

Career Development Theory and Process

Introduction – Career Theory Overview

For nearly a century, scholars and writers have been developing theories and designing strategies to help people find and maintain meaningful work. One of America's best known career development pioneers was Frank Parsons, whose book, **Choosing a Vocation**, was published posthumously in 1909, a year after his death. Parsons observed that vocational choice consists of self-understanding, knowledge of occupations, and "true reasoning," or discernment. His idea was to help people create a good match between self and occupation. Parsons' "matching" approach has permeated the career development profession since its inception.

About mid-century, two major contributions to the field were made by Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad and Herma, and by Donald Super. The former examined the "occupational stories" of people from many age groups, and determined that occupational choice is not a one-time decision, but a developmental process occurring over several stages and sub stages. Ginzberg, et. al., observed that young children, up to about age eleven, live in a **fantasy stage**, where they believe they can do just about anything. They frequently say, "I'm gonna be a _____" without considering skill sets, education and training requirements, or the economy. For them, anything is possible. Between the ages of twelve and eighteen, young people are in the **tentative stage**, where they begin to say, "I like this" (interests), "I'm good at this," (capacity), "This is important to me," (values), and "I think I might want to move in this direction," (tentative choices). Ginzberg and associates called the third stage the **realistic stage**, where adults begin to zero in and say, "I want to know more about this (exploration) and "The picture is getting clearer. I seem to be gravitating to this area." (crystallization).

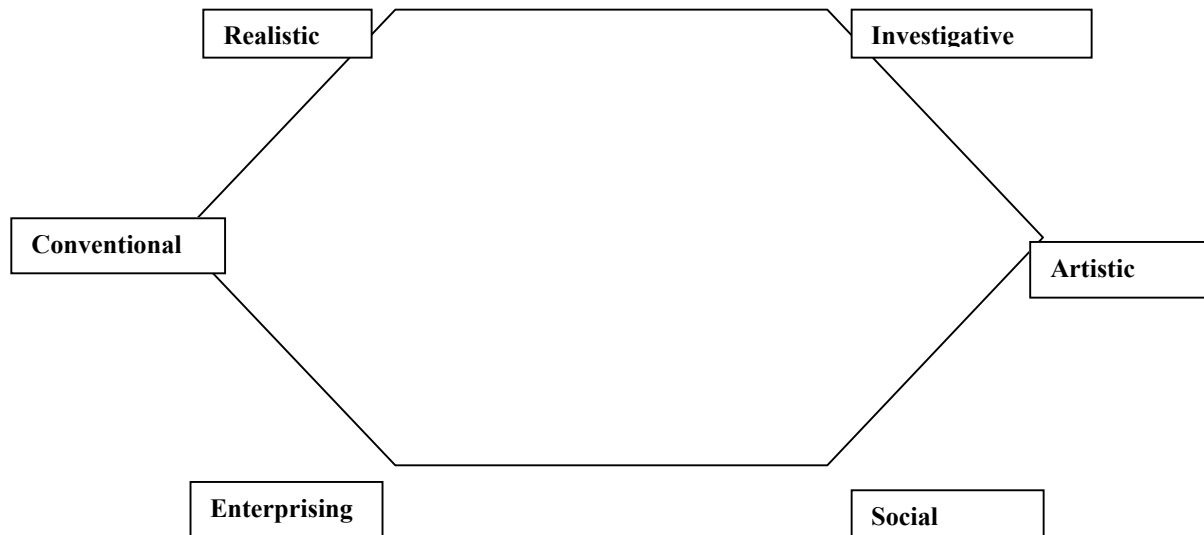
At about the same time, Donald Super was publishing work on his developmental theory, consisting of five stages: growth (childhood), exploration (adolescence), establishment (early adulthood), maintenance (middle adulthood) and decline (later adulthood). (He subsequently changed decline to disengagement.) Super also suggested developmentally appropriate tasks for each stage. He viewed "career" as the sum total of all the roles we play in our lives, and created a Life Career Rainbow to illustrate this.

Although the works of Ginzberg, et. al. and Super have been challenged and refined during the past half-century, they helped us understand 1) that choosing one's life work is not a single-point-in-time event, but a long-term process, beginning in early childhood and progressing through adulthood; and 2) that career consists of much more than work. Both of these contributions made it clear that career development is a dynamic process requiring continuous evaluation, reevaluation and change.

In the 1960's John Holland made a major contribution to the field by creating a hexagonal model to build on the matching perspective suggested by Parsons six decades earlier. Holland postulated a workplace comprised of six major work environments and a populace comprised of six personality types. He gave the same names to both: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional. According to Holland, the matching process is a two-way street; people search for work environments that are compatible with their personalities, and work environments are created to attract certain types of people.

Holland assigned the six environments/personalities to "corners" of a hexagon, with contiguous corners being more similar to each other than those further away. This model is often called

RIASEC because the descriptors are arranged, beginning in the upper left corner of the hexagon, and moving clockwise, as follows: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, Conventional.



Although these six types can be arranged to yield 720 different combinations, Holland believed a “score” based on a person’s top three preferences provided enough information for effective decision making. This resulted in his developing a classification system based on three-letter codes from the hexagon. For example, an SEA personality would seek a congruent work environment, i.e., one that welcomes social, enterprising, and artistic interests and skills. A CIR work environment would provide few compatible experiences for the SEA personality. Holland developed an interest inventory called the Self-Directed Search (SDS) that results in a three-letter code, although he suggests that people can identify their codes without taking a formal assessment.

Below are ideas that Holland includes in his theory.

- 1) *Most people can be categorized as one of six personality types labeled realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, or conventional.*
- 2) *There are six kinds of work 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) *A person’s behavior is determined by an interaction between his or her personality and the characteristics of the environment.*

The closer a person comes to finding a compatible work environment, the more likely he or she will experience satisfaction. Holland's six personality types are described below.

The **Realistic** type is described as:

Asocial	Inflexible	Practical
Conforming	Materialistic	Self-effacing
Frank	Natural	Thrifty
Genuine	Normal	Uninsightful
Hardheaded	Persistent	Uninvolved

The **Investigative** type is describes as:

Analytical	Independent	Rational
Cautious	Intellectual	Reserved
Complex	Introspective	Retiring
Critical	Pessimistic	Unassuming
Curious	Precise	Unpopular

The **Artistic** type is described as:

Complicated	Imaginative	Intuitive
Disorderly	Impractical	Nonconforming
Emotional	Impulsive	Open
Expressive	Independent	Original
Idealistic	Introspective	Sensitive

The **Social** type is described as:

Ascendant	Helpful	Responsible
Cooperative	Idealistic	Sociable
Empathetic	Kind	Tactful
Friendly	Patient	Understanding
Generous	Persuasive	Warm

The **Enterprising** type is described as:

Acquisitive	Energetic	Flirtatious
Adventurous	Excitement Seeking	Optimistic
Agreeable	Exhibitionistic	Self-confident
Ambitious	Sociable	Domineering
Extroverted	Talkative	

The **Conventional** type is described as:

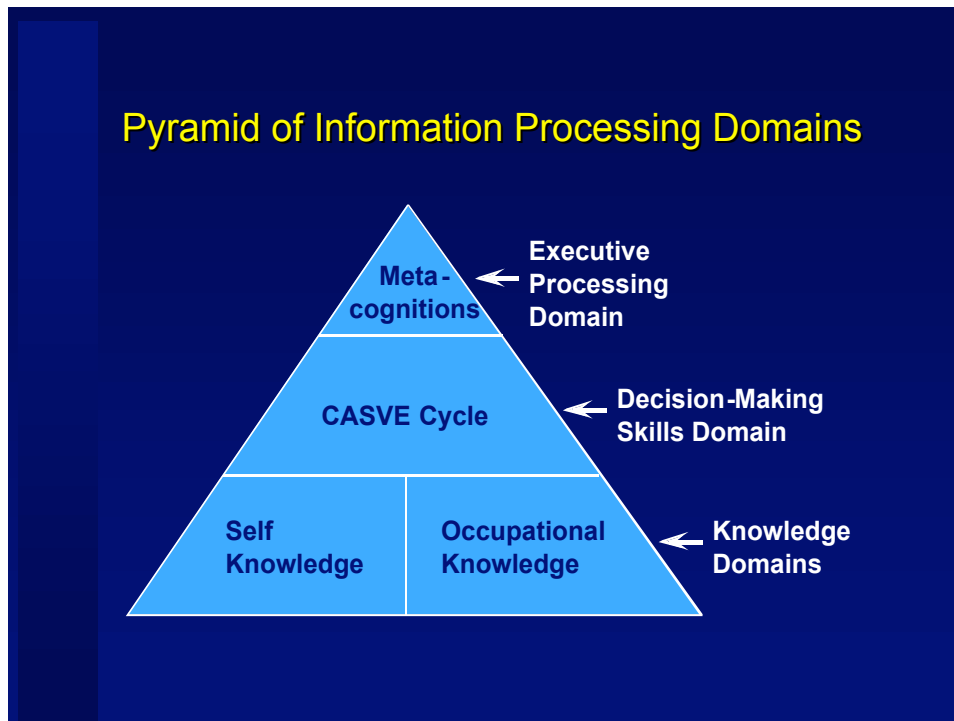
Careful	Inflexible	Persistent
Conforming	Inhibited	Practical
Conscientious	Methodical	Prudish
Defensive	Obedient	Thrifty
Efficient	Orderly	Unimaginative

More recent career development scholars have focused their attention on the decision-making process. Peterson, Sampson, Reardon and Lenz take a cognitive information-processing (CIP) approach that describes three domains of career choice. It is based on a pyramid, with self-knowledge and occupational knowledge forming the base. These constitute the Knowledge Domain. Above it is the Decision Making Skills Domain, comprised of five information-processing skills known as CASVE:

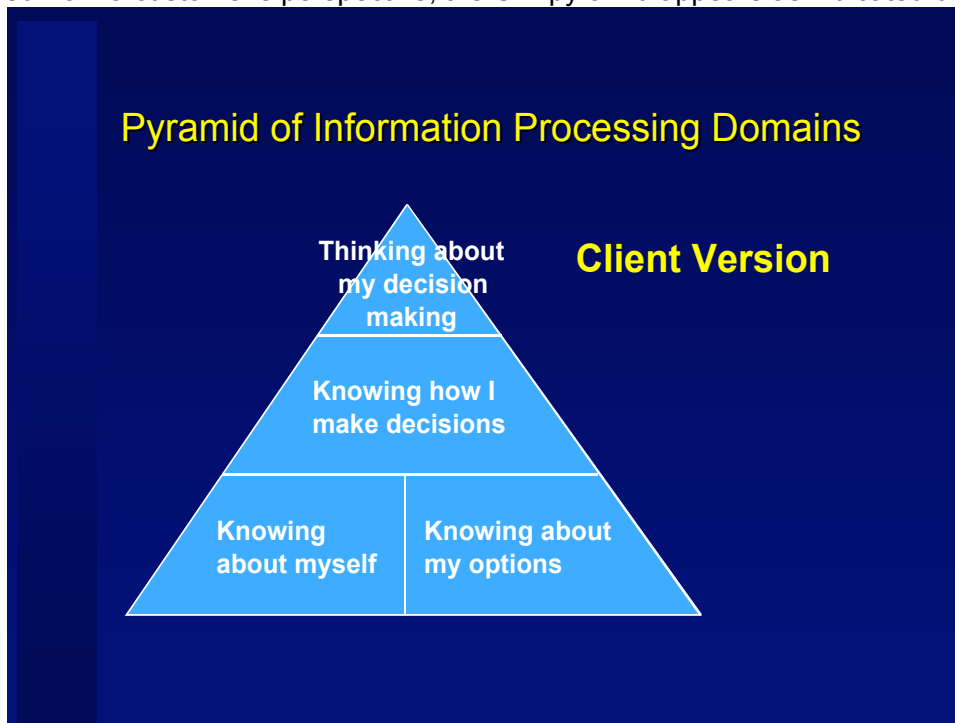
Communication,
Analysis,
Synthesis,
Valuing, and
Executing.

(CASVE will be discussed in more detail in the Career Planning and Decision-making learning unit.) At the top of the pyramid is the Executive Processing Domain, which focuses on metacognition (thinking about our thinking). This is the monitoring/evaluation part of the process, where we ask, “How is it working? What would improve it? What adjustments could/should I make?”

The CIP model is illustrated below.



When viewed from a customer's perspective, the CIP pyramid appears as indicated below.



As previously stated, the base consists of self-knowledge and knowledge of occupations. People differ in the amount of information they have about self and work. Peterson, Sampson, Reardon and Lenz claim that **self-knowledge is based on perception rather than fact** and is influenced by both past experience and present feelings. (Understanding a person's perceptions is an important task for career professionals.) It is in this self-knowledge sector that customers ask, "What are my interests, skills and values? What do I know? What can I do?" **Knowledge about occupational options, on the other hand, is based on facts that can be verified.** "What skills are required? Where do these occupations exist? What do they pay? What is the outlook?" These latter questions can all be answered by having access to good labor market information.

H.B. Gelatt, another decision-making pioneer, writes about positive uncertainty, in which he touts the role of information. Gelatt recognizes that in a changing world, decisions will need to be re-made and adjusted many times over. However, without information, the process becomes a game of chance, much like playing pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey or Russian roulette.

National Career Development Guidelines

In the late 1980s, many of the ideas introduced by these career development pioneers were incorporated into the National Career Development Guidelines, a federal project combining the efforts of several government agencies and professional associations. The Guidelines describe competencies individuals should have in order to plan and manage a career. They are developmental, i.e., competencies are provided for different age groups, and are organized around themes similar to those suggested by Parsons: self-knowledge, educational and occupational exploration, and career planning. The Guidelines are discussed in detail later.

What Do We Mean By Career?

Career originally meant a road, or a course to be traveled. In time it began to mean a course of achievement within a profession. Through the first seventy-five years of the twentieth century, career referred to a professional occupation yielding both money and a respected position in which one could advance. (From this perspective, some people had “careers” while others merely had “jobs.”) However, for the last quarter-century career has been viewed more broadly, encompassing work, leisure and other life-span dimensions. Now it is generally agreed that everyone has a career.

Information literally refers to the communication of knowledge, usually obtained from data, or through study or instruction. Sound career decisions depend on sound information and knowledge, both about self and the world of work. Although self refers to internal motivations, interests and values, we often use formal and informal theory-based instruments to make them explicit.

The world of work is external. The information needed in this area addresses questions such as “What work needs doing now?” and “What knowledge and skills are required to perform this work?” **If** we can find work that needs to be done, compatible with our knowledge skills, interests and values, then finding our place in the world of work should not be difficult.

It is this **if** that causes problems. Even if we know ourselves well, we often do not know what work needs doing, where to find it, what skills are required, how much it pays, or where to get the necessary education or training. We need a variety of information to help us understand the economy and the kinds of jobs that can be obtained within it. This fusion of self-knowledge and labor market information provides the context for career planning and decision making.

Career Development Defined by Life Roles

When we examine the multiple roles we have played throughout life, and consider the internal and external events that have influenced our choices, we are really looking at our career development. Because it is a complex process, shaped by many influences and circumstances, career development may appear to occur in a haphazard, almost accidental manner. However, people actually have a great deal of control over the process if they understand it and plan well. A career professional should be able to help customers develop this understanding and acquire the necessary planning skills.

The National Career Development Guidelines

The National Career Development Guidelines, endorsed by numerous professional organizations, make it clear that career development is a lifelong process of learning about ourselves in relation to the world of work. The Guidelines reflect professional consensus in three main areas: (1) Student and adult competencies and indicators for individual growth and self-knowledge, educational and occupational exploration, and career planning. (2) Organizational capabilities to support competency-based career development programs: and (3) Personnel with the knowledge and skills necessary to deliver these programs effectively.

The Guidelines are divided into four sets of competencies and indicators: elementary school, junior high/middle school, high school, and adult.

Each of these developmental levels is divided into the domains of self-knowledge, educational and occupational exploration, and career planning. The following chart provides an overview of the competencies.

Career Development Competencies by Area and Level				
	ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL	ADULT
Self-Knowledge	Knowledge of the importance of self-concept.	Knowledge of the influence of a positive self-concept.	Understanding the influence of a positive self-concept.	Skills to maintain a positive self-concept.
	Skills to interact with others.	Skills to interact with others.	Skills to interact positively with others.	Skills to maintain effective behaviors.
	Awareness of the importance of growth and change.	Knowledge of the importance of growth and change.	Understanding the impact of growth and development.	Understanding developmental changes and transitions.
Educational and Occupational Exploration	Awareness of the benefits of educational achievement.	Knowledge of the benefits of educational achievement to career opportunities.	Understanding the relationship between educational achievement and career planning.	Skills to enter and participate in education and training.
	Awareness of the relationship between work and learning.	Understanding the relationship between work and learning.	Understanding the need for positive attitudes toward work and learning.	Skills to participate in work and lifelong learning.
	Skills to understand and use career information.	Skills to locate, understand, and use career information.	Skills to locate, evaluate, and interpret career information.	Skills to locate, evaluate, and interpret career information.
	Awareness of the importance of personal responsibility and good work habits.	Knowledge of skills necessary to seek and obtain jobs.	Skills to prepare to seek, obtain, maintain, and change jobs.	Skills to prepare to seek, obtain, maintain, and change jobs.
	Awareness of how work relates to the needs and functions of society.	Understanding how work relates to the needs and functions of the economy and society.	Understanding how societal needs and functions influence the nature and structure of work.	Understanding how the needs and functions of society influence the nature and structure of work.
Career Planning	Understanding how to make decisions.	Skills to make decisions.	Skills to make decisions.	Skills to make decisions.
	Awareness of the interrelationship of life roles.	Knowledge of the interrelationship of life roles.	Understanding the interrelationship of life roles.	Understanding the impact of work on individual and family life.
	Awareness of different occupations and changing male/female roles.	Knowledge of different occupations and changing male/female roles.	Understanding the continuous changes in male/female roles.	Understanding the continuing changes in male/female roles.
	Awareness of the career planning process.	Understanding the process of career planning.	Skills in career planning.	Skills to make career transitions.

Activity

The Guidelines competencies and indicators are useful for assessing anyone's career development status. Use yourself as an example. Review the following Adult Competencies and Indicators and rate yourself from 1 to 5, using the descriptors below. What are your "weak spots" that need work for your own career development?

NCDG Competencies and Indicators—Adult

1 = Very Competent, 2 = Somewhat Competent, 3 = Not Sure, 4 = Not Very Competent, 5 = Not Competent

Self-Knowledge	Rating Number
COMPETENCY I: Skills to maintain a positive self-concept.	
Demonstrate a positive self-concept.	
Identify skills, abilities, interests, experiences, values, and personality traits and their influence on career decisions.	
Identify achievements related to work, learning, and leisure and their influence on self-perception.	
Demonstrate a realistic understanding of self.	
COMPETENCY II: Skills to maintain effective behaviors.	
Demonstrate appropriate interpersonal skills in expressing feelings and ideas.	
Identify symptoms of stress.	
Demonstrate skills to overcome self-defeating behaviors.	
Demonstrate skills in identifying support and networking arrangements (including role models).	
Demonstrate skills to manage financial resources.	
COMPETENCY III: Understanding developmental changes and transitions.	
Describe how personal motivations and aspirations may change over time.	
Describe physical changes that occur with age and adapt work performance to accommodate these.	
Identify external events (e.g., job loss, job transfer) that require life changes.	
Educational and Occupational Exploration	
COMPETENCY IV: Skills to enter and participate in education and training.	
Describe short and long-range plans to achieve career goals through appropriate educational/training paths.	
Identify information that describes educational opportunities (e.g., job training programs, employer-sponsored training, graduate and professional study).	
Describe community resources to support education and training (e.g., child care, public transportation, and health and human services).	
Identify strategies to overcome personal barriers to education and training.	
COMPETENCY V: Skills to participate in work and lifelong learning.	
Demonstrate confidence in the ability to achieve learning activities (e.g., studying, taking tests).	
Describe how educational achievements and life experiences relate to occupational opportunities.	
Describe organizational resources to support education and training (e.g., remedial classes, counseling, and tuition support).	

COMPETENCY VI: Skills to locate, evaluate, and interpret career information.	
Identify and use current career information resources (e.g., computerized career information systems, print and media materials, and mentors).	
Describe information related to self-assessment, career planning, occupations, prospective employers, organizational structures, and employer expectations.	
Describe the uses and limitations of occupational outlook information.	
Identify the diverse job opportunities available to an individual with a given set of occupational skills.	
Identify opportunities available through self-employment.	
Identify factors that contribute to misinformation about occupations.	
Describe information about specific employers and hiring practices.	
COMPETENCY VII: Skills to prepare to seek, obtain, maintain, and change jobs.	
Identify specific employment situations that match desired career objectives.	
Demonstrate skills to identify job openings.	
Demonstrate skills to establish a job search network through colleagues, friends, and family.	
Demonstrate skills in preparing a resume and completing job applications.	
Demonstrate skills and abilities essential to prepare for and participate in a successful job interview.	
Demonstrate effective work attitudes and behaviors.	
Describe changes (e.g., technological developments, and changes in demand for products or services) that influence the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for job success.	
Demonstrate strategies to support career change (e.g., on-the-job training, career ladders, mentors, networking, and continuing education).	
Describe career planning and placement services available through organizations (e.g., educational institutions, business/industry, labor, and community agencies).	
Identify skills that are transferable from one job to another.	
COMPETENCY VIII: Understanding how the needs and functions of society influence the nature and structure of work.	
Describe the importance of work as it affects values and life style.	
Describe how society's needs and functions affect occupational supply and demand.	
Describe occupational, industrial, and technological trends as they relate to training programs and employment opportunities.	
Demonstrate an understanding of the global economy and how it affects the individual.	
Career Planning	
COMPETENCY IX: Skill to make decisions.	
Describe personal criteria for making decisions about education, training, and career goals.	
Demonstrate skills to assess occupational opportunities in terms of advancement, management styles, work environment, benefits, and other conditions of employment.	
Describe the effects of education, work, and family decisions on individual career decisions.	
Identify personal and environmental conditions that affect decision making.	
Demonstrate effective career decision making skills.	
Describe potential consequences of decisions.	
COMPETENCY X: Understanding the impact of work on individual and family life.	
Describe how family and leisure functions affect occupational roles and decisions.	
Determine effects of individual and family developmental stages on one's career.	
Describe how work, family, and leisure activities interrelate.	
Describe strategies for negotiating work, family, and leisure demands with family members (e.g., assertiveness and time management skills).	

COMPETENCY XI: <i>Understanding the continuing changes in male/female roles.</i>	
Describe recent changes in gender norms and attitudes.	
Describe trends in the gender composition of the labor force and assess implications for one's own career plans.	
Identify disadvantages of stereotyping occupations.	
Demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, and skills that work to eliminate stereotyping in education, family, and occupational environments.	
COMPETENCY XII: <i>Skills to make career transitions.</i>	
Identify transition activities (e.g., reassessment of current position and occupational changes) as a normal aspect of career development.	
Describe strategies to use during transitions (e.g., networks and stress management).	
Describe skills needed for self-employment (e.g., developing a business plan, determining marketing strategies, and developing sources of capital).	
Describe the skills and knowledge needed for pre-retirement planning.	
Develop an individual career plan, updating information from earlier plans and including short and long-range career decisions.	

Moving toward tomorrow:

All of the early career development theories included a discussion of self-knowledge, information, and decision-making. The National Career Development Guidelines elaborated on these ideas, propelling the career field forward at a time when rapid change was becoming the norm.

Most recent theorists, acknowledging the inevitability of this change, are making it an integral part of their work. They understand that career development is not the linear, direct process we once took for granted, but is complex, chaotic, and often messy. Successful career planning is now based less on finding work that matches one's interests and skills and more on creating work situations that provide lifetime fulfillment and meaning.

Recognizing the importance of this "meaning" theme, many contemporary theorists approach career development as an existential endeavor. Mark Savikas defines career not only as a quest for meaning but as a quest for self, requiring continual introspection and effort. Anna Miller-Tiedeman views the process as an internal journey requiring the use of a life-career compass (personal experience, intelligence and intuition) to find one's way.

Increasing numbers of career development leaders are embracing this holistic approach. L. Sundal "Sunny" Hansen writes about integrative life planning, where family and work, spirituality and life-purpose, and diversity and inclusivity are woven into a seamless tapestry. Guindon and Hanna write about synchronicity. These new perspectives suggest that a multiplicity of life-occurring events come together simultaneously and harmoniously more often than realized. John Krumboltz endorses this view by adding serendipity to the mix.

All of this means that career planning involves random events that are significantly important, because everything is connected and interrelated.

This holistic, lifelong view of career development should cause all of us to rethink our perspectives about career information, and about the role of the National Career Development Guidelines in career planning. We must remember that information is not just a tool to help people choose compatible occupations. It is about helping them create meaningful and fulfilling lives.