



## Integration of contemporary career theory into practice

The integration of contemporary career theory has received considerable attention in recent times. Since the early nineties, several attempts have been made among them, Sharf (1997), Patton and McMahon (1999) and more recently Savickas' (2001) four-level model comprising the self-organisation of personality dispositions, self-regulatory concerns, self-definitional narratives, and selective optimisation processes.

Chen (2003) in his article 'Integrating perspectives in career development theory and practice', aimed at practically assisting career counselors, discusses the case for theory integration, focusing on the integration of the traditional objectivist/positivistic views and the evolving constructivist perspectives. Chen points out that the positivistic approach to career theory, as exemplified by Holland, Davis and Lofquist and Super, is characterised by a linear and rational methodology; whereas as the social constructivist approach views career as a socially constructed process that accounts of a person's individual actions and interactions with others. Chen highlights that both approaches have merit and moreover it is the richness of each that provides a basis for thoughtful and useful debate. Chen further highlights the benefits of being creative, challenging the status quo and keeping an open mind when considering refinements to career counselling theory and practice. Chen's article argues that integration rather than convergence is more valuable in practice. In this context he discusses the opportunity for integration of career development theory career within three main concepts of Career Self-Realisation, Career as a Reflection of Growing Experiences and Context Conceptualisation. For example, Chen outlines how self-realisation can bring together the objectivist and constructivist approaches by integrating social dimensions of self-concept with the subjective self. Additionally, in the case of growing experiences, a counselor has the potential to use a narrative approach to integrate and foster their client's personal development and learning. Similarly, the counselor can help their client to connect the influences of context and career issues in the case of context conceptualisation. Chen further argues that career theory is neither static nor one-dimensional but rather is multi dimensional and dynamic. Therefore debate that seeks to incorporate the richness of different views and encourages the integration of various career theories will serve to enhance both application and practice.

Importantly in an interview with John Holland in 1999, Holland pointed out the need for people to plan more as job changes became more frequent and lamented what he called 'the abandonment of empirical research for advocacy and speculation in the counseling profession'. In a similar interview with JoAnn Harris-Bowlsbey, she stated that she appreciated the benefits of 'blending' the perspectives of various career theorists when considering how people make career choices. Harris-Bowlsbey highlighted the importance of multi-media technology

and the Internet in career planning and the evolution of jobs as more people telecommuted. Harris-Bowlsbey points out the important role that career counselors play helping their clients in understanding both 'the context of career planning and the content', particularly in times of rapid change.

In yet another interview with John Krumboltz at the same time Krumboltz pointed out that his Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making (SLTCMD) 'explained how careers had developed but did not explain what career counselors could do now to help their clients build more satisfying lives in the future'.

This together with inspiration from Savickas and Mitchell and Levin led Krumboltz to develop The Learning Theory of Career Counseling and more recently to Planned Happenstance theory, stating that he 'wanted counselors to empower their clients to create satisfying lives themselves by helping them to take actions that create and capitalize on unexpected events'. Krumboltz stresses the need for counselors to help clients to be capable in adapting to unexpected changes in the workplace and to benefit from such events. Moreover, Krumboltz believes that 'integrating career and personal concerns would make career counseling the most complex form of counseling'.

Collard and Gelatt (2003) argue that the notion of work-life balance should take a more 'holistic view' and more accurately be regarded in the context of 'overall life quality'. Collard and Gelatt highlight, as the boundaries between work and life are becoming blurrier, that we should focus on quality of life rather balance. They powerfully point out with their symphony orchestra metaphor that the word balance seems to conjure up a view of equal time when in fact we should be concerned with the holistic quality of life. Collard and Gelatt maintain, therefore, that counselors have a responsibility to help their clients achieve quality rather than mere balance. In doing so, they believe that counselors should help their clients to consider not just how they spend their time but more importantly to consider their thoughts and feelings or how they experience what they do. Collard and Gelatt further cited that people often have mental barriers to achieving career goals that the counselor can play an important role in helping them to overcoming such roadblocks to achieving quality of life. In addition, Collard and Gelatt question the value of the common wisdom of simplicity. In its place they argue that, in fact, the exact opposite may be what will improve quality of life - 'less is not always better'. Perhaps achieving quality is doing the same differently or simply seeing it differently. Importantly, Collard and Gelatt warn of the problem of counselors thinking too narrowly and to remember that different approaches may be required at different times. This requires the counselor, as acknowledged by Chen, to keep an open mind and approach to counselling practice to ensure that their clients have the opportunity to fully consider all options.



Even more recently Deborah Bloch (2004) recognised the role spirituality played in career development. Bloch considers career as a 'complex entity - a living system' and that this theory 'enables career practitioners to understand and explain what otherwise appears to be random'. Bloch reminds us of Savickas' (1997) comment that 'The empirical traditional rational approach fails to consider complex human qualities such as spirit, consciousness and purpose'. Moreover that starting with the parts neglects the whole picture. For this reason the place to start is in fact with the whole. It is only when we view the whole from a distance that we understand the critical relationships between each other. Bloch describes well how counselors can use the non-linear, complexities and intricacies of life to understand how our careers are implicitly interwoven with life and the world around us. Additionally, Bloch comments that, using narrative approaches, career counselors can help their clients to recognise critical transition points important to developing creative solutions between different transition phases. Counselors can help lessen their client's anxiety associated with change and recognise the benefits that change, even small changes, can bring. Bloch summarises powerfully in her statement, 'As career professionals we have the opportunity to see not only how the world has affected our clients but how our clients, and their work, affects the world'.

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