

Existing career theories cannot account for modern career paths



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In today's times it is agreed that careers are continuously changing and are adapting to the fast pacing world of work. Along with the change there is a consensus on the direction of that change (Collin & Watts, 1996). The traditional theories and practice of work have given birth to new modern careers, careers that are liberating and all-encompassing - a blended use of knowledge and skills while integrating professional and personal life.

Indeed, it is curious that although contemporary definitions of career might seem to lend themselves to diverse approaches, some authors have argued that traditional methods still prevail (Collin & Young, 2000).

Succession planning has become a vital part of career development for the people facing the obstacles of the 21st century. The start of the new millennium has brought a rapidly changing world of work that has brought about a need for all modern workers to constantly re-evaluate their careers and to create job opportunities that would be independent of any specific organization. Researchers have suggested that the climb up the corporate ladder is no longer the reality for most U. S. workers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Peterson & Krumboltz, 1999; Sullivan, Carden, & Martin 1998).

Most Americans now change jobs every four-and-one-half-years (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

Originally, careers were always looked at in the light of expanding within one or two firms which was a linear progression through the career stages.

Organizations defined success in terms of promotions, increments, perks etc.

Most organizations supported the hierarchical structure which now has

changed to a great degree. Firms have downsized to become more flexible

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to respond to increasing global competition. Many firms now outsource their functions along with hiring many part-time workers. This has changed organizations and its workforce. People who choose to work outside the traditional career models, who are said to have 'boundary-less careers' (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Ebby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003; Marler, Barringer, & Milkovich, 2002) are becoming the norm rather than the exception.

Boundary-less careers are defined as "... a sequence of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of a single employment setting" (Defillippi & Arthur, 1996, p. 116). These changes in the workplace have created practices that could hinder the development of career for example; global outsourcing, early retirements, company downsizing etc (Brown, 1997; Ebby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003; Marler, Barringer, & Milkovich, 2002).

This essay is based on the generation of in-depth careers while considering two career theories: Donald super and john Holland. With the aim of effectively evaluating Super's and Holland's theory in terms of its relevance to modern careers this essay will discuss the foundations of the theories, the relevant research pertaining to the theories and a personal reflection of the above.

Career theories are usually based on circumstances such as social, economic and environmental. The modern concept of career is a product of the industrial age (Watts, 1996). Traditionally, organizations would structure people's career paths and lives. During these times, work was concentrated in employment, learning was concentrated in education and education gave way to employment. Career counseling was a concept introduced to the education systems to help individuals transit from one sector (education) to <https://assignbuster.com/existing-career-theories-cannot-account-for-modern-career-paths/>

another. Continuous improvement in career was viewed as a lifelong process. Donald Super in 1953 shed light on this idea and proposed a theory. Others like Roe (1956) stressed on childhood experiences leading to people choosing certain professions. Holland in 1956 expanded on the psychology of personality in-relation to career development and career choice.

These two theories in particular and many others have included psychological and social aspects to the understanding of the career choices people make. Career theories look at the complexity of career choice, adjustment and development.

Donald Super's theory is one of the most well-known career development theories. He worked on this from 1953 to 1996. His theory focuses on the construction of career development concerns during a person's life. Super draws attention to how people go through many stages in life trying to develop a vocational identity. In developing a vocational identity one is constantly exploring, making career choices, entering occupations, changing career fields and adjusting to work. Super's stages work around universal life stages that most people go through in our societies. Super has defined these stages by age but later acknowledged these stages are not necessarily age-related. He stressed on the point that people go through these stages to develop a self-concept which is translated into occupational terms. This self-concept is usually modified, clarified and formed with time. Individuals may go through some stages a few times or may find themselves deposited in a certain stage for a very long period of time. In one of his many works on career theories Super defined the concept of vocational maturity which may not relate to the importance of chronological age but time perspective is <https://assignbuster.com/existing-career-theories-cannot-account-for-modern-career-paths/>

given importance as Super (1990, p 197) states " It has always seemed important to maintain three time perspectives: the past, from which one has come; the present, in which one currently functions; and the future, toward which one is moving. All three are of indisputable importance, for the past shapes the present and the present is the basis for the future. But if I were forced to declare a preference in orientation to time, it would be for the future - even after more than fifty years of work experience.

Super stages are as follows: Growth-early childhood (4-14) where the child learns while growing; Exploration- late adolescence (15-24) newly acquired independence leading to openness to new ideas and concepts but uncertain about one's abilities; Establishment (25-44) - during this stage people prove their competence to their surrounding relationships, start to question commitments and make serious career choices in terms of leaving initial career, as the biological clock is ticking people want to settle down sometimes with a sense of dissatisfaction; Maintenance (45-65) - this stage could be a real turning point for certain people as they might feel tired of what they are doing. Some people might question initial commitments and think if this is all life has to offer and begin to find something new to learn and enhance their personal growth. Certain people prefer sticking to what they are suppose to be and continue to maintain their reputation and name. One might mentor others as they feel established and settled. This stage could be a period a calm and inner development for some people. Some people realize that time is finite and may start giving relationships more importance hence start disengaging from work; Lastly, Disengagement (65+) - this stage deals with preparing for retirement. Energies begin to die out and

people direct their interests elsewhere like part-time employment or volunteer opportunities. Many people in this stage choose to travel more or spend time with family and friends.

Many psychometric/vocational tests have been designed like the Career Development Inventory (CDI), Work Values Inventory (WVI) and the Adult Career Concerns Inventory (ACCI). Super's theory has generated a vast amount of research. Super's theory has been praised and criticized by others and him. His theory has been regarded as being systematic, clear, well organized, applicable and practically supported (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Adults may feel different concerns at a given time regardless of career stage. With regard to cross-cultural applicability and universality Savickas (1997) criticized by saying Super's theory is questionable. Super's concept of recycling through phases can also be questioned. The order of the stages is changing with exploration often taking place after establishment.

Establishment itself is being reduced due to people settling down much later in life. Maintenance has drastically fallen with establishment being pushed into later years, low security and decreasing loyalty to organizations which is proved by the frequency with which people switch jobs/organizations.

Salomone (1996) in his work stated that all transitions cannot included phases of establishment, maintenance and decline.

In 1992 John Holland expanded his trait factory theory by putting people in six personality types: Realistic, Social, Conventional, Investigative, Artistic and Enterprising. According to Holland, people fall into either one of the categories where they can fit best with their environment to best use their abilities, values, attitudes and skills. He explained his theory by using a <https://assignbuster.com/existing-career-theories-cannot-account-for-modern-career-paths/>

hexagon model to help define these categories. A person would be more inclined towards any three sections which can help when making career choices. Holland (1992, 1997) describes the concept of social, environmental and biological factors affecting people's preferences for particular activities. These preferred activities soon become interests which develop into competencies. Holland himself has revised his theory and there have been many psychometric assessment tools developed on the basis of Holland's theory. One example of such tools is the Self-Directed Search (SDS) which evaluates the six personality types defined by Holland. These types in the hexagonal model are then matched with suitable professions considering the possible relationships between and within the individual and the environment. Types that are next to each other on the model have more in common than the ones that are opposite. People whose profile suggests their types are opposite would find difficulty finding jobs/professions that cover all aspects of their personality. The focal point of Holland's findings is that people who have similar personalities would avail similar employment opportunities.

Holland's theory has been under scrutiny for many researchers. Spokane in 1996 put forward important concepts of Holland's theory; it can be better understood by four indicators. " Congruence, which is the degree of fit between an individual's personality and the type of work environment the person is currently in or anticipates entering. Consistency, which is the measure of internal coherence of an individual's type score. Differentiation, which is the measure of crystallization of interests and provides information about the relative definition of types in an individual's profile. Identity, which

is the measure of the degree of clarity of the picture of one's goals, interests, and talents (Spokane, 1996). Many academics have researched Holland's theory critically and have reviewed various criticisms. Holland's theory lacks the attention given to the complexity of individual differences in many professions. Brow and Isaacson (1993) mention this point in their study. The theory does not effectively take into account women, ethnicity, racial, cultural and other groups. A study conducted by Watson, Stead & Schonevegel in 1998 on black South African teenagers found that Holland's hexagon does not sufficiently account for the structure of their interests. Various cultures especially of the developing countries do not promote much freedom in women's careers. When speaking of culture, Cruza-Guet and Spokane (2005) reasoned that "definitive conclusions maybe some years away" (p. 34). Holland's theory lacks insight into the variables that could affect a person's preference. Variables like socio-economic status or educational awareness could affect a person's career choice. Career choice is a process of the relationships between an individual's affecting variables and traits (Brown 1990 p. 346). Not much emphasis is given on time frames and causes of the career choice. Holland's theory ignores the developmental process that leads to people making certain choices (Zunker, 1994 p. 49). Holland's theory works on psychological schemas and is popular in career counseling as it is intuitive and less expensive. This theory effectively matches people to various occupations but does not cater to the different complexities in career development and the life changes that happen over time. This approach deals with what is best for a person rather than why hence it is a momentary approach compared to Super which stretches career development over an individual's lifetime. Although, there may be many

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differences between these two theories there are still certain points on which they agree. Holland(1992) claimed that " the reciprocal interactions of persons and successive jobs usually leads to a series of success and satisfaction cycles'(p54). This phrase is in sync with Super's career development theory. Both these traditional theorist have given A LOT to the occupational realm of psychology. Despite weaknesses these two theories are the most popular. Brown (1990) says the Super's theory " occupies stage centre, along with Holland's thinking. There seems to be no reason to doubt that it will continue to be of considerable importance in the future'.

With the job market being extremely competitive there is a need to guide and assist people to help deal with various professional challenges. As there has been a great change in the world of work as businesses have become global. This change and everyone fighting towards having a competitive edge has brought about a great change in careers and mostly how people view their careers. Modern careers are predicted to be scrutinized and decisions are made regarding learning and work several times in a person's life. Jarvis (2002) in his article states " succession of jobs in a number of industries during their work lives." The change has given birth to various theories: the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) of Lent, Hackett and Brown; Hansen's integrative life planning theory (ILP); Peterson and Other's cognitive information processing approach (CIP) and the post-modern approaches (Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey 2002, 70-92). As time has progressed the need for career counseling has emerged. Self-affirmation and facilitating career decision-making has become key as compared to the traditional approaches, which relied on psychometrics and finding the " best fit". Brott

(2004, 189) and Savickas (1993, 209) addressed the need for personal meaning given to career. Today's careers focus on personal gain more than monetary gains. Love, work and play can be considered to be extremely important in a person's life. Work being one of the important key things one's image of their career has to be meaningful and rewarding to achieve happiness. In order to achieve this happiness people seek they experience many changes in their career paths. Today's careers are referred to as 'boundryless' or 'protean' careers as they are limitless to one's personal preferences, goals and interests. These days' organizations have changed their structures to being more flexible, have started recruiting people on a part-time basis, have moved from having a hierarchical industrial approach to skill enhancing institutions. According to Michelle L. Casto (<http://www.quintcareers.com/>), the norms of the business world are changing and career transitions have become extremely common due to the frequently changing organizations and industries. He feels that the pressures are increasing the line between a person's professional and life has become blurred.

My career is in its infancy. Coming from a developing country with less opportunity for women to grow it is hard to imagine having a dynamic career path. Having interned for a management consultancy firm I have taken my first steps to being a management consultant. Due to the demands of our fast-paced lives and jobs, one has to start planning their career fairly soon. Agreeing with Super's recycling between stages and Holland's trait fit I have chosen a career path that leads to a profession that supports social personality types. Today's careers and jobs demand more meaning from

work as 'career success' is now measured by personal satisfaction rather than money. The increase of technological usage has lead people to learn various programs to cope with the job demands. Aiming to be a professional one day taking courses to learn basic technological knowledge is one of my first steps. With the objective of being a professional my career path has many goals to achieve. In order to reach these goals I might have to try on various roles, jobs and industries. The need to network is essential in the field of occupational psychology as one has to self-market themselves all the time. I plan to have a greater insight into the attitudes and behaviors of workers to determine the most effective way of managing them and various other issues that emerge in a worker's professional life. One of my focal concerns is to deal with employee job satisfaction as there is a definite link between satisfaction and worker productivity. Job satisfaction appears to be negatively correlated to absenteeism, lack of motivation and turnover rate; an issue faced by many companies. It can be agreed that employers have an ethical responsibility to provide their employees with jobs that are challenging, intrinsically rewarding and satisfying.

I have worked for more than six months and during this experience I've learned these issues are faced by almost all organizations, as there is an extreme dearth of consultants in our country.

Most organizational consultants have a say in decisions like whom to hire and who shall be fit for what job. In the next five years, I hope to see myself in a thriving organization where a professional like me can enhance the motivational levels and progress of its employees.

During my work experience, I had the opportunity to organize three assessment centers and facilitate several workshops. Assessment centers for GlaxoSmithKline Pakistan were extremely challenging as they required responsibility, skill and knowledge. The assessment centers were designed to be a loyalty enhancing learning experience for all candidates. I designed a few engaging simulation exercises that mirrored the work environment. I was in charge of selecting the testing materials e. g. intelligence test, leadership test and the ethics test. My main focus was to achieve results that make a difference, reflecting GlaxoSmithKline's challenges and operating methods. The session also included fragments of coaching and development planning that targeted skill development, enhancing leadership effectiveness and recommendations for mentoring.

I constructed observation forms for the assessor's and a system for measuring the candidates personal strengths, weaknesses, development areas, behavior patterns, moral reasoning, problem solving skills and employee performance. This system helped organize the written personalized reports for every candidate, which highlighted accomplishments, performance, development areas, strengths etc. I have chosen a master's program that would equip me with the skill and knowledge it requires to be an independent consultant and reach my personal and professional objectives. With this of stream work with I aim to work with a diverse range of employees which would enhance my work skills and productivity.

The traditional career theories seem to define career paths in fragments only affected by age and life-roles. Belonging to an Asian culture, there are many <https://assignbuster.com/existing-career-theories-cannot-account-for-modern-career-paths/>

other variables that influence career choices. Super and Holland's theories help give insight into what career opportunities are possible but as any theory they have their drawbacks. Although, it is to be noticed that these researchers have given birth to much critique and new concepts. Modern career theories seem to explain today's career paths as career path destinations have changed. Today's career options encourages everyone towards employment while giving them the freedom to choose from numerous tasks, jobs and projects. In disagreement with traditional career theories mentioned above 21st century careers allow flexibility and cater to people with disabilities i. e, working from home or telecommunicating. People have more power to express themselves and shape their careers revolving around their values and interests. No one theory can encompass all aspects of career choice and decision-making. One has to take concepts from various theories to see what fits to them best. Bjorklung & Bee (2008) in their book *The Journey to Adulthood* (6th Ed.) say that it is certain that no one theory can effectively explain all aspects of the complex process of career decision making and development.

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