

Professional career as a lifelong development process

Considering the current importance of lifelong learning in post-industrial society, the demand for lifelong career guidance seems extremely justified (see, among others, "Memorandum on Lifelong Learning" of the EU Commission v. Oct. 2000, ELGPN 2013 and 2015). Thus, developmental career theories gain importance, especially when they refer to the whole professional life. Donald E. Super, the main representative of this direction, made it clear that his developmental approach is not a self-contained theory but combines aspects of developmental, differential, social and personality psychology; the bracket is formed by self-concept theory and learning theory (cf. Super, 1994, p. 215).

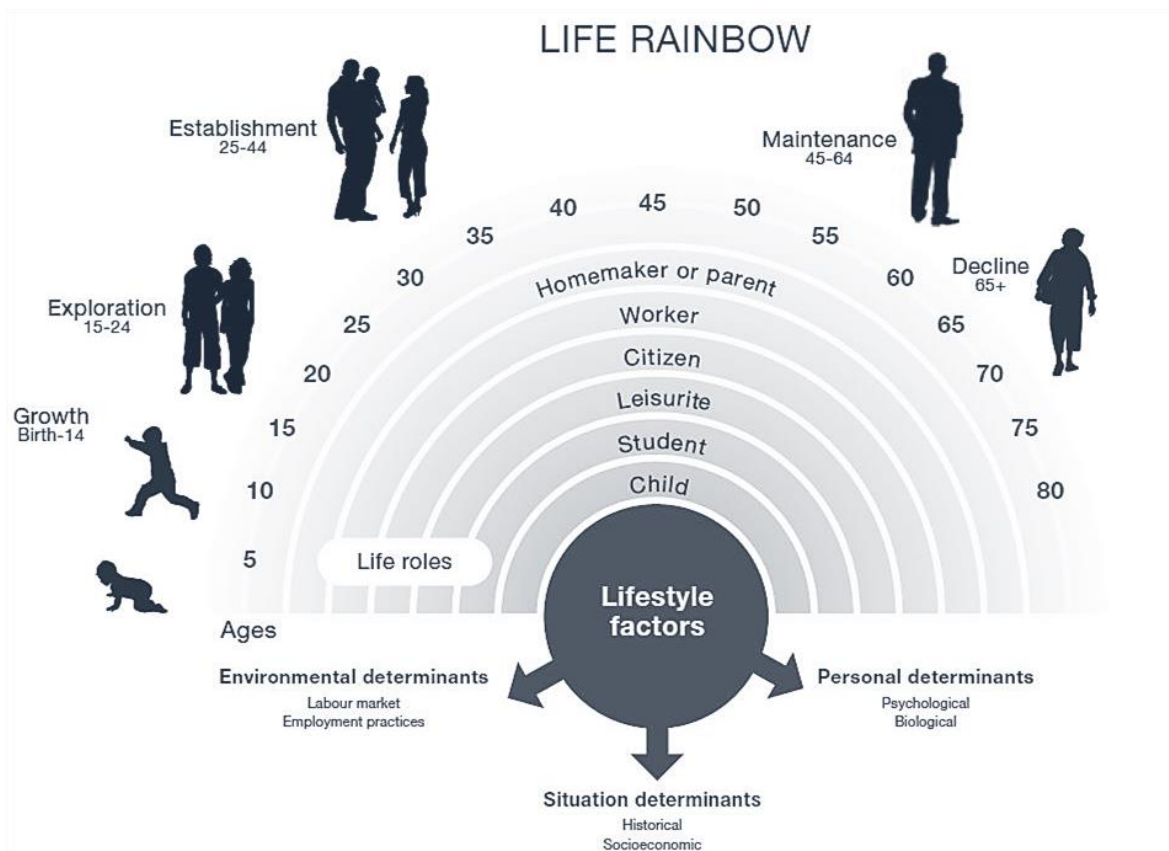


Figure 1: Life Rainbow according to Super. Source: <https://danniausten.blogspot.com/2016/03/super-life-career-rain-bow.html>; colours adapted.

Nevertheless, it is an independent theoretical approach that synthesises the professional life spaces and roles in a model, the 'Life-Career Rainbow'. The stages of life 'growth' are arranged like a rainbow: childhood up to the age of 14, 'exploration': Adolescence 14-25, 'Establishment': 25-45, 'Maintenance': 45-65, 'Disengagement': over 65. Depending on these stages are changes in the areas of life or roles as a child, pupil and student, as a private person, as a citizen, as a professional, as a family member.

Super summarises his theory of occupational development in 15 basic theses (cf. Super 1996, p. 123; Holling et al., 2000, p. 4):

1. People differ in terms of their abilities, needs, interests, values and self-concepts.
2. Therefore, everyone is suitable for a range of professions.
3. Every profession has a characteristic requirement profile (pattern) in terms of skills and personality traits, albeit with a certain tolerance range.
4. Occupational preferences and skills change over time, as does the person's work and living environment. As a result of social learning, the self-concept also continues to develop, but with increasing stabilisation from late adolescence to mature age. This results in a certain continuity of choice and adaptation.
5. This process of change takes place as a consequence of the life stages listed above (maxi-cycle). During the transitions of these stages or when dealing with special career events, however, these stages (steps) must also be passed through as a mini-cycle.
6. The individual career pattern (level reached, sequence and duration of activities) is determined by socio-economic background, talents, education, personality traits (interests, values, self-concept) and the range of career opportunities.
7. Career success depends on the readiness to cope with the developmental tasks that the individual is confronted with due to his biological and social development and societal expectations at the respective developmental stages. This readiness is called 'career maturity'.
8. Vocational maturity as a psychosocial construct is difficult to operationalise. As a tool, it could be determined by comparing the individual's cognitive and affective resources to solve a task with the objective requirements necessary to do so.
9. It is possible to influence the development of career maturity in the individual stages of life by encouraging the development and testing of skills, interests and self-concept.

10. Professional development essentially means the formation and implementation of a person's professional self-concept.
11. Self-concept emerges from the interaction of aptitudes, opportunities to observe and play different roles, and the extent to which the results of these trial role-takings are positively reinforced by key caregivers.
12. Synthesis and compromise between the individual and social factors, between self-concepts and reality, are thus based on tentative role-taking and learning through feedback.
13. Job and life satisfaction depend on the opportunities an individual has to live according to his or her talents, interests, personality traits and self-concepts.
14. The extent of individual job satisfaction is proportional to the opportunity to contribute to one's own self-concepts.
15. For most people, profession and work are the main orientation fields of their personality orientation.

Occupational maturity marks the life course as an occupational maximum cycle; it thus refers to the longitudinal view. Occupational maturity is understood as the affective and cognitive readiness to cope with the developmental tasks that the individual is confronted with at the respective stages of development due to his or her development and societal expectations (cf. Super, 1994, p. 228).

The cross-sectional view refers to how the individual copes with the different role requirements in the respective life span. In addition to the occupational role, this primarily concerns the role in partnership and family, in school and education, in leisure time and in society. Depending on the phase in the life span - growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance or withdrawal - different challenges arise due to the respective specific role interaction. These must be taken into account in lifelong career guidance.

In order to be able to describe the process of choosing and taking on roles, especially occupational roles, Donald Super introduces the constructs 'occupational identity' and 'occupational self-concept'. With their help, the 'fit' of personality traits and occupational requirements in terms of skills and interests can be determined. Occupational identity refers to a person's objective view of his or her occupational goals, interests and talents. Occupational self-concept, on the other hand, focuses on the subjective weighting of perceived skills, interests and values. A good 'fit' of professional identity and professional self-concept results in professional success, satisfaction and career stability.



Career guidance based on Donald Super's theory focuses particularly on the development of career maturity, which consists of various components (cf. Brown, 2007, p. 54):

- Active career planning
- Exploration of professional opportunities (career exploration)
- Active professional decision-making behaviour
- Extensive information activities related to the world of work (world of work information)
- Knowledge of preferred occupations
- Career orientation as a comprehensive measure of career readiness.



Finally, the developmental tasks in longitudinal and cross-sectional perspectives (linking maxi-cycle and mini-cycle) will be presented in tabular form (cf. Super 1996, p. 136; Super, 1994, p. 232).

Life stage	Adolescence 14-25 years	Early adulthood 25-45 years	Middle adulthood 45-65 years	Late adulthood over 65 years
Growth	Development of a realistic self-concept	Learning to get along with others	Accepting one's own limitations	Developing non-professional roles
Exploration	Getting to know expanded possibilities for action	Finding out the possibility of pursuing the desired occupation	Identify new professional challenges	Finding an appropriate living space for old age
Establishment	Entering the chosen profession	Getting a permanent foothold in the professional position	Develop new competencies	Realise things you have always wanted to do
Maintenance	Critical review of current career choices	Securing the professional position	Maintaining a professional position in competition	Retreat to what gives pleasure
Retreat, Dismantling	Spend less time on hobbies	Limit sporting activities	Concentrate on the essentials	Reduce working time

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