Career Time Perspective: Turning a Model into an Intervention

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Abstract

This symposium deals with four research programs that have used basic and applied research to investigate critical variables in career development and then devised counseling interventions based on this research. The present paper describes the definition, measurement, and modification of temporal-experience dimensions which influence career development. The paper begins with an explanation of the rationale for investigating relations between temporal experience and career development, then moves to a precis of the research program, and concludes by describing the resultant temporal-experience interventions that foster career development.

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Rationale

It is easy to overlook the fact that career planning requires individuals to know that they have careers. Everyone has a career but not everyone knows that they do. Hughes (1958, p. 63) explained this paradox when he distinguished between objective and subjective careers. An objective career denotes the series of positions that an individual occupies during her or his life. Knowingly or not, each individual has an objective career. Moreover, external observers can watch an objective career unfold. In contrast, a subjective career denotes self-conscious thoughts about the vocational past, present, and future. Some individuals may not have such career thoughts. Moreover, external observers cannot easily determine whether an individual engages in career mentation. Those people who do not think about their vocational past, present, and future demonstrate an objective career yet they do not construct a subjective career.

A subjective career emerges from a temporal experience characterized by an awareness of the connection among the past, present, and future and an inclination to delay present gratification for future rewards. The occupational culture of the middle class in the United States strongly values a future orientation. In fact, the middle class embraces future orientation as the mainstay of mental health. Consequently, individuals who have assimilated middle class values worry about the future and, in response, start to construe their subjective careers. They often seek to structure the future with occupational plans in order to reduce their anxiety about the future and

to elaborate their subjective careers. Career interventions that increase self-efficacy, decisional skill, and world-of-work information reduce career anxiety and empower clients to chart their subjective careers.

Not everyone orients themselves to the future. In fact, many people orient themselves to the present because of their life situation, socioeconomic status, socialization, or culture. Present-oriented individuals often concentrate on surviving or enjoying the present. Being present-oriented, they concentrate on today and maybe next week, but not next year. They lack interest in planning and preparing for the future. The future is now. Consequently, they do not seek or appreciate traditional career interventions. After offering career planning services to presented-oriented clients, counselors often complain that these clients arrived late, did not show for appointments, or kept appearing unexpectedly. Counselors also seem frustrated when counseling present-oriented clients who seem apathetic or demand a job right now. As a result of personal preference, social injustice, or cultural conditioning, clients from special populations may lack the sense of subjective career with which to monitor and manage their vocational past, present, and future.

To help people form a subjective career that allows them to understand and adapt to the occupational culture of the United States, researchers need to study how subjective careers are constructed and elaborated. Although Super clearly identified time perspective as a prerequisite for career maturity and presumably a sense of subjective carer, counselors have insufficiently attended to time perspective. In examining the literature about time, one can see why. Similar concepts have different names and concepts with the same name have different operational definitions. To

examine how subjective careers originate and develop, my colleagues and I have been studying the personal experience of time as it relates to career development. The goal of this research program, now in its third phase, is to devise and test temporal-experience interventions that help present-oriented clients to form and elaborate their subjective careers.

Career Time Perspective Research

During the first phase of the research program, we surveyed literature in psychology, sociology, and philosophy that dealt with the personal experience of time. We found great diversity and inconsistency in the linguistic and operational definitions that researchers used to identify and investigate temporal-experience variables. To deal with this conceptual jumble, we decided to ignore the linguistic labels given to the variables. Then, we proceeded to collect and compare the operational definitions used by researchers. Next, we organized the research findings corresponding to different operational definitions and then factor analyzed the measures themselves (Hellwig, 1982; Lopez-Baez, 1980; Madison, 1983; Silling, 1981). This initial work produced a conceptual model that linguistically explicated and operationally defined temporal experience (Ringle & Savickas, 1983; Savickas, 1986).

The second phase of the research program examined how the model of temporal experience pertained to the career domain. We organized the small amount of literature that we could find (most of it from the achievement motivation research); conducted field studies to observe how the variables in the temporal-experience model related to career decision making (Savickas, Silling, & Schwartz, 1984) and to motivation (Wolf & Savickas, 1985); and reviewed the results of earlier studies which had examined the relation of

time perspective to career maturity (Lopez-Baez, 1980), occupational plans (Tout, 1980), work values (Waechter, 1980), and planning during the maintenance stage (Collins, 1981; Feinburg, 1984), These studies suggested that different patterns of temporal experience associated with variations in rate and degree of vocational development. Given the dense network of associations between temporal experience and vocational development, we concluded that temporal experience conditions vocational development processes. Accordingly, we formed hypotheses about the influence of temporal experience on the subjective experience of career.

Now, in the third phase of the research program, we are experimentally testing these hypotheses and investigating how existing counseling interventions affect temporal experience (Anuszkiewicz, 1983; Savickas, 1990a). Moreover, we are designing and testing new interventions based on the temporal-experience model (Savickas, 1991a and 1991b). The initial results indicate that temporal experience is modifiable. Also, constructive-developmental methods that help clients make meaning seem to be particularly effective in enhancing the subjective experience of time and career.

Turning a Model into an Intervention

The model of temporal experience being developed by this research program has implications for counseling practice. The model and its practice implications are briefly explained in this section of the paper.

For the purposes of career intervention, the model of temporal experience proposes that learning about time transverses a course from conceptualizing time zones (time perspective), to populating time zones with events (temporal differentiation), and connecting these events so that they seem to flow continuously across time zones (temporal integration). The

following three sections present the three dimensions of perspective, differentiation, and integration following their postulated order of development. Each section defines a dimension and explains how that dimension relates to subjective career, describes how to measure the dimension, and discusses micro-interventions that affect that dimension.

Time Perspective

Definition and Relation to Subjective Career

Time perspective denotes view of and orientation to time. View of time refers to the images, analogies, and metaphors that individuals use to comprehend time. In the occupational culture, view of time or time imagery relates to achievement motivation. For example, Knapp and Garbutt (1958, p. 432) concluded from their research that "individuals of high achievement motivation possess a distinctive attitude toward time reflected in their preference for time metaphors involving precipitant haste."

Temporal orientation refers to which time zone has primary relevance for contemporary decision making. Temporal orientation is a fundamental value in all societies (Kluckhohn & Stodtbeck, 1961). It can be used to characterize a culture because cultures differ in the value they ascribe to the past, present, and future. For example, the occupational culture in the United States considers future orientation as the prime precursor of mental health and career achievement. A future orientation enables one to delay gratification and work for tomorrow. A future orientation increases anxiety and, in turn, commitment to the work role because work itself grows out of anxiety about survival in the future (Savickas, 1990b). Individuals who orient themselves to the past or to the present encounter predictable problems

in adapting to and coping with the occupational culture. For example, a present orientation disposes individuals to impulsive behavior whereas a future orientation sustains the will to delay gratification (Klineberg, 1968).

Assessment

To thoroughly assess view of time, counselors may use a semi-structured interview devised by Dapkus (1986). To quickly assess view of time, career counselors may ask clients to complete the following sentence: "Time is like _____." Individuals may respond with analogies such as time is like money, a race, a frozen rope, or an old African tree. Counselors can explore the analogies by examining the images. They can learn if the client's view makes time seem ascending, fast, slow, running out, and so on. The counselor may then consider whether the analogy has movement and direction. In the occupational culture, metaphors that express directional movement relate to job satisfaction and success. Individuals who exhibit Type A behavior often possess a view of time that reflects time harassment or "hurry sickness".

Counselors may assess temporal orientation with Cottle and Pleck's (1969) lines test which presents a horizontal line to individuals and asks them to view it as their lifeline. The left end of the line is labeled "B" for birth and the right end is labeled "D" for death. Individuals are instructed to draw two vertical lines that divide the line into three segments: the first segment represents their conception of the amount of time in their past, the second their present, and the third their future. The largest segment is interpreted as the time zone which they are oriented toward. The assessment may then be turned into an intervention using procedures described by Olesky-Ojikutu (1986). Cottle's (1976) circles test

may be used in a similar way. Whitbourne and Dannefer (1986) have adapted the "life graph" techniques for assessing past and present orientation.

Intervention

Counselors who wish to condition clients to view time as directional movement and to orient clients to the future will find many effective interventions in futures curricula (Toffler, 1974). Tips about counseling techniques relative to present versus future time orientation are provided by Langer and Zwerling (1980).

Temporal Differentiation

Definition and Relation to Subjective Career

A future-oriented time perspective makes the future seem important and thus increases anxiety. Populating the future with general events reduces this anxiety because it allows individuals to foresee their personal futures. Temporal differentiation denotes the density and extension of events that populate a time zone. Density refers to the number of events. The more events that populate a time zone, the more that time zone seems real to an individual. Extension refers to the time span between the first and last events in a time zone. Future extension enables foresight whereas past extension enables hindsight (an important ingredient in self-knowledge).

An individual who densely populates the past and the future with events that extend far toward both horizons has a schema ready for career planning. A differentiated future provides a meaningful context for setting personal goals. A differentiated past contributes self-knowledge about one's abilities, interests, and values. A differentiated present provides awareness of choices and opportunities.

Assessment

Assessing temporal differentiation can be informal. For example, counselors may ask students to list the important events that they expect to occur during the school year. Students who write more events and who anticipate events farther into the future can be expected to achieve higher grades and experience more satisfaction with school. To more formally assess density, counselors may count the number of responses that an individual gives to two questions: "Who will you be?" and "What will you do?" (Kastenbaum 1961). To assess extension, counselors may determine the difference between actual age and the most distant event written in response to the Open Events Test (Wallace, 1956). Stein, Sarbin, and Kulik (1968) devised, and Tolor, Brannigan, and Murphy (1970) revised, a more structured measure of temporal extension called the Future Events Test (FET).

Intervention

Anticipatory guidance may be the preferred way to increase temporal differentiation. Just naming anticipated events helps people to adapt. Labels for experience reduce anxiety. Anxiety is greatest when we know something is going to happen but we have no idea what will happen. Anticipating events and then modeling the future using these events enables an individual to envision possible selves embedded in that future. Anticipatory guidance about their own lives is an excellent career development intervention for adolescents and adults because it enhances their adaptability. People who can predict the general form their lives will take can adapt better or, as Super (1957) pointed out, they can work to defeat the predictions that they dislike.

Anticipatory guidance for career development may take the form of discussing life stages. Helping people learn the course of a typical life enables them to think about the progress of their own lives. Media presentations make good discussion stimuli for this type of career intervention. Many popular movies deal with life stages. I have used excerpts from movies such as Saturday Night Fever, Down to the Sea in Ships, and Peggy Sue Got Married. Art and music also provide appropriate stimuli. For example, Thomas Cole's paintings that deal with time's passing and it's continuity (e.g., "Voyage of Life" series) prompt discussion about life stages as does Grieg's "Lyric Pieces", a musical diary of his life. A videotape that pictures Marcel Marceau's mime of Shakespeare's seven ages of human beings similarly directs discussion to life stages.

Rather than using media excerpts to stimulate guided discussion about life stages, counselors may use resources that directly teach about life stages. For example, an animated movie called "Everybody Rides the Carousel" teaches Erikson's model of the life cycle. Reading and reflecting upon Sheehy's (1976) Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life also facilitates future differentiation.

Teaching about career stages, as opposed to life stages, is also effective. The Adult Career Concerns Inventory (Super, Thompson, & Lindeman, 1988) provides a superb lesson plan for teaching individuals or groups about careers and the developmental tasks which they may encounter in the near and far future.

Career counseling involves helping people create, articulate, and enact their dreams. Once an individual envisions the future in general, she or he can dream of the personal future. Thus, a powerful intervention is to help

people daydream about their futures. As noted by a perfume commercial, dreams are where we design our lives. Research suggests that occupational daydreams may be the best predictor of what people will do years later (Touchton & Magoon, 1977). Note that the first section of Holland's Self-Directed Search deals with occupational daydreams. Techniques like guided imagery (Skovholt & Hoenninger, 1974; Skovholt, Morgan, & Negron-Cunningham, 1989) and future autobiographies (Maw, 1982) in which people imagine themselves in the future systematically use the power of dreams. Given these initial dreams as scripts, counselor can work to help clients further differentiate their dreams by making them denser and extending them farther. Counselors may also identify the goals in these daydreams and then help clients shape their aspirations into more achievable, believable, and concrete goals.

Temporal Integration

Definition and Relation to Subjective Career

Perspective makes the future important, differentiation enhances goal setting, and integration enables planning. Temporal integration denotes the sense of connectedness among events across time zones. Integration begets an optimism that goals can be achieved when an individual uses the continuity of general events as a basis for constructing personal pathways for goal attainment and begins to experience and shape the future by acting in the present to implement the plans. Thus, temporal integration includes continuity among the past, present, and future as well as optimism about the achievability of goals. Continuity is a cognitive scheme that sustains

planning skill and optimism is conative disposition that sustains planful attitudes.

Continuity refers to awareness of the uninterrupted and successive flow of events extending across time zones. Continuity among then, now, and when provides the cognitive schema for realistic planning. As long as a person construes time as discontinuous, each experience is new and unique. Discontinuity reduces predictability and makes planning illusive. When people construe time as an unbroken thread, they can become aware of enduring themes and patterns in life, clarify and stabilize their identities, and choose activities that require perseverance.

Optimism refers to the inclination to anticipate that goals are achievable through personal effort. In contrast, hope implies that goals are achievable with the assistance of other people or luck. Optimism increases when individuals attach specific plans to personal goals. The best plans form from past accomplishments and explicitly connect present behavior to future outcomes. Optimism that present behavior can be organized to achieve future goals moves enactment of plans.

Assessment

Sense of continuity can be measured with the 20-item Long-Term Personal Direction Scale (Wessman, 1973) or the open questions in the self-confrontation method (Hermans, Fiddelaers, deGroot, & Nauta, 1990). Optimism can be measured with the 8-item Achievability of Future Goals Scale (Heimberg, 1961), the 20-item Hopelessness Scale (Beck, Weissman, Lester, & Trexler, 1974), the 12-item Hope Scale (Snyder, Harris, Anderson, Gibb, Yoshinobu, Langelle, Harney, Holleran, & Irving, 1989), or the 17-item Hopelessness Scale for Children (Kazdin, Rodgers, & Colbus, 1986).

Intervention

Interventions to increase temporal integration deal with planning attitudes and competencies. These interventions help clients map their futures, plan routes to get there, and commit themselves to the journey. Plans bridge the gap between knowledge and action (Miller, Galanter, & Pribram, 1960, p. 10). People make plans to reach some inner image of what they imagine the future to be like. Shostrom's (1968, p. 357) advice to therapists holds equally well for career counselors: "The therapist must attempt, in effect, to bring the patient to a time competent orientation which ties him [or her] to the present, with past memories serving as significant learning experiences and future goals tied to here-and-now activity." Hopkins (1979) described a brief exercise that shows clients how to overlap the present and the future time zones.

> I list five things that I need to do by Monday (these tend to be urgent) and then five things that I want to do during my lifetime (these tend to be important). My next task is to combine the lists into one imperative list of things both important and urgent. I can get at a big important thing by making a small part of it urgent (p. 2).

Tiedeman's paradigm of purposeful action lends itself well to designing interventions that create temporal integration and form vocational plans. Tiedeman defined career as the imposition of direction into vocational behavior. Tiedeman and Field (1965) suggested that counselors help clients compare and contrast their currently experienced situation to their currently desired situation. Then, based on the differences between the two, devise a plan to move toward where they would like to be. Acting contingently on plans makes for purposeful action directed toward goal attainment.

Counselors with an interest in life planning (in contrast to vocational guidance) typically use interventions that enhance temporal integration. For example, Hansen's (1989) Integrative Life Planning Workshop includes counseling materials and methods that address emerging life patterns and enhance temporal integration. Also, Brown's (1988) Life Planning Workshop for High School Students includes several microinterventions that create and reinforce temporal integration. Simulations such as "When I Grow Up I'm Hoping to be Married (Staff, 1972) and the "Life Career Game" (Boocock, 1967) also enhance temporal integration.

An assessment method used to examine the quality of occupational plans in achievement motivation research may be modified into a career intervention. First, have clients write a description of a career goal. Second, help them make a plan to attain that career goal by writing 15 steps (one per page) that move them from today to goal attainment. Then, modify and develop the plan by making the steps contingent, revising the details so they are specific and comprehensive, and building in alternatives. Additional ideas for interventions to facilitate temporal integration appear in the personality psychology literature (e.g., Emmons's 1986 work on personal strivings and Frese, Stewart, and Hannover's 1987 work on planfulness and action styles).

Conclusion

In a research program addressing the relationships between temporal experience, we have (1) identified variables pertinent to career development, (2) empirically investigated how these variables related to each other and to career development, and (3) combined the key variables into a model of temporal experience. Currently, we are continuing the research program by investigating the efficacy and effiency of a temporal-experience intervention

(Savickas, 1991a) for modifying the personal experience of time and career among clients who represent diverse populations and who differ in degree of career development. This intervention is designed to help clients construct and articulate their subjective careers by making the future seem more important, causing the future to seem real, and creating optimism that goals can be attained.

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