**Theoretical Models of Career Decision Making**

Why does an individual choose a particular career path? To what extent is career choice influenced by others? What social factors are involved in career decision-making? The answers to these and other questions have challenged many writers over the past century and several theories have been developed.

**Person-Environment Fit (P: E Fit) Theories**

Every person has a unique set of interests and skills: different jobs (and specialties) have different requirements for skills and personalities. If a person with particular interests and skills can be found a job with requirements that fit those interests and needs his skills, it would seem likely that the individual would well matched to the occupation. Person: environment fit theories are essentially a career matching approach to career’s guidance. Frank Parsons described this process when establishing a vocational guidance agency in Boston, Massachusetts (Parsons 1909).

This approach was also used by Roger (1952), who used a series of questions (around areas as diverse as intelligence, attainments and domestic circumstances) to guide the interviews he held with clients seeking careers advice. His ‘Seven Point Plan’ was widely used in the 1950s to provide school leavers with career guidance.

John Holland (1985) further developed P: E Fit theories. Holland concentrated on the differences between individuals, rather than their similarities. He defines six types of individual (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional) and recognises that these types will have different occupational interests.

Perhaps the most widely used P:E Fit tool for doctors is Sci 59, a psychometric tool which looks at skills and attributes needed for the various medical specialties and matches them to an individual’s work preferences. Further details and access to the test (for members) is available on the BMA website:

www.bma.org.uk/advice/career/applying-for-training/psychometric-test

**Developmental Career Theories (DCTs)**

Developmental theories of career choice recognise that choosing and adjusting to work is a continuous process, and use psychological concepts to explain processes of career development. Donald Super is widely associated with the developmental approach to career guidance (Super 1957). He describes an individual passing through five ‘life-stages’ (growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and decline) as his career progresses. Super states that as a person grows, he develops an idea of himself, his ‘self-concept’, which can be used by the individual to match the picture he has developed of himself against the picture he holds of a person in an occupation.

**Structural Theories**

Structural theories attempt to explain careers and career choices in sociological terms: the social position of an individual and his family background will influence opportunities that are open to him (Bowles & Gintis 1976). Roberts (1968) states that social stratification is an important determinant of career and argues that career guidance is of limited value when social and structural forces play such an important role.

**Community Interaction Theories**

Community interaction theories describe the influence of both psychological and sociological factors on career decision-making.

In his Community Interaction Theory, Law (1981) describes how the community in which an individual lives and works can motivate him to a particular career goal, or indeed how it can fail to do so. The community in this context includes all the people that a person interacts with: partners, family, friends, colleagues and others. We listen to and take advice from such people all the time: their advice is important to us, and it matters. Trying to make important career decisions without the input of such important influences can be difficult and make any career decisions more difficult too.

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