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Career Development Theory

Career development theory studies paths toward improving professional growth, career trajectory and overall job satisfaction. Understanding career development theory can be an important step in determining your core values, strengths, weaknesses and desired path. While there are varying claims in different career development theories, all of these theories acknowledge the importance of cultivating a positive emotional relationship with work and of developing meaningful professional ambitions. In this article, we'll examine career development theory, its multiple manifestations, and how it can provide insight into your personality and your professional growth.

Career development theory is the study of career paths, success, and behavior. It aims to explain why a person might be a good fit for a certain career and provide advice on how to attain a promising trajectory. It also focuses on identifying common career stages when education, guidance and other interventions are necessary.

Career development theories come from four main areas of study:

- Differential psychology
- Personality
- Sociology
- Developmental psychology

Frank Parsons pioneered career development theory with the release of his trait and factor theory in the early 1900s. Since then, the study of career development has produced various theories and captured much public interest. In the following sections, we examine five of the most influential career development theories.

Frank Parsons' Trait and Factor Theory

Trait and Factor Theory entails three actions. First, examine the personality traits of the person whose career is being planned. Second, inventory the character traits of the job. Third, measure the personality traits of the individual against the traits of the job.

The Trait and Factor Theory is used in several aptitude tests, including:

- Interest-Kuder Career Search (KCS)
- Aptitude-Differential Aptitude Tests (DAT)
- General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB)

Holland Theory of Vocational Types

The Holland Theory of Vocational Types focuses on personality types as the main factor in career choice and development. John L. Holland developed his theory on the idea that career choice is based on personality. He believed that a person's work satisfaction is linked to similarities between their personality and job environment.

Holland's theory has six personality types, sometimes call the Holland Codes or Holland Occupational Themes:

- **Realistic (R)**

Also called "Doers," people in this type solve problems by taking action rather than discussing it. Realistic types are interested in work that requires skill and strength. Carpenters, chefs and personal trainers all fit into the realistic personality type.

- **Investigative (I)**

Also called "Thinkers," people in this type like to work with information. Investigative types enjoy working by themselves rather than with a group. Actuaries, lawyers and doctors all fit into the investigative personality type.

- **Artistic (A)**

Also called "Creators," people in this type are creative, inventive and typically more emotionally aware than other Holland Types. Artistic types are independent but enjoy working with other people. Graphic Designers, writers and musicians all fit in the investigative personality type.

- **Social (S)**

Also called “Helpers,” people in this type enjoy teaching or helping others. Social types value working with others and creating relationships. Teachers, counselors and human resource professionals all fit in the social personality type.

- **Enterprising (E)**

Also called “Persuaders,” people in this type enjoy working with people and information. Enterprising types value status and security. Entrepreneurs, stockbrokers and salespeople all fit in the enterprising personality type.

- **Conventional (C)**

Also called “Organizers,” people in this type enjoy rules and regulations. Like enterprising types, they put a value on status and money. However, they have a dislike for unclear or unstructured work. COOs, personal financial planners and economists fit in the conventional personality type.

Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, is the idea that an individual’s motives and behaviors are based on experience. These experiences can break into three main categories:

- A person is influenced by self-efficacy, or what they believe they can achieve.
- A person is influenced by what they see other people achieve and the actions they take.
- A person is influenced by factors around them that they cannot control.

In career development, Social Cognitive Theory helps to explain how a person can set up their career development plan for success. Through a positive view of their own abilities and surrounding themselves with a positive network of mentors, a person has a better chance of achieving their career goals.

The framework for this theory is called Bandura’s Triadic Reciprocal Model of Casualty. This model says a person’s output is based on a mixture of:

- Personal characteristics
- Behaviors and actions they see from other people
- Outside factors

Super's Developmental Self-Concept Theory

Donald Super built his developmental theory on the idea that your view of yourself changes. Time and experience help shape the way a person values their career and the goals they set. This theory defines a "career" as the entire lifetime of a person.

Super broke career development into five stages:

- **Growth**

This stage starts at birth and continues through age 14. A person develops their sense of self and attitude toward work.

- **Exploration**

This stage starts at age 15 and continues through age 25. A person tries out different career paths through classes, hobbies and actual work.

- **Establishment**

This stage starts at age 25 and continues through age 44. A person develops entry-level job skills and develops work experience.

- **Maintenance**

This stage starts at 45 and continues through age 64. A person changes elements of their career to improve their position.

- **Decline**

This stage begins at age 65. A person reduces the amount of work they do and prepares for retirement.

Super believed that people found career satisfaction based on their view of themselves at each of these five stages of development. For example, a person may value a work-life balance more in their maintenance stage than they do in their establishment phase. The career can be the same, but time and experience change how the person perceives their profession.

Roe's Personality Theory

Anne Roe's Personality Theory states that a person chooses their career based on their interaction with their parents. Roe believed that the way a child interacts with their parents would lead them to pursue either person-oriented or non-person-oriented jobs. Person-oriented jobs have a high amount of interaction with other people. Non-person-oriented jobs are more independent.

Roe created several categories of careers that could be person-oriented or non-person-oriented based on the skill level of the job. Roe broke careers into eight categories:

- Service
- Business Contact
- Organization
- Technology
- Outdoor
- Science
- General Culture
- Arts and Entertainment

Each of these categories, Roe stated, has six levels based on how much skill is required for the job:

1. Independent responsibility
2. Less independence
3. Moderate responsibility
4. Training required
5. Special training
6. Follow basic instructions

An individual is then classified into eight categories and six levels based on the interaction they had with their parents as a child.

Career development theory can help you gain a better understanding of yourself and your career. Many people find a combination of several theories enables them to gain better insight. While learning about these theories can help people begin to understand their interest in a career path, a career counselor can more specifically guide you using tools and tests based on these theories, as well as their own professional expertise.

Components of Career Planning

- **Self Assessment**

Trying to find a career without being self aware is like trying to run a race not knowing where the finish line is. How can you know which career path is going to be most satisfying, if you don't even know what you're all about? You can't. That's why self assessment (sometimes referred to as a career assessment) is such an important part of the career planning process. During the self assessment process you'll use tools designed to help you learn more about your interests, values, personality, aptitudes, skill sets, developmental needs, and preferred work environments, so you can make an informed career decision.

- **Career Exploration**

Based on the results of your self assessment, you should now have a list of occupations that appear to be a good match with your values, interests and skill set. Next, you'll want to narrow this list down to about ten occupations. Go through the list and eliminate those careers that you know you're not interested in. For example, even though you'd make a great police officer, and the career is a good match with your values, interests, and skill set, you know you don't want to work in a job that requires you to carry and shoot a gun. In addition to researching individual occupations, you'll also want to research industries that you'd like to work in.

- **Career Identification**

As its name suggests, the career identification component of the career planning process is when you select just one occupation, among the many you've considered. During this step you'll identify the occupation that you're most interested in, as well as a few alternatives to fall back on if your first choice doesn't pan out. Now that you know which occupation you're going to pursue, you'll want to prepare to enter your chosen field. Identify all the requirements (e.g. education, costs, etc.) for entering your chosen career field.

- **Create an Action Plan**

The final step in the career planning process is to create an action plan. The action plan is designed to help you reach your goals. It's like a road map that takes you from choosing a career to finding your first job all the way to achieving your long-term career goals. In your action plan you should identify your short-term and long-term goals, identify education and training requirements for your career, develop a job search strategy, identify potential employers, create a resume, compose cover letters, and prepare for job interviews.