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## VOCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

*Vocational psychology*, a specialty within applied psychology, is the study of vocational behavior and its development across the life cycle. Emerging in the first decade of the twentieth century as America became heavily industrialized, vocational psychology originally concentrated on the fit between a worker's abilities and interests and a job's requirements and rewards. The outcome of a good match between a person and position is job success and satisfaction, with failure and frustration being expected from a poor fit. This paradigm, once called trait-and-factor, is now called person-environment fit. It rests on the contributions of differential psychology, that is, the measurement and study of individual differences in personality traits and cognitive abilities.

Vocational psychology crystallized as a specialty in the second decade of the twentieth century, promulgated in 1916 by Hollingworth's book titled *Vocational Psychology*. Until World War II, vocational psychology concentrated on two functions. The first functioned applied the matching model in vocational guidance to help individuals choose jobs. The second function applied the matching model in personnel selection to help companies choose

workers. The same person, a personnel and guidance psychologist who counseled individuals and consulted with companies, performed both functions. Following World War II, personnel psychologists began to concentrate on either guidance or selection, with guidance becoming the hub for counseling psychology and selection becoming the hub for industrial psychology. While today they are distinct, both disciplines remain interested in vocational behavior. Vocational psychologists study vocational behavior from the perspective of the worker, while industrial/organizational psychologists study vocational behavior from the perspective of the employer. Because of its concern with the individual rather than the organization, vocational psychology research serves as the basic science for the profession of career counseling.

Contemporary vocational psychology encompasses two domains, one sphere of activity is concerned with vocational choice by high school and college students and the other sphere of activity is concerned with work adjustment by adults. Spanning both choice and adjustment, a second model to augment that of person-environment fit became popular during the middle of the twentieth century. It was called the *vocational development model*. This paradigm popularized the term *career*. For example, *career development* replaced *vocational development* as a rubric. Viewed objectively, career is the series of positions that an individual occupies from school through retirement. Viewed subjectively, career is the imposition of meaning on vocational behavior. Individuals construct their careers by using subjective meanings both to guide their selection of occupational positions and to make their work roles matter to themselves and others.

Vocational psychology's unique contribution to psychology continues to be the conceptualization and measurement of vocational interests. Other important topics include vocational choice, career indecision, career intervention, school-to-work transition, organizational commitment, work adjustment, mentoring, and work-family balance. Research on these topics can be found in vocational psychology's three main journals: *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, and *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. Regular updates about research and reflection on vocational behavior appear in the serial volumes of the *Handbook of Vocational Psychology*.

—Mark L. Savickas

See also Holland's theory of vocational choice, Super's career development theory, Vocational education