Career Exploration Model for Students in Human Resource Development

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Abstract

Since the introduction of Holland's model of personality, many career interest inventories have been developed. However, a career planning model specifically for HRD students does not exist. Through an analysis of Human Resource Development job categories, the researchers were able to identify careers and occupations for each personality type identified by John Holland's Self-Directed Search (SDS). Implications for further study and use within HRD academic programs are discussed.

Keywords: career decision-making, personality inventories, HRD roles

1. Introduction

Students confront a variety of career-related decisions as they enter and progress through their educational programs. Many of these decisions relate to exploring the fit between themselves, the major they have selected, and becoming a professional. Unfortunately, a substantial proportion of students enter college with unclear career goals (Gardiner, 2015; Borges, Richard, & Duffy, 2007). Progress in career development can also become blocked when there is a lack of information about self-concept, the world of work (occupational information), and ways of obtaining information. Students who lack career information may enter college and quickly find that their career goals are unobtainable or unsuitable (Larson, Heppner, Ham, & Dugan, 1988). Those who have an adequate amount of self-information and occupational knowledge will make better decisions and have more career success later in life (Creed, Patton, & Prideaux, 2007; Hirschi, Lee, Porfeli, Vondracek, 2013; Scandura, 1992); whereas those without this information will make poor decisions (Holland, 1985). Further, Chartrand, Robbins, and Morrill (1997) and Gati, Fassa, and Houminer (1995) suggested that students who do not have adequate information may be blocked from making a decision at all.

Kuchinke (2002) stated more students enter human resource development (HRD) programs from diverse occupational and educational backgrounds, and the average age of students enrolling is increasing. Some enter graduate programs in HRD directly out of their undergraduate programs while others transition into graduate school after several years of working in an occupation that is very different from HRD. Regardless of when and why students enter HRD programs, the process of self-concept development becomes salient. Therefore, it is important for students to evaluate their personal motives and professional aspirations early in their program (Hazler & Kottler, 2005). There remains; however, a void in the HRD literature on the career development of HRD students.

It is our belief that most students, including those in HRD programs, experience some degree of career indecision as they enter and progress through their academic programs. In Johnson's (1986) study, 54 percent of the students had not made a career decision until they enrolled in college. Steel and McDonald (2000) found that an estimated 50-75 percent of all college students change their major, causing disruptive delays in their pursuit of a degree and their career development.

However, Wessel, Ryan, and Oswald (2008) found that students with higher adaptability scores when ask to learn new tasks had a lower probability of changing major. Therefore, HRD faculty would benefit from a better understanding of what career decision-making issues confront HRD students.

2. Purpose and Research Questions

In this article, our purpose is threefold: (a) to examine the career decision-making concerns of students, (b) to briefly review existing theories on how students approach the career decision-making process, and (c) to apply the outcomes of (a) and (b) to recommendations for both HRD students and faculty. To this end, three research questions are used to guide and inform the inquiry, namely:

Research Question 1: What difficulties do students face in the career decision-making process?
Research Question 2: How does Holland's Self Directed Search (SDS) assessment help students explore and identify their work-related interests?
Research Question 3: Can careers in Human Resource Development be identified by and categorized within the SDS?

Our hope is that these questions will stimulate discussions in two groups: HRD students and faculty, aid in the career decision-making process, and advance the profession of HRD by educating and growing students into true HRD professionals. Additionally, our decision to explore the career decision-making process is based on our position that HRD faculty should be integrately involved in the professional development of their students. Research has shown the importance of access to positive mentors, career development, and career success (Blickle, Schneider, Perrewe´, Blass, & Ferris, 2008; Johnson, Jones, & Cheng, 2014 ; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Sturges, Simpson, and Altman (2003) identified that one of the key competencies provided by business-related programs is an awareness of career meanings, motivation, skills, and knowledge. Students who obtain these competencies can provide direction in their own development as well as use these competencies later in their HRD profession to assist others with career development. However, in Kuchinke's (2002) study, only 23 of the 55 offering degrees in HRD required a career development course in their program. To grow the profession, HRD faculty must be willing to include career development issues in their curriculum or address these issues through other means.

3. Need for the Study

Career exploration and planning is a process that takes place over time and involves a series of decisions. Choosing a college major is just one of the decisions students make in the process. To make decisions that are satisfying to them now and in the future, it is helpful for students to know how their interests and strengths can be used in making career choices. In today's global economy and rapidly changing work environment, there is a need to make career decisions early in an academic program of study. Career seekers will face job descriptions that combine facets of traditional career categories and must realize that career exploration is more than identifying a college major.

A variety of career development interventions are practiced in public schools, colleges, universities, and other agencies that have planned integration of career development concepts (Gordon, 1995). These curricula lead the majority of students through the concepts that will prepare them for the future. Some students; however, fail to respond to the various interventions and are not ready to work through the process. Several studies suggest that some students could be termed vocationally immature and not ready to begin the career planning process (Chartrand et al., 1997; Fuqua, Blum, & Hartman, 1988; Larson et al., 1988). This may be due to lack of motivation or dysfunctional myths, whereas other students simply do not understand the process and need some psycho-educational interventions.

This difficulty or indecision has become a major concern of practitioners, researchers, and educators and will continue to be a concern as societal trends push students to revise their career decisions over their life spans (Hirschi, Herrmann, Keller, 2015; Jaskiewicz, Luchak, Oh, & Chlosta, 2015). It remains a complex problem that includes multiple dimensions that are related to both cognitive deficits, such as limited requisite career information, and identity factors and personality variables, such as self-efficacy, anxiety, self-defeating characteristics, and locus of control (Gati et al., 2011; Luzzo, 1993; Metz, Fouad, & Ihle-Helledy, 2009). These factors are indicative of the conflicts that indecisive students experience. Other studies (Di Fabio & Maree, 2013; Isik, 2014) have indicated that students with low self-efficacy would be delayed in their decision making as would students with an external locus of control (Lucas & Epperson, 1990).

High anxiety has also been closely tied to a student's inability to decide (Newman, Fuqua, & Minger, 1990). Additional researchers have argued that career indecision resulted from issues related to vocational identity and how clear the individual has set goals (Reddan, 2015), and identified interests and talents (Holland, Daiger, & Power, 1980), occupational information (how much knowledge do they have about careers?) (Mubiana, 2011), and career barriers (Larson, Toulouse, Ngumba, Fitzpatrick, & Heppner, 1994).

Some students seek advice through individual career counseling, and others use self-help tools and computer-based information. Di Fabio and Bernaud (2008) found that students who believe career counseling is valuable are more likely to see help. In providing interventions to help students make better and timelier decisions, it is important to know why they are having difficulty. By viewing career indecision as multi-dimensional, faculty can provide a better diagnosis of the causes. Cataldo, Brusoski, Golin, and Gallagher (1993) found that their intervention of three 90-minute structured, career workshops increased students' career decidedness through a pretest-posttest-control group design. Thompson (1976) cautioned against the misconception of passage of time. He stated people would often suspend their career planning actions and simply believe that the passage of time would clarify alternatives and result in better decision making. However, if they did not use their time to explore or rethink their plans, it was unlikely that a good decision would be made.

4. Career Development Theories

Research in career development has evolved over time from three foundational theories: a) developmental, b) social cognitive, and c) person-environment. Developmental theorists assumed that "career development is a process that takes place over the life span" (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996, p. 128). This is based on the psychological theory that individuals progress through distinct career stages, in which each stage is characterized by unique career concerns and needs (Hargrove, Creagh, & Burgess, 2002; Super, 1990; Vonderacek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrod, and Herman (1951) theorized that career choice is a process which extends from about age ten to age twenty-one, and that the most important factor determining career choice is the series of interlocked decisions the adolescent makes over time.

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) hypothesizes that "person inputs (individual difference variables such as predispositions, gender, race/ethnicity, and disability/health status) and background contextual affordances affect occupationally relevant self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations by shaping occupationally relevant learning experiences" (Schaub & Tokar, 2005, p. 305). These self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations affect the formation of vocational interests through the influence of occupational goals, choice actions, and performance attainments (DeWitz & Walsh, 2002; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Rottinghaus, Lindley, Green, & Borgen, 2002). Krumboltz (1991) described the way people make career decisions depends on what they believe about themselves, their abilities, and the world of work. These beliefs are personal generalizations that are formed in an attempt to represent their own self and environment. However, these beliefs may affect their career decision-making process regardless of whether or not they are accurate. Lau and Shaffer (1999) theorized that traits such as locus of control and self-esteem predict career success.

Person-environment fit theory suggests that work-related outcomes are influenced not only or even primarily by persons or environments separately, but by the degree of fit between persons and environments (Fritzshe, McIntire, & Yost, 2002; Holland, 1985; Larson & Borgen, 2002; Spokane, 1994; Swanson & Fouad, 1999). The customary approach for characterizing and comparing persons and environments is based on vocational interests (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Holland, 1997; Meir, 1999) and implements the concept of congruence suggested by Holland (1985). According to this approach, congruence is inversely related to the distance between the individual's vocational interests and the characteristics of their work environment as reflected by the dominant personality type (Holland, 1985). In the area of career development, theorists examined the correspondence of an individual's characteristics with characteristics of particular work environments.

4.1. John Holland and the Self Directed Search

John Holland, a vocational psychologist, first published his theory of vocational personalities and work environments in the Journal of Counseling Psychology in 1959. Holland's theory consists of three origins: a) Henry Murray's personality work in 1938; b) vocational psychology literature on interests, personality, and job dimensions; and c) his own work in 1958 on the vocational preference inventory (Gottfredson, 1999). His theory was based on the idea that a person's psychological attributes lead to occupational choice (Savickas & Gottfredson, 1999).

Holland's theory has contributed to the research of Vocational and Industrial/Organizational Psychology through the creation and development of vocational interest inventories and career counseling and education. The theory has created new ways in which occupational information is organized (Savickas & Gottfredson, 1999). In addition to the contributions to vocational psychology, Holland's theory has lead to developments in understanding non-academic accomplishments, competence studies, and to the development of other career assessment tools.

Holland has contributed to the development of psychological tests, and he has changed the way vocational assessment has been administered. Today, vocational assessment requires little psychological interventions, it is better understood, and it can be done by an individual easily and without counselor intervention. Holland has inspired further research in counseling practices and science. Holland's assessment tools have been used for military recruiting and the O*Net system. Holland's theory could be used to explore areas of development and socialization, personal and environmental change, the environment and environmental influences, and the effects of vocational inventories delivered by the media and other means.

Holland believed in the concept of a person-environment fit where one's vocational identity matched their personal identity. According to Gottfredson (1999), Holland's working style could be characterized as, "persistent, focus driven, foresightful, thoughtful, caring, practical, and intelligent" (p. 15). Holland's theory showed that if vocational preference was an expression of one's personality, then one's occupational history would fall under similar categories. Therefore, a person's occupational pattern could be predicted though the category or subcategories from their personality code or from their previous jobs.

The Self Directed Search (SDS), first developed in 1971, is an educational and career planning tool based on Holland's theory. As depicted by Figure 1, it is based on a hexagon model in which each point of the hexagon represents a personality type that individuals are believed to possess. Through the SDS, personal characteristics can be matched with environments that support these characteristics (Tinsley, Tinsley, & Rushing, 2002). The points on the hexagon are each assigned a letter (R, I, A, S, E, and C) to represent each of the personality types.

Once an individual has completed the SDS, a three-letter code is revealed based on both career interests and leisure activities. The first letter in the code represents the dominate personality type. The second letter in the code represents a personality type that resembles the individual, and the third letter is the personality type that the individual least resembles. The three letter code can be used to help students who are unsure of what educational or career path they want to follow by providing them with a list of possible careers or college majors to explore. Long and Tracey (2006) stated that "the distances between the types on the hexagon are inversely proportional to the magnitude of relations. Adjacent types are most related, alternative types have an intermediate relationship, and opposite types are least related" (p. 40).

The R in the hexagon represents the Realistic personality type. An individual with the Realistic personality type would possess athletic or mechanical abilities. This type reflects someone that prefers to work with objects, machines, tools, plants, plants, or animals, or to be outdoors. They are traditional and practical, but they consider themselves less social. The Realistic personality is adventurous, conforming, and has concrete values (Smart, Feldman, & Ethington, 2008). The I in the hexagon represents the Investigative personality type. An individual with the Investigative personality type would reflect someone that is analytical, technical, and scientific. This person is a skeptic and a problem solver. Investigative personalities would prefer to work alone so that they could explore and understand ideas and events. The Investigative type would prefer to create or learn new knowledge (Gottfredson, Jones, & Holland, 1993).

The A in the hexagon represents the Artistic personality type. Individuals with the Artistic personality type would prefer to work in an environment where they could be creative and express themselves. They have innovating or intuitional abilities. The Artistic personality type is expressive and likes to interact with others. They prefer to work in unstructured situations, and they value aesthetics (Smart, et al., 2008). The S in the hexagon represents the Social personality type. The Social personality type is empathetic, outgoing, and friendly. The person with this personality type would possess humanitarianism characteristics and have strong verbal skills. The Social personality type has good interpersonal skills, and they are good at mentoring others. They worry about the welfare of others, and they would prefer to work in a nurturing profession (Gottfredson, et al., 1993).

The E in the hexagon represents the Enterprising personality type. An individual with an Enterprising personality type would prefer to direct and persuade others.

These people are characterized as influential, self-confident, and enthusiastic. The Enterprising personality can lead or manage organizational goals. They would work best in a profession that requires public speaking, politics, and leadership abilities (Muchinsky, 1999). The C in the hexagon represents the Conventional personality type. An individual with the Conventional personally type prefers to carry things out in detail or follow clearly defined procedures and systems. They are orderly, conforming, and dependable, and they prefer structure and routines. They would prefer to work with numbers and machines (Smart, et al., 2008).

4.2. Connecting Career Indecision to Holland's SDS

Personal Career Theory (PCT) is the "collection of an individual's beliefs, ideas, assumptions, and knowledge that guides an individual as they choose occupations or fields of study" (Reardon & Lenz, 1999, p. 103). This theory suggests that an individual's career indecision is made up of their personal characteristics, occupational knowledge, and poor decision making skills. An individual's PCT develops over a lifetime and is influenced by one's environment. Holland (1997) believed that the PCT is related to the RIASEC hexagon in that one's personal characteristics are related to their occupational structures, beliefs, and strategies for achieving their personal and occupational goals. In the SDS, Holland provided an expressed and measured vocational interest section because he believed occupational aspirations would determine one's career path; however, one's occupational history may not reflect those aspirations. For example, a person could take the SDS and come up with a personality type that does not match that person's experiences in life, work history, or academic achievements. Further, it may not be aligned with his/her career goals or personality but simply part of their life circumstances.

Therefore, the SDS can be a powerful tool in understanding a person's interests and traits. It can be used by career counselors and faculty to help their students in making career decisions. Career counselors and faculty must know that there are eight factors could affect the career decision making process and affect the RIASEC typology: congruence, personality characteristics, vocational identity, coherence of aspirations, consistency, and professional judgment. The fundamental theory of congruence, defined as the relative proximity in the hexagon between the individual's expressed and assessed interest, fulfills an individual's need for a personalized rewards and can optimize their work experience (Miller, 1997). If students' expressed interests are related to their SDS code, implications can be made that these students understand and are thinking about career choices. However, when students' expressed and assessed interests are different, they may experience career indecision. The expressed career choices have more validity than the measured assessment.

The vocational identity students hold in Holland's theory are related to how stable one's goals and self-perceptions are. Individuals with a high vocational identity are more able to make confident decisions with their SDS results. However, if vocational identity is low, a student may not be able to move forward with the information received from the SDS. Coherence of aspirations is defined as "the degree to which codes of a person's set of vocational aspirations or occupational daydreams belong in the some RIASEC category" (Reardon & Lenz, 1999, p.109). Individuals with high aspirations will tend to work in an occupation that matches the first letter of their 3-letter code, meaning that they have narrowed their career goals to a particular field. However, a student with low career aspirations may have a distorted view of the work world. When a relationship between the first two letters in the code is apparent, the code is said to have consistency. High consistency in the pattern of personality types and interests exists when the two first letters of the code are closely related or adjacent to one another on the hexagon (Bullock & Reardon, 2005).

5. Methodology

According to the New York State Department of Labor Data (2006), most HR careers fall under the Enterprising personality type. However, the researchers believed other personality types within Holland's study could be interested in HRD jobs and careers. Therefore, the researchers set out to create a list of HRD jobs and careers for the other five personality types. Through a review of literature (Bell, Lee, & Yeung, 2006; Gubbins & Garavan, 2005; Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2007; Society of Human Resource Management, 2008; Ulrich, Brockbank, Yeung, & Lake, 1995), the researchers were able to generate a list of the most current and recognized HRD roles. The literature review was conducted using academic literature databases, ProQuest Direct, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Ebsco Academic Search Premier, ERIC, and the Social Sciences Citation Index. The search terms that were used are human resource roles, human resource skills, and human resource competencies.

The researchers utilized the task inventories and job analysis functions on the Occupational Information Network (O*Net) (2009) to identify core competencies and key attributes required for each role generated in the literature review. Next, the researchers compared these competencies and attributes to the abilities and skills (and examples of professions) that typify persons dominant within each Holland personality type. From this comparison, the HRD roles were matched with the personality types (see Table 1).

6. Discussion

Schmitt, Oswald, Friede, Imus, and Merritt (2008) suggested that their findings on student outcomes may be broadened to other academic institutions as well as work organizations. They recommended that academic institutions find ways to "address fit perceptions include providing individuals with realistic previews of the environment to which they are making application and intend to enter" (p. 332). Therefore, the proposed career development process in this paper provides a framework to guide applied research that seeks to develop strategies to build high career commitment in human resource development students.

Most students, including those in HRD programs, experience some degree of career indecision as they enter and progress through their academic programs. The literature review supports the view that a career decision-making process is needed to account for the indecision of students in the career field of human resource development. Therefore, we offer the following propositions:

Proposition 1: The career decision-making process for HRD students can utilize Holland's Self Directed Search (SDS) assessment.

Proposition 2: The career decision-making process for HRD students can utilize the roles identified by this study for each category within the SDS.

7. Conclusions, Implications, Suggestions for Future Research

Swanson and Gore (2006) referred to Holland's SDS as the most useful assessment due to its ease of integration and frequent use with other career counseling information. The researchers agree that the SDS is a valuable assessment tool for those students that are unsure of their career path. There are many students that may want to pursue a degree; however, they are unsure of what to major in because they are faced with career indecision. Holland's central thesis was that people flourish in environments where there is a good fit between the individual's personality and the environment in which the person functions. Good fit can lead to satisfaction, and lack of fit can lead to dissatisfaction. Logue, Lounsbury, Gupta, and Leong (2007) suggested that students who are "pursuing the major and then the occupation to which they are suited results in satisfaction, first with the academic field, and later, with the occupation and career" (p. 270). The SDS can provide a student with ideas about what career path they may want to follow, whether that be to further their education or not. If and when students decide to attend college, the SDS will help them decide what career areas within their chosen field they should pursue.

This paper articulated specific actions through the use of Holland's SDS that students in HRD programs should take to ensure they are able to explore and identify their work-related interests early in their academic program. These actions will help them leverage and promote their career development in the future. Specifically, if students decide to enroll in a Human Resource Development program, they will be able to determine, through the completion of the SDS, if they should pursue a career in management, training, career counseling, evaluation, instructional design, etc. Human Resource Development faculty can use the SDS as a tool to create experiences for students that will enhance meaningfulness, responsibility, knowledge of results, and empowerment, which in turn will help to develop a workforce that is committed to the field of human resources.

Figure 1. Holland's Person-Environment Typology Model

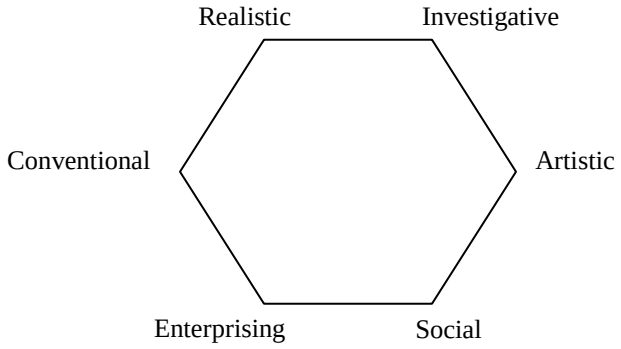

Table 1.

SDS Categories of HRD roles

Personality types	HRD roles
Realistic	General Supervisor Training Technician Safety Inspector
Investigative	Systems Analyst Safety Manager Job and Occupational Analyst
Artistic	Director of Instructional Materials Instructional Designer
Social	Career Counselor Hospital Administrator Employee Relations Specialist Industrial-Organizational Psychologist Director of a Community Organization Employment Interviewer Trainer
Enterprising	Manager of Education & Training Planner of Program Services Department Head at a College or University Labor Relations Manager Employment Manager
Conventional	Budget Analyst Employment Clerk Evaluator Job Task Analyst

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