gender bias in that most females frequently tend to score predominately in three personality types: artistic, social, and conventional. Holland suggests that in our sexist society, females will display a greater interest in female-dominated occupations.

## Developmental Theories

### Super's Theory

Donald Super (1957) and other theorists of career development recognize the changes that people go through as they mature. Career patterns are determined by socioeconomic factors, mental and physical abilities, personal characteristics and the opportunities to which persons are exposed. People seek career satisfaction through work roles in which they can express themselves and implement and develop their self-concepts. Career maturity, a main concept in Super's theory, is manifested in the successful accomplishment of age and stage developmental tasks across the life span.

Self-concept is an underlying factor in Super's model: "...vocational self-concept develops through physical and mental growth, observations of work, identification with working adults, general environment, and general experiences....As experiences become broader in relation to awareness of world of work, the more sophisticated vocational self-concept is formed" (Zunker, 1994, p.30).

Super's contribution was the formalization of stages and developmental tasks over the life span:

<b>STAGE</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>
<b>Growth</b>	<b>Birth - 14 of 15</b>	<b>Form self-concept, develop capacity, attitudes, interests, and needs, and form a general understanding of the world of work.</b>
<b>Exploratory</b>	<b>15-24</b>	<b>"Try out" through classes, work experience, hobbies. Collect relevant information. Tentative choice and related skill development.</b>
<b>Establishment</b>	<b>25-44</b>	<b>Entry skill building and stabilization through work experience.</b>
<b>Maintenance</b>	<b>45-64</b>	<b>Continual adjustment process to improve position.</b>
<b>Decline</b>	<b>65+</b>	<b>Reduced output, prepare for retirement.</b>

People change with time and experience, and progress go through the following vocational development stages:

<b>VOCATIONAL</b>	<b>AGES</b>	<b>GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS &amp; DEVELOPMENTAL TASK</b>
<b>Crystallization</b>	<b>14-18</b>	<b>Developing and planning a tentative vocational goal</b>
<b>Specification</b>	<b>18-21</b>	<b>Firming the vocational goal</b>
<b>Implementation</b>	<b>21-24</b>	<b>Training for and obtaining employment</b>
<b>Stabilization</b>	<b>24-35</b>	<b>Working and confirming career choice</b>
<b>Consolidation</b>	<b>35+</b>	<b>Advancement in career</b>

Although Super originally presented the stages and tasks in a sequential manner, he later added that we cycle and recycle throughout our life span as we adapt to changes in ourselves as well as to the trends in the work place. Understanding these ages and related stages of career development helps the facilitator select appropriate responses and activities.

Super and Thompson (1979) identified six factors in vocational maturity: (1) awareness of the need to plan ahead, (2) decision-making skills, (3) knowledge and use of information resources, (4) general career information, (5) general world of work information, and (6) detailed information about occupations of preference.

Super also looked at the different roles we play during our lifetimes and the relative importance we give to those roles at different times in our lives.

### **Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory**

Much growth takes place as a result of learning and imitating the behavior of others. Krumboltz developed a theory of career decision making and development based on our social learning, or environmental conditions and events, genetic influences and learning experiences. People choose their careers based on what they have learned. Certain behaviors are modeled, rewarded and reinforced.

### **Decision-Making Theories**

Some decision-making theories hypothesize that there are critical points in our lives when choices are made that greatly influence our career development. These decision making points are such events as educational choices, entry-level job positions, changing jobs, etc. Other decision-making theories concerned with ongoing choices across the life span. The decisions that we make are influenced by our awareness of the choices that are available to us and our knowledge of how to evaluate them. Others address our complex environment. For example, H.B. Gelatt says, "We make our decisions based upon what is actual and what is actual is never static" (Gelatt, 1991, p. 1).

### **Cognitive Theories**

Cognitive theories of career development are built around how individuals process, integrate and react to information. The ways in which individuals process information are determined by their cognitive structures. These structures influence how individuals see themselves, others and the environment. Cognitive theories suggest ways to help clients build or refine a hierarchy of thinking skills and decision making skills that influence career development.