

# Toward an Integrated Theory of Career Choice and Development

Hee-Yeong LEE

Pukyong National University

## 진로 선택 및 발달 이론의 통합에 관한 소고

이 희 영

(부경대학교)

(Received February 28, 2008 / Accepted June 30, 2008)

### Abstract

진로상담에 대한 관심과 요구가 높다. 효과적인 진로상담을 위해서는 무엇보다도 나름대로의 이론적 틀을 가지는 것이 무엇보다도 중요하다. 다양한 진로문제를 다루기 위해서는 어느 한 이론보다 통합된 관점을 가지는 것이 중요하다. 이에 본 연구에서는 대표적인 진로이론 4가지 선정하여 각 이론의 독특성을 검토한 후 이를 기초로 하나의 통합된 관점을 제시하고자 하였다. 이를 위해 Holland의 유형론, Super의 자아개념발달이론, Krumboltz의 의사결정의 사회학습이론, Dawis와 Lofquist의 직업적응이론의 유사점과 차이점을 검토하였다. 검토 결과, 진로 이론은 진로 선택 및 발달의 영역에 따라 유용성에 있어 차이를 보였다. 다시 말하면, 어떤 이론이 다른 이론보다 진로 선택 및 발달의 특정 측면을 이해하고 설명하는 데 더 유용한 것으로 나타났다. 그러므로 각 이론의 독특성을 고려하여 기존의 이론들을 하나의 이론으로 통합하는 것이 가능하고 유용할 것이라는 결론을 얻었다. 이러한 분석 결과를 기초로 진로이론 통합의 한 가지 방안을 제시하였다.

**주제어 :** 진로선택, 진로이론, 진로이론의 통합

### 1. Introduction

It is generally accepted that work is central to human development and total life adjustment. Because of the importance of work in most people's life, there have been a number of theoretical approaches to identify, describe, and explain important factors that affecting lifelong human work behaviors. Among those perspectives, Holland's career typology theory, Super's self-concept theory,

Krumboltz's social learning theory, and Dawis and Lofquist's theory of work adjustment have been the most influential(Osipow, 1990).

Each of major four theories of career choice and development has emphasized different facets of career-related behavior. This approach to theory building has produced fragmented and incomplete glimpse of the career development process, and thus, has not sufficient in explaining the complex aspects of vocational and career developmental process.

† Corresponding author : 051-629-5495, hylee@pknu.ac.kr

For the fuller understanding of career development, integrated theory of career development that incorporates aspects that are unique to each of career theories is needed.

This paper examined the four most influential career theories to identify special utility of each theory and attempted integration on the basis of distinctive features of each theory into one unified theory.

## II . Four major theories

### 1. Holland's typology theory

Holland(1992) has indicated that the intellectual roots of his theory are mainly in differential psychology and in typologies of personality. On the basis of the assumption that vocational interests are one aspect of what is commonly called personality and that the description of an individual's vocational interests also describes the individual's personality, Holland's(1992) theory has focused on the personality type of the individual as the major influence in career choice and development. The four basic assumptions underlying Holland's theory are :

(1) "In our culture, most persons can be categorized as one of six types : realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, or conventional" (p. 2).

(2) "There are six model environments : realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional"(p. 3).

(3) "People search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on

agreeable problems and roles"(p. 4).

(4) "Behavior is determined by an interaction between personality and environment" (p. 4).

These four assumptions are supplemented by several secondary concepts which aim at moderating or qualifying predictions or explanations that are derived from the main assumptions(Holland, 1992). These secondary concepts include the following :

*Consistency* : "Within a person or an environment, some pairs of types are more closely related than others. Consistency is the degree of relatedness between personality types or between environmental models. Degrees of consistency or relatedness are assumed to affect vocational preference"(p. 4).

*Differentiation* : "Some persons or environments are more clearly defined than others. The degree to which a person or an environment is well defined is its degree of differentiation"(p. 5).

*Identity* : "This concept provides an estimate of the clarity and stability of a person's identity or the identity of an environment"(p. 5).

*Congruence* : "Different types require different environments. Incongruence occurs when a type lives in an environment that provides opportunities and rewards foreign to the person's preferences and abilities"(p. 5).

In summary, individual behavior is a function of the interaction between one's personality and environment, and vocational choice behavior is an expression of, or expansion of, personality into the world of work. Thus, individuals choose an occupation to satisfy their preferred personality

orientations.

## 2. Super's self-concept developmental theory

Super's conception of a career model is intended to denote a longitudinal, developmental approach rather than a single-choice, matching approach such as that of differential psychology and of congruence theory as used by Holland(1984). Super systematically described the process of career development and in doing so attached primary importance to self-concept, life stage, and vocational maturity.

According to Super(1984), occupational choice is a lifelong process which self-concept of people making career decisions plays a major role, and career development is essentially the development and implementation of self-concept. Self-concept also plays a crucial role in work satisfaction. In Super's view, work satisfaction is proportionate to the extent to which an individual has been able to implement self-concept(Herr & Cramer, 1992). Self-concept, as a product of experiences, is changed and developed throughout one's entire life, although self-concept is increasingly stable with time and experiences.

Super(1984) maintained that people move through a series of stages in which the self-concept is successively refined. The life stages, each of which calls for different kinds of vocational behavior, are characterized as a sequence of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline(Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). According to Super(1994), the process of career development occurred by means of six

vocational development tasks which begin with crystalization of a vocational preference and end with readiness for retirement, and an individual's progress in mastering the tasks through the stages can be guided, in part, by facilitating the maturity of abilities and interests and, in part, by aiding in reality testing and in the development of self-concepts.

Crucial to Super's theory is the concept of career maturity which can be defined as the degree of success in coping with the demands of life stages. Career maturity, in combination with self-concept, is an useful predictor of career behavior(Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996).

## 3. Krumboltz's social learning theory

Krumboltz's social learning theory of career decision making(SLTCDM) is an outgrowth of the Bandura's general social learning theory of behavior, with its roots in reinforcement theory and classical behaviorism (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1984). SLTCDM was an attempt to explain how people come to be employed in a variety of occupations and to help people make satisfactory career decisions. The theory is primarily based on life events that are influential in determining career choice. In this theory, the process of career decision making involves four factors : (1) genetic endowments and special abilities, (2) environmental conditions and events, (3) learning experiences, and (4) cognitive, emotional, and performance responses and skills(Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1984). In other words, each of these factors plays a part in guiding career choices and development.

SLTCDM emphasizes the instrumentality of

learning experiences in producing preferences for various activities and beliefs about themselves and the nature of their world around them (Krumboltz, 1994). It assumes that the individual personalities and behavioral repertoires that persons possess arise primarily from their unique learning experiences rather than from innate developmental or psychic processes (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1984). SLTCDM posits three kinds of learning experiences: instrumental, associative, and vicarious learning experiences. Two consequences of these learning experiences are self-observation generalization and task approach skills that provide the basis for career-related behavior that depends on the environment in which people are raised (Krumboltz, 1994). SLTCDM is unique in that it, unlike many other career theories, integrates social, cultural, and economic factors into the theory.

#### 4. Theory of work adjustment

Theory of work adjustment (TWA) focuses on the work behavior of specific individual who continuously interacts with specific work environments and places its main emphasis on job satisfaction and work adjustment resulting from correspondence between individual and environment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). Dawis and Lofquist presented a list of assumptions underlying their theory. These assumptions may be summarized as follows:

An individual is seen as motivated to fulfill work requirements and to have their personal requirements fulfilled by work. Individuals seek to achieve and maintain a positive relationship

within their work environment. Individuals bring their requirements to work environments, and the work environment makes its requirements of individuals. To survive, the individual and the work environment must achieve some degrees of correspondence. In order to achieve and maintain this congruence, the individual must successfully meet the job requirements, and the work environment must fulfill the requirements of the individual. Job stability which can be systematically related to tenure, satisfaction, and effectiveness, is a function of fit between the individual and the work environment. The continuous and dynamic process of achieving and making correspondence with a work environment is referred to as work adjustment. Work adjustment is predicted by the fit of the work personality and the work environments. Two key indicators of work adjustment are the satisfaction of the individual with the work environment and the satisfactoriness of the work environment with the individual. Both satisfaction and satisfactoriness are required for the individual to remain and be retained on the job. The correspondence between the individual's needs and the reinforcer system that characterizes the work setting is expected to predict level of job satisfaction. An important construct of TWA is a work personality which means distinctive features of the individual in relation to work adjustment. Personality style is an environment on four basic dimensions, entitled celerity, pace, rhythm, and endurance, and individual differences in this personality style are expected to result in important differences in both the manner and the success of adjustment

to work(Dawis & Lofquist, 1984).

### **III. A comparison of major theories**

As you may notice from the previous sections, there are some commonalities in all four theories. What it follows is some of similarities between theories. Super's notion of the self-concept is similar to Krumboltz's notion of the self-observation generalization, which, in turn, is similar to the self-knowledge of Holland. Krumboltz's theory and Super's theory agree on the basic notion that people successively refine their self-concept results from a series of learning experiences. Some common themes also exist between Krumboltz's theory and Holland's theory. Both theories recognize that people develop unique ways of viewing themselves and the world around them as a result of learning experience. TWA is similar to Krumboltz's theory in that both theories use the concept of reinforcement.

Regardless of these similarities between theories, all four theories differ not only in basic premises of their theorists but also in goals they are trying to accomplish in their theorizing. Some theorists attempt to explain why people make the choices they do; others focus on the development of career behaviors over time. Specifically, there are important differences with respect to those aspects that each theory trying to focus on. That is, Holland focuses on choice, Krumboltz on decision making, Super on lifelong development, and Lofquist and Dawis on adjustment.

Major differences between theories also exist

with respect to what is predicted about career choice, its implementation, and adjustment to it. Specifically, Holland predicts how well a choice fits the individual as well as occupational entry, and predicts the satisfaction, persistence, and stability of the choice by means of congruence; the TWA predicts occupational choice, satisfaction, persistence, stability, and productivity in work by means of correspondence between the needs of the work personality and its skills and aptitudes with the demands of the work place and its potential need satisfiers; Super's theory predicts occupational entry and satisfaction by means of self-concept implementation and development skills, and the quality of decision making of each career life stage is predicted by vocational maturity; and finally SLTCMDM predicts occupational choices and quality of choice process as a function of skills in making decisions that individual possesses. Thus, each theory has its own slant on variables predicting the choice content and process and its outcomes.

### **IV. The integration of career theories**

In my view, in order for theory to fully explain all the career pertinent phenomena, it should provide the answer for at least the following five questions :

1. Why do people choose a particular occupation?
2. How is a person's career developed?
3. How is career decision made?
4. What happens to an individual after entry into work force?

5. What influence do social, cultural, and economic factors have on career development?

None of the present theories adequately answer all the questions that ideal career theory should include. This is because, as is apparent from the previous sections, each of the theories differ in its emphasis and its purpose. Osipow(1994) summarized the most important distinctive features of each theory as follows : For Holland's theory, what happens; for Super's theory, how it happens; for the TWA, how it happens and its outcome; and for social learning theory, how to make it happen and how to choose what happen.

Since each theory has its unique emphasis and its goal, career theories need to be complemented or supplemented one another in order to more fully explain all the career-related behavior. How conceptually, a particular theory can be used to synthesize existing theories? In order for career theory to deal with all the career relevant phenomena in the real world, it should take a life-span approach(Vondracek & Fouad, 1994). In this regard, I think Super's theory should be placed on the center of theory integration. In addition, his theory is the most inclusive of those presented in that it deals with the differential, developmental, and phenomenological aspects of career behavior.

Super(1984) identifies the developmental tasks of the developmental stages that occur throughout the life span and emphasizes the importance of the self-concept in the selection and implementation of career choice. Super's emphasis on life stage development and self-concept implementation can provide the basis of an explanation of the career

development process of the integrated theory.

Holland(1984) posed his theory as one of vocational choice not as one of career development. That is, he was much interested in explaining the content of occupational choice than describing the process of choice. Holland(1992) asserted that people choose a certain occupation because it is congruent with their personality types. His theory is very useful in explaining the personal aspect of the integrated career theory, and it might be connected to super's developmental stages in the way Super has envisioned self-concept implementation (Osipow, 1994).

The decision-making process must be included in theory integration. Krumboltz (1996)'s theory provides basis for identifying the career-decision making process. That is, it provides a conceptual and theoretical structure for comprehending and examining the learning process that lead to a variety of career decisions. The general learning model proposed by Krumboltz could be used in helping us understand the decision-making process at different stages or in different settings. Krumboltz's theory also contributes to our understanding of how social, cultural, and economic factors influence on career development.

It is very important to understand and predict work progress after entry into the work force because most vocational activities occur after the school years are over(Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996), and thus, the integrated theory should include adult career development. Theory of work adjustment can provide a conceptual basis for explaining adult career development.

## V. Special issues

A growing emphasis has been placed on the impact of gender and social, cultural, and economic factors in career development. Existing career development theories do not fully explain career choice and development for women and ethnic minorities because the available theories were formulated primarily to account for the career behavior of white males (Brooks, 1984). Therefore, all career theories should be modified to include consideration of special problems in career development of women and ethnic minorities (Fitzgerald & Betz, 1994). The theory of Super and Krumboltz attempted to take into account gender and social, cultural, and economic factors that influence women and ethnic minorities, but none has yet developed propositions that specify the effects of those factors (Brooks, 1984). It is my position that separate theories for women and ethnic minorities are needed because first, the existing theories are inadequate for women and ethnic minorities, and second, the efforts to make their theories more relevant for all people in our society are unsuccessful.

## VI. Summary and conclusion

Four major theories of career choice and development have been examined in an attempt to identify similarities and differences between theories. While they share some commonalities, each of these four theories differ in its emphasis and its goal. In other words, each of these four theories focuses on

different aspects of career behaviors not covered by the others. As a result, it might not be possible to say that which theory is best. However, it would be possible to say that which theory might be more useful than another in explaining a certain aspect of career choice and development. Therefore, it would be possible and useful to synthesize the uniqueness of each theory into one more powerful theory. This paper addressed this issue and provided one example of integrating existing theories into one unified theory.

## References

- Brooks, L. (1984). Counseling special groups: Women and ethnic minorities. In D. Brown & L. Brooks (Eds.), *Career choice and development: Applying contemporary theory to practice*. San Francisco : Jossey-Bass, 355~368.
- Davis, R. V., & Lofquist, L. H. (1984). *A psychological theory of work adjustment*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fitzgerald, L. F., & Betz, N. E. (1994). Career development in cultural context: The role of gender race, class, and sexual orientation. In M. L. Savickas & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Convergence in career development theories*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 103~118.
- Herr, E. L., & Cramer, S. H. (1992). *Career guidance and counseling through the lifespan: Systematic approaches* (4th ed.). NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Holland, J. L. (1984). A theory of careers: some new developments and revisions. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.
- Holland, J. L. (1992). *Making vocational choices* (2nd ed.). Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.

- Krumboltz, J. D.(1994). Improving career development theory from a social learning perspective. In M. L. Savickas & R. W. Lent(Eds.), *Convergence in career development theories*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 9~31.
- Mitchell, L. K., & Krumboltz, J. D.(1984). Social learning approach to career decision making: Krumboltz theory. In D. Brown & L. Brooks(Eds.), *Career choice and development: Applying contemporary theory to practice*. San Francisco; Jossey-Bass, 235~280.
- Osipow, S. H.(1990). Convergence in theories of career choice and development. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 36, 122~131.
- Osipow, S. H.(1994). Moving career theory into the twenty-first century. In M. L. Savickas & R. W. Lent(Eds.), *Convergence in career development theories*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 217~224.
- Osipow, S. H., & Fitzgerald, L. F.(1996). *Theories of career development*(4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Super, D. E.(1984). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. In D. Brown & L. Brooks(Eds.), *Career choice and development: Applying contemporary theory to practice*. San Francisco; Jossey-Bass, 192~234.
- Vondracek, F. W., & Fouad, N. A.(1994). Developmental contextualism: An integrative framework for theory and practice. In M. L. Savickas & R. W. Lent(Eds.), *Convergence in career development theories*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 207~214.