A Career Services Model for Translating Theory into Practice

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The present conference addresses two pivotal questions which were raised at the conference on "Convergence between Theories of Career Choice and Development." The first question asked 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 asked 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, as Dr. Swanson (1994) has just noted, yet a career counseling theory really should concentrate on the relationship and communication processes between the client and counselor. Both questions, passionately articulated, addressed the transaction between practice and theory as well as how this transaction can be eased. Each major section of the present conference responds to these questions from a different vantage point.

In this section of the conference, five presenters respond to the two fundamental questions from the perspectives of five foundational theories of career development and counseling: Person-Environment, Psychodynamic, Person Centered, Developmental, and Social Learning. Each presenter considers, from his or her theoretical standpoint, how (a) career theories are useful in practice, (b) career theories have been improved by feedback from practitioners, and (3)

career theory can be made even more useful to practitioners. My paper considers these important issues from the psychodynamic perspective of depth psychology and the narrative paradigm. In particular, my presentation addresses how I have tried, for my clients and myself, to improve the exchange between theory and practice.

I will describe a heuristic framework that serves to guide and increase the practical application of theoretical models and their associated methods and materials. The framework seeks to bridge the current gap between theory and practice in a useful, common sense manner. Metaphorically, I view the framework as a toolbox which organizes and stores the most useful career interventions. The framework also provides a means by which practice can systematically inform and improve theory. If theory is practice-at-a-distance, then the framework tries to shorten the distance.

How the Framework Emerged

My practice has always informed my understanding of existing theory. My first interest in theory came from desperation. When I was completing my training as a school psychologist, the director of the university's counseling center offered me a position as a counselor. In reporting to work for the first time, I entered the counseling center behind a student who asked the secretary for an appointment to discuss his career. The director joined us in the foyer, said hello to the student, and then said to me "here is your first appointment." As a school psychologist, I knew nothing about

career intervention. The director quickly taught me how to do trait-and-factor guidance. He was a past-master of the model and methods who I sought to emulate. Half of the time I seemed to succeed. In these instances, my clients were happy and referred their friends to me. However, half the time I failed. Thus, I strove to improve and I did what Holland always suggests, I read a book. The book was Vocational Psychology written by John Crites (1969). The book taught me about the content and process of vocational development and instructed me in the effort to develop clients' career choice readiness by helping them to learn and use attitudes and competencies for planning, exploring, and deciding. These methods helped with clients who had previously remained undecided or unrealistic after completing trait-and-factor guidance with me. My work improved. Now I was useful to two-thirds of my clients, or even three-fourths in a good week. Nevertheless, I was still frustrated. I wondered why my attempts to develop career choice readiness worked so well with some clients yet were ineffective with other clients. How could I help clients who were indecisive, not just undecided, prepare to decide?

In my search for an answer, I looked to psychodynamic theory. Ed Watkins (1984) and David Blustein and his associates (1989) taught me about the psychodynamics of career development and the importance of identity and life scripts. The work of Audrey Collin and Richard Young (1986) and David Jepsen (1992) on action theory, hermeneutics, and the narrative paradigm taught me how individuals fashion their

identities and write their scripts. Again, my work improved. It got even better when I learned about cultural embeddedness, contextual affordances, and null environments from Nancy Betz, Arnold Spokane (1991), and Fred Vondracek (1990).

So, that was my journey: from objective vocational guidance to developmental career education, to subjective career counseling, to enabling a client to cope with the opportunity structure and cultural barriers. In the end, I finally understood what Mary Sue Richardson meant when she told me the shocking news that she no longer did career counseling. Each of her clients receives brief therapy, that includes attention to career concerns.

As we all know, yesterday's solutions become tomorrow's problems. I was theory-rich and action-poor. In the language of academia, I was all fact up. How could I turn my empirical knowledge and interpretive understanding loose in a consulting room. I figured out that my infatuation with each new theory that I learned had, in succession, trapped me in the standpoint provided by a singular perspective.

Eventually, I returned to what Mary Sue Richardson had said about brief therapy. Brief therapy requires that the counselor adopt multiple perspectives from which to view the client's career concerns and respond with a technical eclecticism that matches client needs with fitting interventions. In other words, I sought to learn to use theories and their associated techniques as they were meant to be

used. Each theory addresses a circumscribed problem, trying to apply it outside of its range of convenience frustrates both the client and the counselor.

To orchestrate the theories and techniques in a manner that eases the theory-practice exchange, I designed a model for career services. The framework makes me more systematic in applying technical eclecticism as well as allows me to understand how each client whom I counsel teaches me something about theory and teaches my theories something about practice. The framework forces me to consider each client from the multiple perspectives of the object, the subject, the context, and their mutual interaction. It even helps me navigate the troubled waters of the scientist-practitioner stream in professional psychology.

A Framework for Career Services

Theory must advance practice. To move theory out of the academy and into the consulting room for myself, I use a framework for career services. In simple terms, the framework adapts Wagner's (1971) Theory of Structural Analysis of Personality. Wagner constructed Structural Analysis as a practical means to relate psychodynamic personality theory to the clinical use of measures such as the WAIS, MMPI, CPI, Rorschach, TAT, and Bender-Gestalt.

Figure 1 shows a schemata of Wagner's Theory of Structural Analysis. Developmentally, the facade self emerges first, in response to the environment, as a means of adapting to social demands. The

introspective self develops later when "the individual takes cognizance of his [or her] own functioning, achieves a sense of identity and formulates a subjective set of ideals, goals, and self-appraisals" (Wagner, 1971). In the structural model, drives press on the facade and introspective selves.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

The facade and introspective units of structural analysis correspond to the objective and subjective perspectives. The facade is rational, analytic, and empirical. In contrast to the facade's logical functioning, the introspective self is psychological. It is the domain of complex purposes, consciousness, and agency. Counselors operationally define the facade with <u>scores</u> from objective measures such as interest inventories and understand the introspective self with <u>stories</u> from projective techniques or biographical narratives. Whereas the facade is logical and the introspective self is psychological, the context represents sociological functioning. Before, the individual was the community. Individuals are always situated. They act and feel relative to the situations in which they find themselves. The arrows in the schemata refer to process dimensions such as intrapersonal "self-talk" and interpersonal reciprocal interactions.

This schemata, translated into the language of the vocational realm, organizes the multiple perspectives from which the practitioner must view a career client and helps the counselor to assess where, in the welter of complex stimuli presented by the client, the most useful intervention might be aimed.

Figure 2 shows the simple translation of the schemata into the language of worklife. The environment is portrayed as life roles, and can be discussed in the language of Super's life-career rainbow model and construct of role salience. The facade is a vocational self which can be operationally defined as RIASEC adjustive orientations and behavioral repertoires. Viewing traits as unitary adaptive mechanisms also locates them in the facade self. The introspective self can be understood using Hughes' (1958) construct of subjective career and linguistically explained and operationally defined with variables such as Super's (1963) "self-concept," Adler's "life-style" (Watkins, 1984), and Cochran's (1991) "narrative knowledge." Drives have been largely ignored in vocational theory with exception of Bordin's (1990) important work and measures such as the Vocational Apperception Test and card sorts.

Insert Figure 2 About Here

The process dimensions can be comprehended using Krumboltz's (1979) social learning theory. For example, the interaction between

the vocational self and environment lends itself to stimulus-response language and to Bandura's (1978) ideas about reciprocal determinism. The self-reflective structure called career engages in self-observation generalizations and can be operationally known with Crites' (1978) Career Maturity Inventory, Krumboltz's Career Beliefs Inventory (1988), and Holland's (1980) Vocational Identity Scale.

Application of the Model

In performing an in-take interview with a new client, I use the framework for career services to understand how to best help the client. In effect, I seek to determine whether the client is ready to translate a self-concept or vocational identity into occupational possibilities or needs to articulate and understand her or his life themes and central projects. I typically do this by administering the Holland's (1980) Vocational Identity Scale to assess whether the client is ready for vocational guidance or career counseling. This major branching decision dictates whether, in conceptualizing the client's career concerns, I will apply objective models such as trait-and-factor schema, Holland's (1985) RIASEC theory, and the Minnesota theory of work adjustment (Lofquist & Dawis, 1991) or subjective models such as Super's (1954) thematic-extrapolation model, Cochran's (1991) narrative paradigm, and personal construct theory (Neimeyer, 1988).

After the primary branching decision, a secondary branching decision is made. If the primary decision is to focus on the

subjective career, then the counselor must choose whether to start by examining and revising life themes or considering responses to vocational development tasks. If the decision is to focus on the objective career, then the counselor must choose whether to start by discussing occupational possibilities or overseeing a job search.

Having chosen the focus of intervention and the most pertinent theoretical model leads the counselor to almost automatically select particular intervention strategies from among the group of techniques and methods that populate the domain being addressed.

Five Career Services

I have placed five distinct career services in the appropriate section of the framework for career services as portrayed in Figure 3. The framework reveals the coherence among the services. The services are defined as occupational placement, vocational guidance, career counseling and education, personal therapy, and position coaching.

Insert Figure 3 About Here

Placement. The placement service corresponds to the Environment (i.e., roles of work, friendship, and love) section of the model. Occupational placement assists individuals who have chosen an occupational field to secure a position in that occupation. It helps clients to negotiate the social opportunity structure by gathering information, writing resumes, networking, searching for jobs, and

preparing for interviews. This service emphasizes social skills training. Counseling psychologists who provide placement services use social learning theory as articulated by Krumboltz (1979) to reduce job-search anxiety, increase assertiveness, counter mistaken beliefs, coax exploratory behavior, increase social skills, and refine self-presentation behavior. Placement works best with clients who are ready to implement a choice, that is, those who have committed themselves to a field and seek a place in it for themselves. However, placement services do not work as well for clients who have no destination in mind. They need a guide to specify a choice.

Guidance. The guidance service corresponds to the Vocational Self. Vocational guidance assists individuals who are undecided to articulate their behavioral repertoire and then translate it into vocational choices. It helps clients to perceive more options and make choices by applying Parson's (1909) venerable triad of clarifying interests and abilities, exploring congruent occupational fields and levels, and specifying suitable vocational choices. This service emphasizes guidance techniques.

Counseling psychologists who provide vocational guidance use the trait-and-factor theory as articulated by Parsons (1909), Williamson and Darley (1937), Holland (1985) and others to interpret interest inventories and ability tests, provide educational and vocational information, encourage exploration, and suggest matching choices. Guidance, because it essentially translates self-concepts into

occupational titles, works best with individuals who possess clear and stable vocational identities. Those people who cannot confidently and coherently answer the questions of "who am I?' and "what do I want?" are not ready to make matching choices. They need a counselor to help them crystallize a vocational identity and envision a subjective career.

Counseling. The counseling service corresponds to the Career Self. Career counseling facilitates self-reflection and cognitive restructuring in clients who need to mature and deepen their personalities. It helps clients to elaborate their self-concepts by introspection and discussion of their subjective careers (Hughes, 1958). Counseling psychologists who provide the counseling service use self-reflection models developed by ego psychologists, person-centered counselors, cognitive therapists, and others to conceptualize self and clarify choices through meaning-making activities like values clarification, identity-articulation exercises, and life script analysis. Counseling works best with clients who want to learn more about their subjective views about life, develop their personal and vocational identities, or crystallize occupational field and ability level preferences. However, counseling does not work as well for clients who need to implement this self-knowledge. They need education.

Education. The education service corresponds to the arrows between the Vocational and Career Selves. Career education assists

individuals who encounter difficulties in enacting their subjective career intentions (Career Self) through their objective vocational behavior (Vocational Self). It these helps clients to develop self-management attitudes such as foresight and autonomy as well as competencies such as planning and decision making. It develops their readiness to cope with vocational development tasks. Counseling psychologists who provide the career education service use deliberate psychological education (Mosher & Sprinthall, 1971) and developmental counseling (Blocher, 1974; Ivey, 1986) models to orient individuals to developmental tasks and foster coping attitudes and competencies that address these tasks. Career education works best with clients who want to learn to better manage their motivation and implement their self-concepts. However, education does not work as well for clients who experience motivational problems. They need therapy.

Therapy. The therapy service corresponds to the Drives section of the model. Personal therapy assists individuals who have trouble developing a clear and stable vocational identity to examine what they need to feel secure (e.g., Phillips & Bruch, 1988). It focuses on the drama of recurring relationships to help clients examine personal motives, identify a central problem, and modify distorted motives. Counseling psychologists who provide brief therapy seek to integrate personal and career counseling models (Blustein, 1987; Subich, 1993) and use the working alliance (Bordin, 1979) to modify personality structure. Therapy works best with clients whose excessive

indecisiveness, anxiety, and conflicts thwart their efforts to form a personally meaningful vocational identity. However, brief therapy does not work as well for clients who need extensive treatment to deal with fundamental psychopathology.

Coaching. The coaching service corresponds to the arrows between the Vocational Self and Environmental Roles. Position coaching assists individuals who encounter problems in adjusting to occupational positions to learn better adaptive mechanisms. It helps clients to cope with organizational culture, position requirements, and coworkers by mentoring, rehearsing, and training. Counseling psychologists who provide career coaching use systems theory and organizational development theory as articulated by Dawis and others to mentor individuals. Coaching works best with clients at the extremes of adjustment, such as individuals who need help entering the world of work through life-skills training (e.g., Adkins, 1970) or progressing at a faster rate through mentoring about managing their careers (Carden, 1990). It also assists individuals to resolve conflicts between work and family (Savickas, 1991). Needless to say, everyone can use a coach now and again.

Conclusion

The model for career services seek to ease the exchange between career theory and practice by providing a single, unified schema that counselors can use to assess client career concerns, identify the career theory that best comprehends those concerns, and select

interventions strategies that seem best suited to resolve those concerns.

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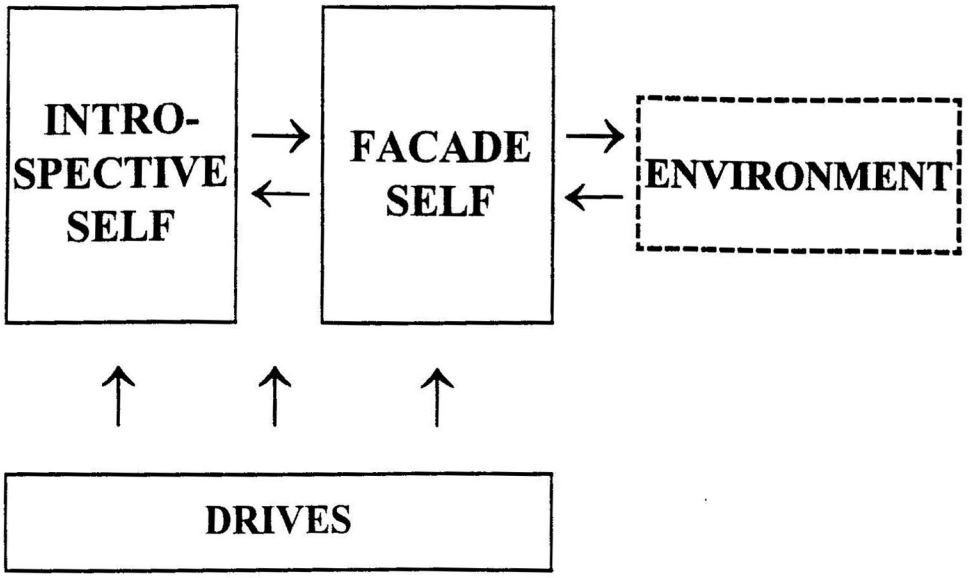

FIGURE 1

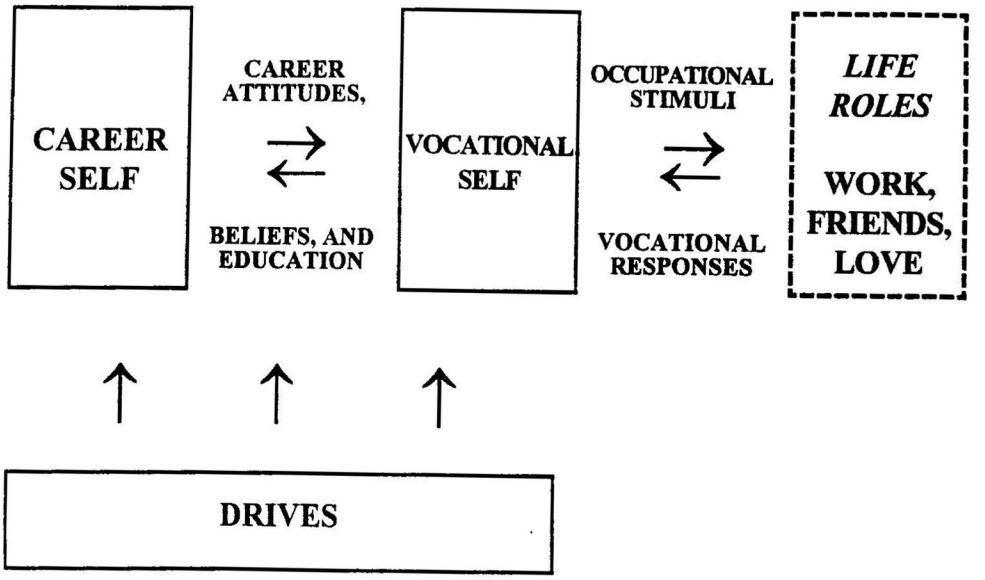

FIGURE 2

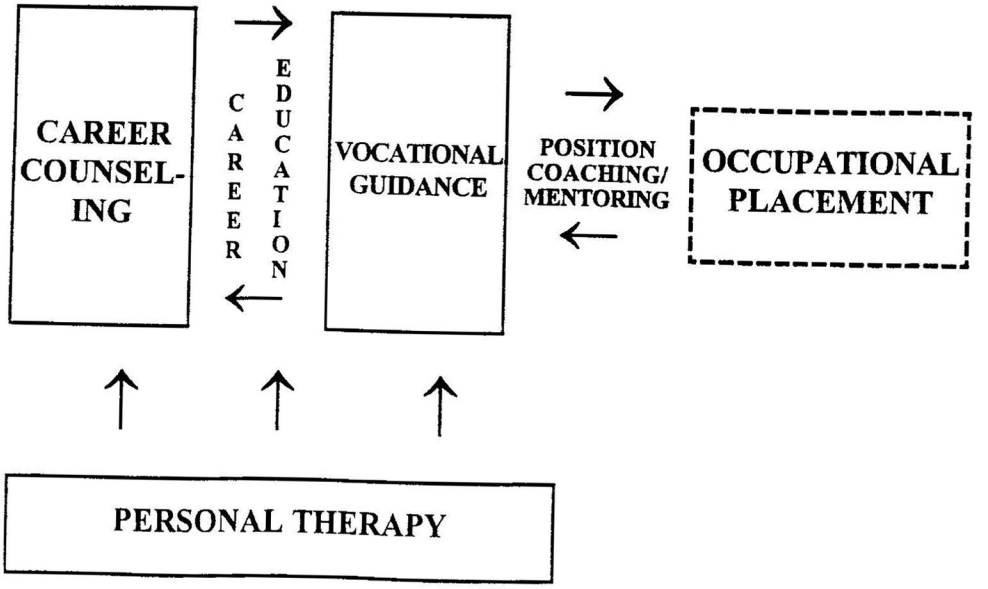

FIGURE 3