

**Specific Issues in Career Counselling Theories**

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## 1. Introduction

Career development helps an individual form their work identity wherein its management encompasses a person's lifetime. It is strongly related to human development since individuals gain awareness about their interests and related suitable occupations. It is achieved through intervention such as those provided by counsellors through career guidance and education sessions. In this way, individuals are assessed and given information about careers they wish to pursue. It prepares them by gaining employable skills that are required for the related job task. As such, the active management of one's career is vital since it provides a framework that guides individuals on the path and measures they must take in order to achieve their career ambitions (Brown & Lent, 2004).

The formation of work identities begins at a young age, as students are encouraged to visualize their desired employment when they reach adulthood. It allows the school to motivate students towards their career path by encouraging them to take subjects or extra-curricular activities that would develop the skills necessary for the job. In this way, defining one's career involves assessing one's personal characteristics and personality type, which helps direct individuals to matching employment that suits their inherent traits and interests. It also involves assessing barriers to certain careers such as social and economic factors. More importantly, it also includes the identification of physical and mental abilities wherein an individual is able to determine whether they have the right capacities necessary for the job. As such, this emphasizes the importance of career development to one's life including the career counselling theories that assist human resources and school officials in guiding individuals to suitable and feasible career

choices (Reardon et al., 2008). This paper will review the specific issues related to career counselling theories and examine ways in which career development services can be improved.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Career guidance and counselling

Career guidance and counselling are services that help individuals develop responsibility for their career development. It is a systematic program, which increases an individual's self-knowledge enabling them to take advantage of educational or work opportunities. It also increases their decision-making skills wherein they are able to make informed decisions that would best improve their chosen path. Career guidance supports individuals by facilitating employment placements. They can also assist individuals by improving their interview skills and apply intervention strategies that would increase their employment effectiveness and satisfaction. Counselling is part of career guidance and acts as a form of intervention strategy. It is based on interpersonal relationships established between counsellor and clients, which allows the counsellor to use psychological methods to improve a client's mental well-being. The modality used is dependent on the counselling objectives, which is assisting clients on career selection and adjustment. In this manner, the vocation chosen should best represent the client's personality strengths and interests (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2011).

This is increasingly important in career guidance especially in assisting clients to decide on their future career options. It involves a careful consideration of the client's personal strengths and interests including providing information about the type of employment opportunities available and subsequent industry trends or obstacles. In this manner, it provides critical

information about the skills requirement for certain job tasks and other related resources that would aid clients in making informed career decisions. More importantly, it provides clients with a better understanding of themselves including their capabilities and capacities. In this way, clients can make effective adjustments that would support their career choices. It involves developing independence and critical thinking as well in order for clients to select jobs and educational opportunities that would contribute to their career development. Through career guidance and counselling, clients are able to learn more about themselves and their innate talents, personalities and interests, which would serve as a foundation for their career choices. Counsellors assist clients in understanding themselves better through psychological assessments that would allow them to have a clear vision with regard to self- knowledge (Patton & McMahon, 2007).

Career guidance and counselling provides an objective assessment of a client's strengths and interests. They provide information and increased awareness of employment opportunities related to their skills, strengths and interests. Moreover, it allows clients to explore desired vocations wherein they could try through internships if the job is suitable for them. Significantly, these intervention strategies help highlight client's skills wherein they can make decisions that support their career goals. In the simplest terms, it acts as a guiding framework enabling clients to set and achieve career goals and take action towards achieving their chosen career paths. Studies indicate that career guidance and counselling has had a positive impact wherein clients are able to become successful in their respective careers. It contributes to higher levels of employee performance, efficiency and satisfaction as clients feel they have a strong sense of control over their careers. Career guidance and counselling supports individuals in their decision-making skills, enabling them to pursue career paths wherein they feel they have a greater locust

of control. In this way, they make conscious decisions in their life that contributes significantly to career satisfaction (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2011).

## 2.2. John Holland's Typology

John Holland's Typology is one of the most influential works used by counsellors in career guidance and development. It asserts that vocations chosen are an expression of an individual's personality, which predetermines their career choice. This theory is based on personality types wherein Holland has been able to develop a theory of careers. The Holland Occupation Themes or RIASEC classifies individuals to six personality types namely Realistic/Doers, Investigative/Thinkers, Artistic/Creators, Social/Helpers, Enterprising/Persuaders and Conventional/Organizers (Zunker, 2011).

This guides individuals to find their personality type and select the corresponding careers suited to their personality. However, a major criticism against this theory is its assumption that all people in the world fall into six simple categories. It may not be entirely true in real life application since personality types crossover with others. Furthermore, it does not take into account possible personality changes that can occur during one's lifetime (Buchman & Malti, 2012).

Nevertheless, the RIASEC has provided a category scheme that allows counsellors to identify more than seven hundred personality patterns. This theory supports the idea that individuals select careers based on their personality strengths. More importantly, they choose vocations that are suitable to their environment wherein they are surrounded by like-minded people. It takes into account that an individual will thrive based on their interaction with the

environment that is similar to their personality. The environment thus, determines their behaviour, which enables them to use their strong skills and capacities. Moreover, the environment rewards the personality type as it able to meet an individual's expectations and satisfaction requirements (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008).

The theory is flexible enough to incorporate different personality types especially those that cross over with others e.g. Enterprising and Artistic. In this way, the theory supports career development by taking a cognitive approach wherein the skills, interests and personality types are matched to particular employment opportunities. It enables counsellors and clients to conduct problem solving wherein they can be directed towards careers they have the strongest leaning. This is achieved through assessment tools such as Self-Directed Search, Vocational Preference Inventory and the Strong Interest Inventory (Anderson & Vandehey, 2011).

It is important to note that John Holland's Typology has contributed greatly to career development especially in emphasizing on how self-knowledge can contribute to informed career decision-making. However, as this theory was developed in the mid-twentieth century a particular glaring issue is the case of gender bias wherein females are delegated to three main personality types namely artistic, social, and conventional. In this manner, it supports directing females towards gender-specific occupations rather than allowing females to explore their employment possibilities in different career fields. Furthermore, the model and its assessment tools are based on American values such as independence and individualism, which are not traits applicable for different cultures (Evans, 2007). In this way, one of the issues of this theory is its lack of cultural sensitivity especially in matching personality types in today's 21<sup>st</sup> century employee working in a globalized economy. It is important to note that an added issue is its

irrelevancy for internationalization of careers wherein there are various career options and paths other than those specified in the categorical chart (Buchman & Malti, 2012).

### 2.3.Trait-Factor Theory

The Trait-Factor Theory is one of the major career development theories applied by counsellors. It was developed by Frank Parsons and E.G. Williamson wherein distinct traits determine a person's employment potential. Trait is defined as a person's values, personality and abilities. In this manner, the theory asserts that certain jobs have factor requirements that determine whether a person's trait is suitable to be successful in that type of employment. This has led to career, individual and occupational profiles. As such, these profiles allow counsellors to match traits versus job factors enabling decisions made during career development planning. This theory provides a problem-solving component that allows counsellors to assist clients in their career decision-making. It is also important to note that trait and job factors also assumes that the right match will lead to higher employee performance and satisfaction levels (Andersen & Vandehey, 2011).

An example of tools used that applies the Trait-Factor Theory are True Colors, General Aptitude Test Battery and Data-People-Things Interest Test. The advantages of this theory is being able to forecast a probable fit for clients and jobs wherein profiles can be a cross between those identified. This theory identifies four main categories namely Guardian, Idealist, Artisan and Rational. In application, this theory has a practical appeal wherein there are measurable outcomes, rationale and framework for career development. However, there are also issues surrounding the use of this theory especially since it was also developed in the mid-twentieth century. One of the issues again is the gender bias and lack of cultural sensitivity as particular

traits are specifically associated with certain occupational types. It thus marginalizes some works towards certain dominant traits that are based on American values (Patton & McMahon, 2007).

Furthermore, there is a self-reporting bias wherein respondents of assessment tools may not actually report their true traits. As such, they may respond positively on traits expected of them. This is especially applicable for female respondents who are seen to be more affected by their social environment (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008).

Moreover, the practice of matching individuals to their environments assumes that their traits or personalities do not change over time wherein clients may have developed certain skills or traits that make them suitable for other career choices. It does not take into account that people are evolving in the work environment wherein even the labour environment as well does not remain constant (Bassot, 2012).

### 3. Conclusion and Recommendations

The theories analysed in this research relates to career development especially in emphasizing self-knowledge and personality as key determinants for job qualification. They provide practical frameworks that assist career guidance and counselling. In fact, John Holland's Typology and the Trait-Factor Theory act as foundations for the defining career development since it assesses an individual's personality and skill. However, both theories do not address gender bias and cultural insensitivity that are also factors that determine job qualification. More importantly, both are not able to remove respondent bias in the assessment tools requiring counsellors to rely on qualitative approaches to have an objective assessment during career development sessions.

As such, the issues surrounding career counselling theories are also due to its apparent irrelevancy in today's globalized economy wherein industries and labour markets have changed with the internationalization of careers. Many careers are no longer gender specific wherein many job tasks have changed to become flexible based on employee's capabilities and skills. This highlights the need for counsellors to be informed about industry practices and conduct research on employment job tasks and skills requirement. This will allow the career development service to be more comprehensive accounting for gender bias and cultural insensitivity. It will allow counsellors to proper match traits, interests and skills versus job requirements (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008).

In this manner, while both theories provide practical approaches and measurable outcomes they guide individuals in their decision making of chosen career paths. Counsellors however have to conduct due diligence and add other important dimensions before giving career advice. This includes assessing clients through interviews and past experiences wherein clients are evaluated based on their current disposition, which can take into account any personality changes. Moreover, counsellors should provide employment and industry information to clients in order for them to determine for themselves, which career paths they would like to pursue (Andersen & Vandehey, 2011). The over-reliance on psychological assessment tools is also a barrier in properly providing career development services for clients wherein counsellors should take into account the different influencing factors that are unique to clients taking care to avoid generalizations. Counsellors rather must apply a customized approach in providing career guidance and counselling (Evans, 2007).

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