

Problems of Young People in Beginning Their Careers

Mark L. Savickas

Behavioral Sciences Department

Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine

Rootstown, Ohio 44272-0095

U.S.A.

Presented at meeting of the
International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance

Budapest, Hungary

October 3-6, 1993.

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Individuals with similar levels of academic success in school vary in the success that they achieve on the job. Cognitive psychologists contend that the differences in job success and satisfaction are only partially explained by ability and motivation (Wagner & Sternberg, 1986). The remaining variability may be attributed to individual differences in tacit knowledge. New workers with practical intelligence about managing their careers and dealing with coworkers fare much better at stabilizing in and succeeding on the job.

Knowing the employer's social expectations for employees and preferred methods for meeting these expectations allows new workers to stabilize and advance in their jobs. Programmatic research on the developmental tasks and coping responses involved in stabilizing in a new job has produced information about the formal requirements of adapting to a new job. The newest studies in this program of research examine the tacit knowledge of individuals who have mastered the tasks involved in succeeding at a new job.

The present paper describes six tasks involved in job stabilization and the tasks' developmental progression: organizational fusion, position performance, coworker relations, work habits and attitudes, advancement, and career planning. The tacit knowledge that allows new workers to master these tasks will then be explained and a practical and personal means of transmitting this knowledge to young people at the beginning of

their occupational careers will be discussed.

Use of Instructive Accounts In Helping Newcomers at Work

The postmodern turn in philosophy of science has strongly criticized logical positivism's insistence on abstracting knowledge from local situations so as to produce universally valid generalizations (Richardson, in press; Savickas, in press a). This insistence has fostered an over-reliance on using the scientific method to produce decontextualized, abstract principles that can be difficult for applied scientists to use in problem solving. The turn from objectivism to perspectivism has expanded what counts as science. We are now ready to admit that particularization can produce as valid and rigorous truth as generalization and that the knowledge of what works in local situations can be as important as abstract principles that pertain universally. The postmodern turn has opened a new line of inquiry for vocational psychology, namely research to develop instructive accounts of what works in which situations (Savickas, in press b).

The new emphasis on producing knowledge about the ordinary activities of everyday life has been quite heuristic for research on career development. We have been able to examine coping with the tasks of career development using approaches that examine "critical incidents," "meaningful events," "practical intelligence," "effective strategies," and "tacit knowledge." These studies produce knowledge that is easily translated into practice because they offer instructive accounts about successful coping that can be used to coach, mentor, and teach youth how to stabilize in a new position. Super and Crites have provided two

complementary frameworks for identifying the topics of instructive accounts we should seek from workers.

Career Tasks Encountered by Young Workers

Super (1963) referred to the life period in which youth begin their occupational lives as the establishment stage of a career. He divided the career establishment stage into the three phases of stabilizing, consolidating, and advancing. Within the stabilizing phase, Crites (1982) described a progression of six developmental tasks. Each task must be mastered if the youth is to retain the position and move to the next task.

The first task is called *organization fusion*. Fusion means that the new worker must successfully adapt to the organizational culture established by the employer. Many new workers encounter "culture shock," or what sometimes is referred to as "surprises" by organizational psychologists (Louis, 1980). Inability to fit into the new culture can lead youth to quickly leave or be asked to leave their employment position. When new workers find their way to fit into the new culture, then they must attend to *position performance*. The employee must meet the normative standard for production that has been established for workers in that position. Failure to do so results in termination of the employment contract, regardless of whether or not the youth fits the culture.

After an initial period of proving that they can participate in the culture and do the job, new workers must concentrate on two demands of everyday worklife. Ordinarily, the new worker must display the ability to form good *relationships with co-workers* and exhibit effective work *habits and attitudes*. During this period,

failure to get along with colleagues is the most frequent reason that workers lose their jobs. The second reason is being an inconsistent producer of work products. Being late, leaving early, not showing up, taking too much time off, not concentrating on tasks, and doing poor quality work may each lead to termination.

Youth who show that they have a good work ethic and that they can "get along," should eventually turn their attention to "getting ahead." This requires attention to *advancement* opportunities within their current organization and charting an organizational path for themselves. In addition, they may be required to look for advancement opportunities in similar organization that may offer better *career paths*.

Helping Youth Master Career Tasks

My students and I have been applying the new science of instructive accounts to understanding how youth at the beginning of their careers master the developmental tasks in the establishment stage based on an empirical integration (Savickas, Passen, & Jarjoura, 1988) of the phases identified by Super (1963) and the tasks identified by Crites' (1982) tasks. The results of one study may be especially pertinent to the theme of this session. Dix (1992) studied the tacit knowledge used by 50 workers to cope with the six tasks identified by Crites (1982). She applied the paradigm of practical intelligence devised by Wagner and Sternberg (1985) to elicit practical knowledge about mastering the critical tasks youth face in stabilizing in the world of work. We are now experimenting with teaching workers at

the beginning of their careers the "tricks of the trade" in mastering early career tasks in order to determine if this "mentoring at a distance" can measurably improve their job satisfaction and success. An outline of what we are teaching youth at the beginning of their careers contains the six developmental tasks along with the most effective coping behaviors we have identified from the instructive accounts of career experts.

A. Organizational Adaptability

1. establish oneself as a team player
2. acquire job knowledge and expertise
3. make quality contact with people
4. learn from the experts
5. focus on the big picture
6. change oneself to fit into the organization
7. do any task to get the job done
8. establish credibility with others

B. Position Performance

1. establish high internal standards
2. set measurable goals
3. seek multiple levels of feedback

C. Work Habits and Attitudes

1. be well organized
2. motivated to work hard
3. be early
4. promote open communications
5. get the job done immediately

6. experience pleasure from work
7. strive to perfect skills

D. Coworker Relations

1. take time to listen
2. respect coworkers as persons
3. Sensitivity to the needs of others
4. ability to get along with others
5. acknowledge the strengths and efforts of others

E. Advancement

1. keep current in your field
2. involvement with other professionals
3. seek new challenges on the job

F. Career Choice and Plans

1. set specific goal for advancement
2. challenged in current field
3. less crystallized career plans
4. strategize to achieve long-term organizational goals
5. change career path

Conclusions

One of the goals of vocational psychology and organizational development is to assist novices who are entering the world of work to negotiate the tasks of establishing themselves in an occupational position and thus help them to avoid predictable crises or problems. One way to do this consists of teaching youth at the beginning of their careers the six critical developmental tasks that condition their job satisfaction and success and then increase their practical intelligence for mastering the six tasks.

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