

Alternative Futures for Vocational Psychology:

A SWOT Analysis

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The year 2001 is the 30th anniversary of the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* and the beginning of a new decade and new millennium. This confluence provides an advantageous occasion for examining how counseling psychology can effectively respond to the dramatic changes occurring in the world of work. The models, methods and materials developed and used during the last century were effective in assisting individuals pursue satisfying and successful careers in an industrial society. However, rapid movement to a global economy and an information society has either diminished the effectiveness of these theories and techniques or demanded they be renovated. While several prior symposia have identified and discussed these issues and challenges, it is now time to look forward and concentrate on how vocational psychologists and career counselors can respond. Thus, this symposium seeks to raise awareness about the challenges faced by vocational psychology in the coming decade and to identify strategies to advance the discipline and improve the services it provides.

To do this, a panel of influential vocational psychologists will describe their visions for the future of vocational psychology and career counseling. Their visions of the future along with strategic plans for stretching the field over for the next decade, will emerge from independently conducted SWOT analyses. Each symposiast has agreed to identify the internal **strengths** and **weaknesses** of the field and to discuss the external **opportunities** that have the potential to meet needs consistent with the goals of vocational psychology and career counseling as well as **threats** and unfavorable situations which may block goal attainment. Having identified the four components in a SWOT analysis, the symposiasts will then analyze the critical issues facing vocational psychology and build a list of strategic alternatives by recommending what the field

should emphasize, restructure, pursue, correct, avoid, and counter. After presenting these issue statements, the symposiasts will state their vision for vocational psychology and career counseling for the next decade in the form of a strategic plan that includes a mission, objectives, and strategies. The mission statements will indicate why vocational psychology exists, and describe its chief products and services, clients served, and value added. The associated goals and objectives will specify the kind of results vocational psychology should seek to achieve and the strategies will detail action plans for achieving these goals.

Some of you may be intrigued by the idea of conducting your own S.W.O.T. analysis and constructing a strategic plan for vocational psychology or your careers in it. Some professors of vocational psychology may want their students to do the same. You are invited to engage in the same process used by the symposiasts. To make this possible, the following pages contain the request made to the symposiasts. The request begins with a statement about the domain of vocational psychology and then offers suggestions and prompts for conducting the analysis and constructing a vision for the discipline's future.

Vocational Psychology

Vocational psychology is the study of vocational behavior and its development in careers, particularly emphasizing issues of occupational choice and work adjustment. The discipline focuses on the perspective of individual workers not the perspectives of the organization or occupation. The focus on individuals differentiates vocational psychology from the fields of I/O psychology, organizational behavior, and occupational sociology. Of course, vocational psychologists work in organizations, yet when they do they concentrate on individual workers and their careers rather than on the organization and its leadership.

A S.W.O.T. Analysis for Vocational Psychology

The following outline provides a general structure for your thinking, it need not be an outline for your article. You may not want to include each section or all the information you considered in a particular section. You can, if you wish, identify what you believe have been the greatest accomplishments and disappointments in vocational psychology during the last ten years. The overriding goal, however, is to articulate your vision for the next ten years of vocational psychology. To help you construct that vision in more detail you may want to consider the following topics.

Internal Strengths of Vocational Psychology

A strength is a resource, capacity, skill, or advantage. In this context, a strength is a condition internal to our field that is under our control and can be influenced by us. The following prompts might help you identify strengths.

- Who are we?
- Who do we serve?
- Why do you do what you do?
- What do we do well?
- What are our core competencies?
- How strong is our market?
- Do we have a clear strategic direction?
- What is our culture?
- What are our resources?
- How do we distinguish ourselves from competitors?

Internal Weaknesses of Vocational Psychology

A weakness is a limitation, fault, defect, or deficiency in resources, skills, and capabilities that seriously impedes the field. Weaknesses are under our control and can be influenced by us. The following prompts might help you identify weaknesses.

What can be improved?
What is done poorly?
What should be avoided?
What embarrasses you about this field?
What do you want to change?
What do you want to do better?
What have clients or institutions asked you to do that you cannot?

External Opportunities for Vocational Psychology

An opportunity is a favorable situation that has the potential to meet a need consistent with your mission. Opportunities may help us reach our goals. Opportunities are not under our direct control. The following prompts may help you identify opportunities.

What are interesting trends?
What good chances are we facing?
Do changes in technology and markets present any new opportunities?
Do changes in government policy related to our field present any new opportunities?
Do changes in social patterns, population profiles, lifestyles present any new opportunities?
If you take the next step in vocational psychology, what would that be?
What ideas have been offered to you?
What opportunities have been presented?
Are there new markets?
What changes do you expect to see in demand over the next ten years?

External Threats to Vocational Psychology

A threat is an unfavorable situation which may block goal attainment. We must respond to threats in order to grow. It is best to anticipate threats and to respond proactively.

Who is doing the same thing?
Are they doing it better?
What is threatening your client base?
What do practitioners want?

Analysis of Strategic Issues Facing Vocational Psychology

Now it is time to build a list of strategic alternatives. To do so, analyze your S.W.O.T.

list by thinking about:

- What we should grow (concentrate on)?
- Which strength do we build on?
- What should we shrink (restructure)?
- Which new things should we attend to (merge, collaborate, acquire)?
- Which weaknesses should we correct?
- Which threats do we counter?

The following questions may be useful in helping you to develop issue statements that represent the interaction between strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Be specific about and give examples of issues, concerns, and ideas.

- How can strengths be used to take advantage of opportunities? (S-O strategies)
- How can we use strengths to counteract threats? (S-T strategies)
- How can we overcome weaknesses or counteract threats? (W-T analysis)
- How can we overcome weaknesses to take advantage of opportunities? (W-O strategy)
- How can this be considered an opportunity as well as a threat?
- How may this apparent strength turn out to be a weakness?
- How does this weakness really represent a strength?

A Vision or Strategic Plan for Vocational Psychology

After completing your issue statements, state your vision for vocational psychology in the next decade, maybe in the form of a strategic plan that includes a mission, objectives, and strategies. If you write a mission statement, please indicate why vocational psychology exists, maybe describing its chief products or services, customers served, and value added. You may want to discuss goals and objectives which specify the kind of results vocational psychology should seek to achieve. If you do the why (mission) and the what (objectives), you might want to add the how, meaning strategies for achieving the objectives.