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## SOME THOUGHTS ON VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY

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when the writer was Assistant Professor of Education at McGill University.*

The earliest of the so-called vocational counsellors firmly believed that it was necessary only to present facts about numerous occupations in a reasonable and interesting way to a client. The client would then act in a rational fashion and make a choice of a job which would give him satisfaction for life. This theory, put forward by a Boston socialist, appeared to make some sense and *would probably work* if two things were true:

1. That people keep one job or career for life.
2. That counsellors and clients work in a vacuum where all other forces—social, economic, religious, or moral—are stable and not subject to change.

Some other theories held that a man takes a job to satisfy unconscious impulses or drives. Thus the hunter and prize fighter are sadists, the butcher and surgeon are sublimating sadism, the actor and soldier are exhibitionists and, perhaps, guidance counsellors are busy-bodies with an infinite capacity for minding the business of other people.

Of course there is also the "accident" theory saying that accidents of birth, race, religion or conditioning force a person into a job or career in spite of himself. I'm not sure whether this theory should be labelled fate or behaviorism. I suppose its name would depend on where you lie on the continuum between the preachings of Mohammed and the teachings of B. F. Skinner.

In rural areas and non-technological cultures a relationship has been shown between a son's job aspirations and the careers of his father and grandfathers.

On the other hand, an economist has stated very simply that occupational choice is based strictly and completely upon earnings. That is, workers will move for more pay, perform better for more pay, and choose jobs based on amounts of money to be earned.

Of course a whole cult of occupational theories has been built around realism—that clients must be led to accept reality and make realistic decisions. These ideas make interesting reading but an inevitable difficulty arises in trying to decide which definition of realism to use: the client's, the counsellor's—or that of the man who made up the theory.

The "needs" people tell us that a career, occupation or job fills needs. These include needs for recognition, praise, affection, mastery, achievement, domination, socialization, and self expression. This is, at least, a step beyond the idea that man works only for money.

Most of these theories are "one shot" explanations—a person takes a job to serve a purpose and he is ready for life: no more worry, no more change, and a gold watch at 65.

Contrasted to these direct explanations are the more complex ones of the developmentalists—Ginsberg, Super and, I think, Tiedeman have seen career theory as developing in each individual as he matures. Thus a montage of career development would contain such flashes as "exploratory phase," "tentative phase," "fantasy phase," "establishment," "maintenance," and "decline."

Here the person is seen as changing his career outlook as he changes personally or develops. The analogy is very obviously to physical, sexual, and mental development.

Both implicit and explicit in these developmental theories one very important concept appears: there is no one single "right" career choice for each person. If it were possible to measure satisfaction and happiness, it is certain that there are dozens if not hundreds of separate jobs, occupations, or careers into which any one person could fit, given certain attitudes, skills, and rewards.

It is obvious that there are very few people for whom there is just one place to live, one college to attend, one job to hold or one woman to marry. It's a bit shattering to the young student or the romanticist, perhaps, but I believe that awareness of this immense versatility of the capabilities of an individual is a very big step towards vocational maturity.

In saying this I am not rejecting all or any of the other theories and ideas. There are too many people who do appear to fit into occupations solely because of economic or psychological needs or because their fathers were there before them so that none can be discarded safely yet!

Indeed there is some common factor in all the theories that are worth looking at. There appears to be agreement that people and occupations vary, that the choice of a job may help or hinder satisfaction, that choices are affected by external facts and internal needs, and that a counsellor may sometimes help a person make a better job choice than he would alone. (The fact that a counsellor may help a client make a complete mess of his career is overlooked by the theorists, but I add it and take responsibility for it, in the interests of truth.)

Let us accept the fact that one person can be satisfied with many different jobs. The fact remains that he still must choose one of these jobs to begin his career and will probably follow this choice with 2, 3, 4 or dozens more jobs in some order. How does he make his choices? How do you, as his counsellor, account for these choices?

Does such a thing as a career exist? It has been suggested that a career only exists in the minds of the observer and not in the mind of the person concerned. This is quite probably true. Career descriptions, both famous or notorious, tend to be the result of that nemesis of all sociological and educational study "*ex post facto research*"—we begin with the end result and then seek to explain this result by examining possible causes. Our findings are often colored by the known result. We look at the career of a hockey player and say:

"Oh yes, born in Saskatchewan, moved to Alberta, played for Drumheller, quit school at 15, worked in the coal mines between seasons and ate Robin Hood Oats. Aha! a pattern! So that's how it's done."

Thus is born a theory—find another player with the same background and you have a law.

But does the hockey player see it this way as he lives out his career? He may be firmly convinced that his success in the N.H.L. was due to the sole, single fact that he met a girl in Lethbridge who arranged an introduction with a hockey scout for the Detroit Red Wings. Any boy who met that girl would have had the same chance. Who is correct?

Did the Prime Minister see himself as Prime Minister when he began to look for a job? If not, when did he decide—or is his occupation simply the result of a series of jobs and experiences? I think the latter is true. Thus his career pattern is only what we see looking back. It does not exist as a career until it is complete.

So let's forget career planning and look at *occupations*. An occupation, we are told, describes a general area of endeavor, such as teaching, engineering, farming, fishing or soldiering. But how does our client see his personal occupation choice? It may exist as a formal classification, but I wonder how often he is conscious of it—conscious I mean to the point of strong identity or pride.

He is more likely, I think, be he doctor, fisherman, or clerk, to look at his occupation as the specific job he is doing today. He doesn't wonder how he chose it or whether its description fits exactly that which will be published in the Ministry of Manpower's new Dictionary of Occupations or whether it is meaningful or trivial. The same job can mean different things to different people.

Two teachers are teaching science in adjacent rooms in a large high school in Montréal. Each is 25 years old and married. One is the son of a Sicilian immigrant. He left school at 14 to help support mother and nine others. He went to night school to finish high school, obtained his B.Sc. from evening college, and did summer-session teacher training. To him teaching is the ultimate! A profession—more money in 10 months than father earned in 2 years—*idol of the community*—mother's pride! This teacher can't miss. For him it is the golden staircase. There is nowhere to go but up!

The fellow next door is a W.A.S.P., youngest son of a successful surgeon. His two older brothers are engineers, one of them designed two Expo pavilions. Youngest son scraped through high school, was pushed into premed by mummy, failed, but got a pass B.Sc., and drifted into Education. He finds himself reasonably contented handling students, but is not ambitious, because he can never achieve the goals others have set for him. His family are not quite comfortable when he is around. He sees teaching as easy, but a second- or third-rate profession. The future? Who cares?

Now these two men are doing the same job and quite possibly getting the same results. In the coded occupational dictionary they are identical.

Another example—two production bench workers. One is a failed technical-school student who is fed up with his dirty, tedious assembly job, his hangovers, and with himself. Yet he might well produce as much and be

classified occupationally the same as a lad from the Gaspé coast who has never earned more than \$1,000 a year in his life and who thinks this clean, warm, sheltered, highly paid job is just for him. He's never been happier or richer and his wife thinks he is a superman for having moved into the city and made good.

Which of these two men ends up an alcoholic and loses his job; which one retrains, becomes foreman, and retires in 30 years to be a contented grandfather?

The vocational development of these individuals is not based on scientific law but on their perceptions of the job they do. Let us, then, begin looking at common perceptions rather than occupations and we might see a valid theory emerge. The Sicilian teacher and Gaspé bench worker have more in common with each other than with their work mates. Their careers are more likely to be the same in terms of satisfaction and success. So I am drawn to the conclusion that vocational theory, occupational development, whatever you choose to call it is *not* an objective, quantitative, measurable entity in terms of jobs and occupations. In Parsons' theory of career counselling, comparisons of this kind can exist only if all other things are equal. Put job hunters in a social, economic, racial, religious, and moral vacuum and seek a theory if you wish. I live in a province where no Hindu, Moslem, atheist, or other non-Catholic, non-Protestant, non-Jewish teacher can teach in the public schools. In our north is a frontier economy where an incompetent white man may be paid five times as much as a competent Eskimo for driving an identical tractor.

So what do we measure? If anything, it must be perceptions. What do job-holders perceive their roles, their contributions, and their places in society to be? Show me identical job perception and I'll show you identical career patterns. (The author is, at present (1968-69) engaged in a research project measuring the job perceptions of a group of workers in isolated Arctic mining camps. Results of this study will be available in 1969.)

But where is this taking us? Not, certainly, to the refinements of the Strong or Kuder inventories based on the backgrounds of job-holders of another generation, nor to classification by the Dictionary of Occupations. Rather we are now approaching true counselling as differentiated from vocational counselling, adjustment counselling, problem counselling, or others.

We must seek to find and interpret the perceptions of the client to himself and not fit him into a pre-formed manual of jobs. The counsellor will help the client project himself into a *life pattern*, not a job or career. He will use techniques of self appraisal, self knowledge and self understanding. If the client should become concerned with a specific job or occupation the counsellor will then become concerned.

The relationship between counsellor and client will become an encounter, a personal interaction that can bring self realization and awareness to the client. The counsellor can forget his Ginzberg, his Super, his Tiedeman and can concentrate on *being the client*.

This all sounds beautifully existential and a long way from vocational development theory. It is! But may I point out that this appears to be the direction that guidance and counselling, even vocational counselling, is taking. In the excellent book, *Guidelines for Guidance* (1966) edited by

Carlton Beck, which contains 50 readings in modern guidance philosophy, only 2 of the readings deal with vocational or career development.

It would appear that our wonderful "World of Work" doesn't exist in the perceptions of our clients. They may well see jobs, occupations, and careers not as part of the country's wealth but only as a small segment of the client's self. Our job as counsellors is to help each client understand this small segment. It is a big job.

#### REFERENCE

Beck, C. E. (Ed.) *Guidelines for guidance*. Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1966.

### QUELQUES PENSEES SUR L'AVENIR PROFESSIONNEL

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Dans son article, Cram critique les théories existant sur l'avenir professionnel parce que basées sur des données objectives ou empiriques qui ignorent et la personnalité et le monde où vit la clientèle.

L'auteur cite bon nombre d'exemples qui prouvent ses avancés quant à la nécessité d'une théorie qui tiendrait compte des sentiments de la clientèle en ce qui a trait à l'ouvrage, à l'emploi et aux carrières.

On devrait, selon l'auteur, se mettre à la recherche d'une méthode qui assouplirait la relation entre un counselling bien personnalisé et les données inflexibles du monde du travail.