

Introduction

Toward Convergence Between Career Theory and Practice

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CHANGES ATTRIBUTED TO the move to postindustrial society, the information age, postmodern culture, and a global economy have prompted escalating debate about the utility of contemporary theories of vocational behavior for the practice of career intervention (Richardson, 1993, 1994; Savickas, 1993, 1994; Tinsley, 1994). The schism between career theory and practice has a long history of generating discussion between academics and practitioners. Currently, these discussions resemble heated debates that are widening the schism. Unfortunately, the schism has reached the point where Polkinghorne (1992) concluded that counseling psychology now has two sciences: a science of theory and research performed by academicians and a science of practice.

A series of studies has confirmed the belief that theory is little used by practitioners (Morrow-Bradley & Elliott, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1992). Practitioners need knowledge of how to produce beneficial results in clients. They get it from experience with clients, oral tradition, and emerging research about the process of psychotherapy, not from theory and research.

In accord with the growing disenchantment among practitioners, some researchers have also challenged the usefulness of career theory for the practice of career counseling. For example, Fitzgerald and Betz (1994, p. 103) have recently written about the "general lack of utility of major career theories to large segments of the

population.” They account for this shortcoming by explaining that (a) the concept of career development may not be a meaningful concept in the lives of the majority of the population, (b) research on career theories examines the smallest segment of the population, and (c) theories do not systematically attend to the role of structural and cultural factors in conditioning individual vocational behavior.

The degree to which practitioners find career theories useful in their work became of particular interest to vocational psychologists during a conference on “Convergence Between Theories of Career Choice and Development” conducted in April 1992 by the Vocational Behavior and Career Intervention Special Interest Group in the Counseling Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association (Vocational SIG). During this conference, a heated debate occurred on the rift between theory and practice. Part of this debate can be read in a book that emerged from the conference, *Convergence in Career Development Theories* (Savickas & Lent, 1994). To respond to the debate and advance our thinking on the issue, in May 1994 the Vocational SIG conducted a conference entitled “Toward the Convergence of Career Theory and Practice.” This handbook was inspired by that conference.

In general, this handbook addresses two pivotal questions. The first question asks whether practice can ever inform theory. Practitioners are frustrated by the hierarchy implicit in the theory versus practice dichotomy. Practitioners know that theory is “practice at distance” and that theory takes meaning from and advances practice. The second question asks why vocational psychologists have not produced an explicit theory of career counseling. A career counseling theory can overlap with a theory of vocational behavior or career development, yet a career counseling theory really should concentrate on the relationship and communication dimensions of the interaction between clients and counselors. Both questions, passionately articulated, address the transaction between practice and theory as well as how this transaction can be eased.

In constructing the handbook and writing its chapters, the contributing authors shared the goal of advancing the integration of career theory and practice as well as easing transactions between practitioners and researchers. As a result, this handbook provides a comprehensive treatment of the interface between practice and theory. The six chapters discuss the interface itself by analyzing the disparate cultures of researchers and practitioners and the transactional problems that arise when representatives of the two cultures meet to agree upon and work toward a common goal, namely, fostering career development. The remaining chapters each deal with how the integration of practice and theory can be enhanced. The chapter authors have focused on how to foster career development in clients, that is, *career counseling theory*, rather than descriptions and explanations of vocational behavior, that is, *career development theory*. This handbook presents three new theories of career counseling, six chapters on how to more effectively use the major career development theories in constructing career interventions, and three

chapters about how practitioners can use technical eclecticism to orchestrate the translation of the major career development theories into a unified practice of career intervention. In addition, it offers eight chapters on innovations in career assessment and counseling. These groups of chapters, which each approach theory-practice integration from a different vantage point, are organized coherently into five sections of the handbook.

PART 1: PUTTING CAREER THEORY INTO PRACTICE

The chapters in the opening section of this handbook address the general issue of converging theory and practice and reducing the rift between theorists and practitioners. In considering these issues, the authors draw on their personal experiences in constructing and researching theory as well as translating theory into practice and practice into theory. The authors thoughtfully comment on the existence of the rift between practice and theory, carefully analyze the causes of the rift, and suggest creative remedies that might serve to narrow the gap between the two areas. In particular, John L. Holland and Edwin L. Herr closely examine the rift between theory and practice and draw different conclusions about the current situation. Lenore W. Harmon explains that not only is there a gap between theory and practice but there is also a rapidly widening gap between contemporary counseling models, methods, and materials and the diverse situations and complex problems presented by contemporary clients. Consuelo Arbona asserts that the theory-practice rift is irrelevant to the worklives of ethnic and racial minorities who live in poverty. Arbona's contention dramatically advances Harmon's argument concerning a practice-reality gap. John D. Krumboltz and Margaretha S. Lucas seek to reduce the rift by advocating, respectively, a new learning theory for career counseling and methods for building cohesiveness between practitioners and researchers.

PART 2: MAKING CAREER COUNSELING THEORY MORE USEFUL

The chapters in the handbook's second section examine how major counseling theories are useful in career intervention, how counseling theory influences the practice of career intervention, future directions in making counseling theory more practical, and how counseling theories have adapted to feedback from practitioners. Whereas the chapters in the first section address the issue at hand at a general level of analysis, the chapters in this second section deal with the issue from the particular perspectives of several distinct theoretical models for career intervention. The theoretical perspectives selected for inclusion were meant to represent the career

counseling models and methods that are both widely used and of longstanding importance to the field. Jane L. Swanson, from the perspective of trait-and-factor theory, asserts that the theory is the practice. Writing from the person-centered perspective, Ellen B. Lent wonders if it is a specious indictment to claim that theory has failed practice. Judy M. Chartrand uses the social learning perspective to offer a new sociocognitive counseling model that explicitly attends to linking career theory to practice. David A. Jepsen, adopting the developmental perspective, considers four forms of rhetoric and their effectiveness in translating developmental theory into practice. Beverly J. Vandiver and Sharon L. Bowman adapt L. Gottfredson's (1981) theory of occupational aspirations to facilitate the theory-practice translation. Itamar Gati proposes that computerized career guidance systems can act as laboratories for researchers who aim to reduce the gap between theory and practice. Mark L. Savickas closes the section with a chapter that describes a conceptual framework for systematically linking theories to the practice of career assessment and intervention.

PART 3: INNOVATIONS IN CAREER ASSESSMENT

Career assessment measures and techniques are often cited as a primary means of translating theory into practice. Accordingly, the chapters in the third section of the handbook examine criticisms of and new directions for the practice of career assessment as well as the use of assessment instruments during career counseling. Gary D. Gottfredson suggests that theory and practice linkages could be strengthened by a schematic map that shows counselors and researchers how to better use existing segments of career theories to address specific practice problems. John O. Crites illustrates a systematic approach to ensuring a theory-practice linkage in describing the construction, development, and use of his *Career Mastery Inventory*. Fred H. Borgen and Lenore W. Harmon use the 1994 *Strong Interest Inventory*™ to illustrate how practice and research can lead to new theoretical models of interests and personality. W. Bruce Walsh emphasizes a research agenda for fostering theory-practice integration that uses as focal points recent innovations in assessment such as idiographic measurement, the Big Five, and practical intelligence. Linda Mezdylo Subich recommends that breaking the "uniformity myth" will advance theory-practice integration by focusing the attention of counselors on the uniqueness of the individual and the particulars of his or her worldview and social context. Rosie Phillips Bingham and Connie M. Ward describe three new assessment instruments that alert counselors to issues of gender and race as they translate theories into practice. Naomi M. Meara candidly discusses the chapters on assessment in this section, emphasizing the need to increase the sensitivity and specificity of assessment procedures to multiple worldviews and diverse cultures.

PART 4: INNOVATIONS IN CAREER COUNSELING

The chapters in the fourth section of the handbook focus on criticisms of and new directions for contemporary theory and practice of career intervention. In particular, the authors offer specific suggestions for healing the rift between practice and theory. Frederick T. L. Leong identifies boundaries, cultures, and complexity as problems that separate career theory from practice and then recommends that researchers and practitioners remain in contact with each other in order to communicate and collaborate. Mary Sue Richardson recommends that career counseling be reconceptualized as counseling/psychotherapy with a specialty in work, jobs, and career. Richard A. Young and Lasislav Valach propose that postmodern philosophy of science has produced new career theories that explicitly address the convergence of career theory and practice. Audrey Collin discusses the three chapters in this section by considering how the relationships among theorists, practitioners, and clients affect the nature of practice and then presents a model for “reflective practice” of career intervention.

PART 5: CLOSING COMMENTS

The concluding section contains three chapters that summarize and reflect on the prior chapters. Samuel H. Osipow argues that contemporary career theory was not designed to provide operational procedures to use in career intervention and, thus, he wonders if counselors expect too much from career theory. He encourages practitioners to be more active in theory construction and more willing to communicate and collaborate with researchers in turning theory into practice. Roger A. Myers concludes that the convergence between theory and practice is a problem of considerable import, one that is likely to persist into the foreseeable future. He implies that the main contribution of the handbook has been to reveal the varying levels of concern about the rift between career practice and theory and to examine varying explanations of the rift's origin and possible resolution. Walsh and Savickas conclude the handbook by highlighting the recommendations made by the contributors to the handbook for better integrating career practice and theory.

CONCLUSION

Given the schism between career theory and practice, efforts must be made to provide forums in which theorists and practitioners communicate directly with each other and encourage close listening to the diverse frames of reference and overall goals espoused by practitioners and theorists.

The authors in this handbook have been selected to represent diverse views on the rift between theory and practice. As you read their chapters, note how each author answers the five central questions that structure this handbook:

- How can career theories be renovated to address the majority of individuals in society?
- How can practice inform theory?
- What are the best prospects for building clearer connections between practice and theory?
- How can we increase the cohesiveness between practitioners and researchers?
- What type of research can produce knowledge that is useful to practitioners in realistically addressing the complexities presented by diverse clients in various clinical situations?

These questions beg for clarification before the field of career counseling can progress beyond its current achievements.

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