

# Current Issues and Innovations in Vocational Psychology

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Vocational psychology, a specialty within applied psychology, is the scientific enterprise that conducts research to advance knowledge about vocational behavior, improve career interventions, and inform social policy about work issues (Savickas, 2001). In this third edition of the *Handbook of Vocational Psychology*, we once again survey the current status of the discipline and seek to chart its future advances by presenting the research and reflection of leading scholars in the field. The authors in this volume address the central topics that comprise the cutting edge of the discipline, with regard to both innovations in career theory and research and improvement in counseling practice. Their chapters are organized into four sections to ensure that this survey of the discipline is broad in scope and comprehensive in content. The three chapters in the first section of the *Handbook* consider the current status and future possibilities for vocational psychology and its theories of career development. The authors, in turn, examine the field and its theories from the perspectives of historical processes, cultural studies, and women's studies. Following the opening section, which deals with vocational psychology as a field, are two sections that address in turn the two major domains of vocational psychology. These two subject matters are constituted by using occupational entry as a criterion for differentiating the two broad classes of vocational behavior: choice and adjustment (Crites, 1969). The four chapters in the second section of the *Handbook* deal with research on vocational choice, whereas the four chapters in the third section deal with research on work

adjustment. The three chapters in the final section of the *Handbook* examine the practice of vocational psychology, emphasizing career counseling.

### THE FIELD OF VOCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

The three chapters in this section address vocational psychology as a field and examine its past successes, present status, and future directions. The chapter by Mark Savickas and David Baker presents a historical analysis of vocational psychology as a field in applied psychology in the United States and tells the story of how vocational psychology became an identifiable discipline in the social sciences. The authors highlight the antecedents that formed vocational psychology's foundation, the origin and emergence of vocational psychology as a distinct discipline within applied psychology, and the rise of vocational psychology as a psychological science. As the scientific discipline of vocational psychology faces issues of stagnation and decline, this story of its origin and early development sheds light on both the current situation and the future options for reinvigorating the discipline. Especially relevant are the occupational context and social concerns that prompted the "birth" of vocational psychology, because in many ways they resemble the context and concerns that the discipline must address today. However, before vocational psychology can effectively address these concerns, it must address its own decline, possibly with a revitalization and maybe a "rebirth." The future of vocational psychology may rest on its ability to again respond to societal changes by providing useful models, methods, and materials to help workers adapt to transformations wrought by globalization and information technology. Ideas about how vocational psychology might reinvent itself to help individuals cope with the emerging occupational structure, information society, and global economy unfold in the following two chapters.

The chapter by Mary Sue Richardson, Kesia Constantine, and Mara Washburn analyzes how contemporary society is experiencing a significant and far-reaching disruption and reorganization that is altering the entire fabric of the social structure. During the 20th century, options for living were more tightly scripted and circumscribed by norms and social expectation. Self-concepts and identities were developed in a stable social order that provided prompts and punishments to locate an individual in the social order and then guide that individual's choices. Today, globalization and technological change are reshaping views of the self and of identity, seeing them as constructed and co-constructed rather than as developed. Career, which was once thought of as the sum total of a person's work experiences, is now being reconceptualized as a reflexive process that is critical to the ability to sustain the coherent sense of identity required to negotiate life paths without the guidance of norms and traditions. In the absence of these maps, individuals are in



constant need for self-conscious processing of their life experiences to construct and reconstruct their life paths. In this milieu, Richardson, Constantine, and Washburn persuasively assert that vocational psychology needs to reinvent itself to remain useful to society and its citizens. With this goal in mind, they recommend how vocational psychology could be redefined to shift its theoretical lens from developmental to cultural psychology while emphasizing intervention-relevant theory and action research. This transformation in the field of vocational psychology will be as significant as the field's inception as a means to help match individuals to the new occupations that were created at the beginning of the 20th century and its refocus at midcentury from occupations to careers as a means of helping individuals develop their work lives in the hierarchical bureaucracies of corporate culture.

The chapter by Ruth Fassinger enables readers to look at this brave new world of work with an unflinching eye and penetrating insight. She continues her seminal contributions to vocational psychology by first distilling the recent scholarly literature on women's careers to its critical essence and then identifying an ambitious yet realistic agenda of research and reflection that, if implemented, would advance vocational psychology into the 21st century. Fassinger considers, in turn, what is useful and what is missing in four distinct groups of career theories: person-environment, developmental, cognitive, and gendered. Most importantly, Fassinger articulates a vision and explains strategies for advancing each class of theory by tying them to specific vocational problems of contemporary women and then making suggestions to prompt more theory-driven research. She succeeds in envisioning new heuristic paths for vocational psychology, and ends by reminding readers of the need for vocational psychologists to engage in advocating public policy and social justice—activities that were central when the field of vocational guidance was created by social workers who sought to reform the prejudices and ills of urban living.

### **Vocational Choice**

The second section of this handbook deals with the class of vocational behaviors that occur prior to occupational entry, in this case emphasizing the subject matter of vocational choice. In the first chapter of this section, Susan Phillips and LaRae M. Jome ask what vocational psychologists know about vocational decision making that would be useful to career counselors as they work with clients who are trying to make the best possible career choice. The short answer is "quite a bit," but the long answer adds the fact that we need to know quite a bit more. As Phillips and Jome address the important question they pose in the introduction to the chapter, they scan the extant empirical research and theoretical frameworks to identify the most useful models, methods, and materials for easing vocational decision making. They

astutely divide that literature into two parts: one that addresses the *content* of choice and another that addresses the *process* of decision making. After gleaning from these two literatures the best facts and formulas that we currently know, they then turn their attention to what we still need to know. In considering gaps in the literature on and in our understanding of the developing and deciding person, they draw a road map for future research that traces three perspectives on decision making. First is the developmental perspective that focuses on how life-cycle patterns and sequences influence decision making. The second perspective examines the context that surrounds a client and shapes her or his lived experience. The third, and final perspective, focuses on interpersonal relationships and the roles that significant others play in a client's decisional process and eventual choices. Phillips and Jome conclude their chapter by reexamining the usefulness of rationality as the "holy grail" of modern career theory and consider the advantages of postmodern *good-enough choices*, *planned happenstance*, and *positive uncertainty*. Having read this chapter, the careful reader will indeed understand what vocational psychologists know and need to know about vocational decision making and career choice. How to apply this knowledge in career interventions is the topic of the next three chapters in Part 2.

In their chapter, Susan Whiston and Laurel Oliver bridge the science of vocational psychology and the profession of career counseling by addressing research on how counseling fosters vocational development and the need for better conceptualization and investigation of this process. This chapter provides a thorough accounting of what we know and what we need to know about career counseling, especially its outcomes and processes for different types of clients in manifold settings. After defining career counseling and distinguishing it from other career interventions and from personal counseling, Whiston and Oliver closely examine six major aspects of career counseling research. First, they consider the accumulated research on the outcomes and effectiveness of career counseling. Next, they examine the process of career counseling and identify those factors that contribute to effective outcomes. The third section of the chapter addresses the interaction between process and outcome in career counseling, whereas the fourth section considers characteristics of the client and counselor and the setting in which the career counseling is provided. In the fifth section, the authors discuss the role of theory in the practice of career counseling. And looking ahead, the sixth and final topic addresses how career counseling might change and evolve, with specific attention to the influences of technology and the Internet. The authors conclude the chapter by identifying areas where additional research related to career counseling is particularly needed.

This topic is taken up in the chapter by Seven Brown and Eileen McPartland, who examine the research on how career interventions make a difference. Moving beyond the general question of the effectiveness of these



interventions and the specific issue of identifying the critical ingredients that produce these effects, Brown and McPartland consider the issue of “how” these interventions and ingredients achieve their effects and how they can be improved. Brown and McPartland emphasize the need to approach this issue by moving beyond the uniformity myth: that is, the belief that clients are similar to one another and interventions are applied uniformly. To examine how interventions work, they suggest that researchers (a) distinguish among different choice problems and their underlying causes; (b) consider client goals and events that trigger help seeking; and (c) recognize the status identities of clients along dimensions including gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic resources. To examine differential treatment effects along these three lines, Brown and McPartland recommend strategies such as comparative outcome research, applying the best available method, and ideographic data analysis. They hope that, taken together, their ideas and suggestions will promote an applied science of career intervention.

Such an applied science of career intervention must pay particular attention to the usefulness of different interventions with diverse groups in manifold contexts. In their chapter, Michael T. Brown, Yasmine Yamini-Diouf, and Christopher Ruiz de Esparza review the literature on this topic addressing its current shortcomings and concluding that the accumulated findings are sparse at best. They then present a rationale for and a detailed description of a strategic and programmatic research agenda for studying the effectiveness of career interventions with diverse groups. They astutely suggest that this research program should begin by investigating whether the five critical ingredients of effective career intervention identified by Brown and his colleagues (2003) vary as a function of racial and ethnic group membership of the clients. Brown et al. also suggest the possibility that there may be additional critical ingredients in effective interventions with diverse clients in manifold settings. For example, they suggest the possibility that models, methods, and materials for both elevating career aspirations and coping with barriers, constraints, and hindrances may be important ingredients in effective work with minority persons. We hope that the next rendering of this handbook will include a more complete and better understanding about what career interventions work best with which clients.

### **Work Adjustment**

The third part of this handbook deals with the class of vocational behaviors that occur after occupational entry, in this case emphasizing the subject matter of work adjustment. In their chapter, Beryl Hesketh and Barbara Griffin concentrate on the Minnesota Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) and its evolution since 1957. They purposely take an historical perspective in tracing the origins of TWA in order to demonstrate how the rich background of the

concepts remains relevant to today's world of work as well as to highlight how these concepts have parallels with many avenues of recent research in industrial and organization psychology. In outlining the development of the theory, Hesketh and Griffin demonstrate how the heuristic concepts in the theory remain relevant to today's world of work. Beyond explaining the core concepts of TWA, they focus attention on the dynamic components in the theory and their utility for comprehending the fluid, changing work environment individuals face today. In addition to explaining how people maintain adjustment to their work situations, Hesketh and Griffin explore the construct of adaptability and its nomological network. In the end, they provide a contemporary statement of TWA, one that highlights its usefulness in guiding future research and in assisting counselors and coaches to equip people to cope with the adaptive requirements of the modern workplace. The topic of person-environment fit is further developed in the next chapter.

The role of personality in work adjustment has long been ignored because of the initial reports of low to modest correlations between personality inventory scores and job performance. Prompted by the Five-Factor Model of personality, recently there has been renewed interest in the role that personality plays in job-related performance, satisfaction, attitudes, and behaviors. W. Bruce Walsh and Donald E. Eggerth examine these key aspects in their chapter, and use the Five-Factor Model for organizing personality traits to consider how personality relates to work performance, job satisfaction, and subjective well-being. In considering how personality relates to work adjustment variables, they concentrate on the outcomes of satisfaction and satisfactoriness, not on the processes that lead to these outcomes. They report that self-evaluations by workers and supervisors' evaluation of their work show a small relation to dimensions in the "big five," especially conscientiousness. Walsh and Eggerth acknowledge that these relationships are small; yet, they suggest that personality variables can be used additively with other variables to increase predictive validity in selection decisions. However, at this time, the relation between dimensions in the Five-Factor Model and work outcomes appears to be too small and too general to add much incremental validity to the assessments made for career counseling interventions. In fact, after reading this review, it seems that the dimensions in the Five-Factor Model may relate more to the style with which individuals engage in work rather than to the work they choose to do or how well they do it. This style, or what Walsh and Eggerth refer to as "happy personality," seems to relate broadly and generally to affective outcomes such as satisfaction and subjective well-being. The most intriguing insight offered by Walsh and Eggerth is the idea that researchers examine how congruence (either between person and environment or within a person's short- and long-term goals) may moderate or mediate the relation between happy personality and happiness. Of course,



employers want happy workers, so many organizations engage in activities that ease work adjustment.

The broad range of activities that organizations use to develop their workforce as well as to assist individual workers to manage their own careers is astutely described by Gary D. Gottfredson in his chapter. Using a succinct style, he clearly outlines and discusses the organization's major reasons for engaging in these activities: meeting future personnel needs, fostering attachment to the organization, improving worker performance, and identifying and handling human resource problems. To accomplish these four major objectives, organizations enact several core strategies. The first strategy of planning and analysis serves functions such as succession planning, workforce assessment, and job analysis. The second strategy of assessment functions to increase worker self-knowledge through psychological testing, assessment centers, and 360-degree feedback. The third strategy of learning and development functions to foster employee growth through performance management, developmental assignments, coaching, and training. Gottfredson concludes the chapter by identifying the complex challenges encountered by career management professionals who work in organizations and then describes how particular types of research and certain forms of training can assist them to meet these challenges.

Of course, some challenges to work adjustment require more attention and assistance than an employer can provide. For example, the work adjustment of individuals who have disabling physical and psychiatric conditions can present challenges to which employers are ill-equipped to respond. Vocational rehabilitation services directly address these challenges and, as such, vocational rehabilitation should be an important topic in vocational psychology. Although vocational psychologists have been involved in vocational rehabilitation for almost a century, vocational rehabilitation is essentially a multidisciplinary effort that also includes important contributions from education, counseling, medicine, and allied health disciplines. In their chapter, Timothy Elliott and Paul Leung provide a precis of the history of vocational rehabilitation in the United States, emphasizing how public policy has shaped its evolution. They then turn to outlining vocational psychology's major contributions to vocational rehabilitation, typically consisting of theoretical perspectives and empirical research. The emphasis of current legislation, emergence of employment specialists, a strong consumer rights movement, and inadequate coverage in counseling psychology and counselor education training programs may combine to make vocational psychology play an even smaller role in the future of vocational rehabilitation. To avert this possibility requires that vocational psychologists renew their commitment to vocational rehabilitation theory, research, and practice, a commitment deeply engrained in the Minnesota Theory of Work Adjustment (Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1964).

### Career Counseling

The final part of this handbook deals with the practice of vocational psychology, in this case emphasizing career counseling. John Krumboltz and Anne Chan concentrate on one major question: namely, "How should vocational psychology frame the activity of career counseling?" The goals of and paradigm for career counseling have remained largely unchanged since they were first articulated by Frank Parsons in 1909. Krumboltz and Chan directly interrogate these goals and the paradigm used to achieve them and, in so doing, find the current practice of career counseling wanting. Fortunately, they do not stop at deconstructing current practices. They offer a possible remedy in arguing that the goals of career counseling should be broadened, the scope of career counseling should be extended to include all major life transitions, and that transition counselors should focus more attention on helping people who encounter chaos in postmodern society make meaning for their lives, especially through spiritual, religious, and other healing practices. It is meaning that bridges transitions by enabling individuals to maintain a sense of personal continuity and coherence as they move through a series of career discontinuities.

In this regard, Paul Hartung's chapter offers a fresh look at the intersection of vocational appraisal and career counseling. After reviewing traditional models, he suggests a more integrative approach that uses contemporary viewpoints to build on established models and perspectives. Hartung explains how to establish tighter linkages between assessment and counseling by supplementing the positivist match-making approach with a constructivist meaning-making perspective. He also advises that these linkages would be further strengthened by systematic assessment of the myriad factors in career development that are shaped by social contexts and opportunity structures. In the end, Hartung explicates a model that truly uses interpretation of both quantitative measures and qualitative assessments within counseling, rather than the traditional model in which test interpretation was thought to be career counseling.

Before adopting an integrated model of career assessment and counseling such as the one proposed by Hartung, practitioners must examine its effectiveness with diverse groups. Linda Subich, in the final chapter of this work, reviews the research literature for the last 10 years. She concentrates on extracting information about the characteristics of scores from measures of interests, values, self-efficacy, and career adaptability with populations other than the reference populations presented in the instruments' manuals. Unfortunately for the field of vocational psychology, she reports that the existing research concentrates on the instruments themselves, rather than on their use with diverse populations. The majority of the research deals with issues such as internal consistency, construct validity, and differences in group means.



Only three studies examined the concurrent validity of these career assessment instruments. None of the studies that she identified addressed directly the issue of predictive validity. This gap in research leaves open the question of validity for use. Before having confidence in administering these career assessment instruments to diverse populations, practitioners need evidence of their usefulness in predicting choices, pushing exploration, promoting self-knowledge, and prompting new possibilities. Although evidence of mean score differences in the measured variables and distinctions in how different groups may perceive the structure of the work world is valuable, it does not address the question of which instruments to use with which clients.

As a group, the chapters on the field of vocational psychology and its theories (Part One), research on vocational choice (Part Two), research on work adjustment (Part Three), and the practice of career counseling (Part Four) provide not only a thorough update on the status of the field but also penetrating insights about and previews of its forthcoming developments. In so doing, the authors confirm that, as a scientific enterprise, vocational psychology during the last decade continued to advance knowledge about vocational behavior, improve career interventions, and inform social policy about work issues. Furthermore, the authors' evaluations of the current status and future potential of vocational psychology serve to encourage its practitioners to continue to address complex issues with innovative models, methods, and materials.

## REFERENCES

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