Career Appraisal

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Career Appraisal

Abstract
The increasing specialization of today's more diverse and technologically advanced labor market challenges employees and job seekers alike to continually evaluate their career choices and engage in career appraisal. The development of a comprehensive career plan is essential in understanding one's interests, attributes, abilities, and values necessary to fit into this everchanging vocational environment. Moreover, adults find themselves reconsidering previous career choices as they develop new interests or as the job market shifts. Of all these domains, vocational interests serve as the cornerstone of any career plan. John Holland's theory provides an avenue for classifying vocational interests into six categories (RIASEC): Realistic (working outdoors, building, repairing); Investigative (researching, analyzing, inquiring); Artistic (creating or enjoying art, drama, music, writing); Social (helping, instructing), Enterprising (persuading, selling, managing); and Conventional (accounting, organizing, processing data). Interest inventories such as the Strong Interest Inventory (SII) and the Campbell Interests and Skills Survey (CISS) can help users learn which combination of the RIASEC categories describes their vocational interests. Choosing work environments that align with areas of interest is more likely to increase job satisfaction.

Disciplines
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Anchor 8: Lifestyle

At first glance, this concept seems like a contradiction in terms. People who organize their existences around lifestyle are, in one sense, saying that their careers are less important to them and therefore that they do not have a career anchor. These people belong in a discussion of career anchors, however, because a growing number of people who are highly motivated toward meaningful careers are, at the same time, finding themselves in situations in which their careers must be integrated with their total lifestyles.

This kind of situation has arisen for more and more people because of changing social values around independence; the growing number of women in full careers, which has led to many more dual-career families; the changing attitudes of employers toward giving less job security and more portability in benefits; and the growing number of families who cannot survive economically unless both spouses work. If people must manage their own careers and they have spouses with careers, it is inevitable that more and more people will think about designing their total life situations, not just their work.

An integration of career and lifestyle issues is itself evolving, and people with this kind of orientation want flexibility more than anything else. Unlike the autonomy-anchored person, who also wants flexibility, those with lifestyle anchors are quite willing to work for organizations, do a variety of kinds of work, and accept organizational rules and restrictions provided that the right options are available at the right time. Such options might include traveling or moving only at times when family situations permit, part-time work if life concerns require it, sabbaticals, maternity and maternity leaves, day care options (which are becoming especially relevant for the growing population of dual-career couples and single parents), flexible working hours, work at home during normal working hours, and so on. Lifestyle-anchored people look more for an organizational attitude than a specific program, an attitude that reflects respect for personal and family concerns and makes genuine renegotiation of the psychological contract possible.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

All career occupants should recognize their career anchors in order to make better choices about career moves. If individuals do not know their anchors, they are very vulnerable to being given assignments or promotions that do not fit their self-images at all, leading to unproductive and stressful work situations. By analyzing their own career histories and the reasons for the choices they have made in the past, they can identify what is important to them and use that knowledge in making better career choices.

Most people will find that if they reflect carefully on the decisions they have made that they fit into one of the anchor categories. If more than one anchor seems to fit, the person should examine possible situations that might require a choice and think about what he or she would do if forced to make a choice.

In summary, career anchors are a way of understanding the dynamics of the internal career in adulthood. Career anchors form from experience, and once an individual has developed a self-image around his or her competencies, motives, and values, the anchor then guides and constrains the rest of that person's adult career and life. Career anchors can change if a person encounters dramatically new experiences, but for most people, once they have formed a clear self-image, the tendency is to hold on that image.

—Edgar H. Schein

See also Career as a calling, Career satisfaction, Career success, Work values

Further Readings and References


CAREER APPRAISAL

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In the last decade, researchers have established that career appraisal for the individual is more useful when it goes beyond the six general categories of interests to specific interests. For example, although it is useful to know someone has Realistic interests, knowing concretely whether he or she enjoys military activities or mechanical activities allows for better discrimination. In addition, increased specificity translates to increased ability to determine career fields and educational majors that more closely align with one’s interests as well as those that prove to be less desirable. The SII and CISS mentioned above provide measures of specific vocational interests as well as general interests. Although occupational scales on the SII or the CIS implicitly provide greater specificity, scales such as the Basic Interest Scales on the SII make the process explicit and directly interpretable based on the transparency of those scales.

Traditionally, vocational interest assessment has been the primary tool used to assist clients in making important career choices. However, two additional constructs that have emerged in the past decade are also important contributors. The construct of personality has been shown to be an important variable in helping us understand the unique individual from a more holistic outlook. To date, three empirical reviews have examined the overlap of personality and interests. This evidence shows that both have at least three clear general links: (1) People who are more open to new experiences tend to have more artistic and investigative interests, (2) extraverts tend to have more social and enterprising interests, and (3) people who are more agreeable tend to have more social interests. Vocational counselors who incorporate this knowledge will be in a better position to view their clients more broadly than simply through their vocational interests. For example, clients who are more open to novel and new experiences may be more satisfied with intellectual or creative work environments. Interestingly, personality and interests may be genetically linked; studies show that about 50 percent of their stable variance is genetic.

Just as more rather than less information is better with vocational interests, it seems that more specific information about personality beyond general traits is useful in helping better differentiate vocational interests within a particular general interest. For example, people who are entranced with evocative sights and sounds are more likely to be engaged in artistic interests. In short, researchers are beginning to quilt a fabric of particular areas that more aptly define a unique individual with particular tendencies. The more a vocational professional can assist the client to integrate both aspects of his or her personality and interests, the more equipped that individual will be to make an informed vocational choice.

Unfortunately, it is not enough to consider only the unique aspects of clients’ personalities and interests. Rather, understanding these overlapping areas serves as the springboard for placement in engaging careers, but alone, this may not ensure retention. The development of new skills and the refinement of current skills are critical to career persistence. With the advance of social cognitive career theory, vocational self-efficacy has emerged as the third construct in the three-legged stool of career appraisal. Knowledge about personality and interests is helpful in choosing a career or pursuing an area of specialization that is a good fit. However, it may be a person’s self-efficacy that will help ensure that a person will follow through on his or her choices and ultimately succeed at the endeavor.

Understanding the triangular structure of the “P” or person, in person-environment (P-E) fit can help vocational counselors directly address which of the three legs of career appraisal is causing the stool to waiver. If a client demonstrates high interest in a career that seems to match his or her personality type but lacks the confidence to enter that career, a counselor can work
directly to increase the individual's self-efficacy within that specific domain. Specifically, counselors can work with clients to increase self-efficacy by ensuring mastery experiences, providing successful models, reducing anxiety, and providing support and encouragement. Likewise, if a client's personality seems particularly well suited to certain interests and those interests are not apparent, the counselor may want to ascertain whether there have been environmental limitations, such as racism, sexism, or poverty, that have limited exposure to potential interests. Moreover, high-ability clients who have the confidence to pursue a range of career options may need reassurance to follow their interests/personality fit with careers rather than choosing careers that are prestigious or would please their parents. Finally, the understanding of these three constructs will be useful for adult clients who may be underemployed or unemployed or seeking to change jobs within their organizations.

The dynamic use of P-E fit is essential in successfully transitioning from one career to the next. In America's mobile society, it is not uncommon for an adult to shift careers based on the needs of the individual as well as demands of the environment. A person may develop additional interests or choose to emphasize different interests based on consideration of salary, family-friendliness of an occupation, or needs of the family. Older adults may seek out fresh new challenges, greater flexibility, or more independence. Adults may leave careers after a few years despite feeling confident, because they may find the tasks associated with the career a poor fit for their personality and interests. Vocational counselors need to provide P-E fit information to adults at these critical junctures when career appraisal is necessary.

Research is accumulating on the intersection of critical person factors in P-E fit. Though interests provide the foundation, building a successful career demands more than the identification of preferred activities. Future vocational researchers and counselors alike may want to adopt an integrationist perspective. This will allow for the expansion of the field's knowledge of how interests, personality, and self-efficacy interrelate in both experimental and applied settings. It is imperative that vocational professionals in both arenas work to inform each other of their accumulated knowledge. This will allow research to inform practice and practice to inform research.

—Lisa M. Larson and Donna C. Bailey

See also Career exploration, Holland's theory of vocational choice, Person-environment fit (P-E fit), Social cognitive career theory

**Further Readings and References**


**CAREER AS A CALLING**

The new era of organizational life has ushered in critical changes in how people conceive of their careers and how organizations think about the work trajectories of their employees. Trends toward shorter relationships between individuals and the organizations in which they work have forced revised ways of thinking about the structure of careers. While the bells that toll to mark the end of the traditional career may be premature, it is impossible to ignore the need to envision different ways to define what constitutes meaningful narratives of work lives as individuals navigate a changed terrain of careers. Because individuals, rather than the organizations they work for, are responsible for their own career directions, the role of personal