

## A constructivist view on professional development

M. Savickas (2002, p. 149) takes D. Super's approach further, referring to the latter's statement that the theory of the self-concept is better named as a theory of personal constructs. This means that individual career development is determined less by inner maturation processes than by adaptations to environmental conditions: Career paths do not unfold, they are constructed.

Constructivist theory consists of the following 16 tenets:

1. Social and institutional structures shape the individual life course through social role requirements.
2. The job role is central to shaping the personality of most people.
3. The individual occupational behaviour pattern (status aspiration, duration of activity, mobility) is determined by the socio-economic status of the parents, education, talents, self-concept and use of the opportunities offered.
4. People differ in their job-related characteristics, skills, personality traits and self-concepts.
5. Each profession requires specific characteristics but with sufficient individual development opportunities.
6. People are suitable for a wide range of professions.
7. Career success depends on the extent to which individuals find adequate development opportunities for their most important career-related traits.
8. Job satisfaction is proportional to the extent to which the job-related self-concept can be realised.
9. The process of career construction essentially consists of the development and implementation of the vocational self-concept in the vocational roles. The self-concept develops through the interaction of aptitudes, physical conditions, opportunities to observe and perform different roles, and the extent to which the outcomes of this role behaviour meet with the approval of key reference persons.
10. Although the occupational self-concept is increasingly consolidated, it is subject to change over time, just like occupational preferences, depending on experiences in different life contexts.
11. The process of professional change can be characterised by the maxi-cycle of life phases: Growth, Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance, and Retreat.
12. The mini-cycle of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and withdrawal takes place during the transition from one professional phase of life to the next.
13. Occupational maturity is a psycho-social construct that characterises the individual's level of occupational development on the continuum of occupational life stages.
14. Occupational adaptability is a psychological construct that characterises the individual willingness and ability to cope with current and future occupational development tasks.
15. Career construction is triggered by professional development tasks and determined by the responses to these tasks.



16. Career construction can be promoted at every stage of life through appropriate presentation of developmental tasks, exercises to strengthen adaptability and help in evaluating the self-concept.

Propositions 1-3 refer to the framework conditions of development, propositions 4-10 to the professional self-concept and propositions 11-16 to the developmental tasks as a link in career construction (cf. Savickas, 2002, p. 157; Brown, 2007, pp. 73, 77, 444; Niles, Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005, p.33; 321; Herr, Cramer, Niles, 2004, pp. 68, 164, 232; Gerstenmaier, 2014, p. 675).

The current academic discussion in the field of constructivist views is enriched by the "life-designing." approach, which combines the theories of self-constructing ("self-constructing") and career construction ("career construction") (cf. Savickas et al., 2009, 2011; Nota, Rossier (eds.), 2015).

Five assumptions characterise this "life-design" approach to career guidance:

1. The so-called "matching models" developed in the first third of the 20th century and still prevalent today, with the aim of optimally assigning a person to a profession on the basis of differentiated test procedures ("trait and factor"), are now obsolete. Rather, occupational identity is a complex dynamic process of mutual adaptation between the individual and his or her ecosystem. Professional identity is formed through self-organisation of the diverse experiences in daily life.
2. In the area of career information, career guidance must move away from the increasingly differentiated descriptions of individual occupations towards the provision of information strategies. On the one hand, occupations and working conditions are changing more and more rapidly, and on the other hand, there is a danger of "information overload" rather than a lack of information. What is needed now is a stronger orientation towards the decision-making heuristics of those seeking guidance.  
An important prerequisite for successful guidance in this sense is the ability to take a systemic view of the complex, interactive and dynamic processes between the individual and his or her reference persons or reference systems (cf. also Schiersmann et al., 2008, p. 15).
3. It is paradoxical that guidance is still based on simple causal models, although practice teaches otherwise.  
Thus, the "diagnosis - indication - prescription" procedure derived from medicine must be replaced for career guidance by iterative strategies of problem-solving. Guidance seekers and counsellors should shape the dynamics of life-designing over a longer period of interaction, including the client's reference systems.
4. The previous methods and instruments of career counselling force the counsellor to translate the subjective perceptions of reality of their clients into a technical language that is not understood by them. But instead of these abstract and invariant social or statistical norms, the linguistic and personally relevant frame of reference of the person seeking guidance should now be used.

Professional models and counselling methods must be aligned with the permanently evolving reconstruction of the client in his or her subjective and complex reality.

5. More than in the past, the evaluation procedures for the effectiveness of guidance must be adapted to the complex conditions. To this end, multivariate and process-oriented methods must be increasingly used. The main criticism is currently directed at the lack of empirically validated studies on the efficiency of career guidance.

As basic framework conditions for life-designing counselling, the authors emphasise

- the life-long function,
- the holistic approach, which takes into account self-construction in all role references, not only that of the professional role,
- the inclusion of the client's entire living environment (contextual),
- the concise character by reviewing the client's life story so far.

Only these preconditions enable the realisation of the central goals of life-designing counselling:

1. Strengthening the client's ability to adapt to changing developmental needs ("adaptability").
2. Reference to the client's past and present biography and self-construction ("narratability").
3. Strengthening the client's own activity in terms of developing new dimensions of personality, e.g. self-efficacy beliefs ("activity").
4. Raising awareness of the individual design processes and decisions in the client's life so that these connections can be used for future self-constructions ("intentionality").

The counselling model in the sense of life-designing comprises the following six steps:

- Step 1:** Client and counsellor define the problem together and identify the client's target expectations of the counselling.
- Step 2:** Client and counsellor explore how the client currently perceives and behaves in relation to their essential role requirements.
- Step 3:** Primarily through narrative methods, the client is enabled to redefine important life references and crystallise perspectives.
- Step 4:** The current problem is put in relation to the new perspectives. This step is successful when the client succeeds in synthesising the old and the anticipated new.
- Step 5:** Elaboration of an action plan and initiation of concrete steps, taking into account the client's environment and support options.
- Step 6:** Follow up on short-term and longer-term outcomes of the implementation process (Savickas et al., 2011).

Adaptability, in particular, as conceptualised by Savickas (2005), has been increasingly discussed in recent years. According to this, four attitudes are important for individuals to realise their self-concept in a profession: Future-oriented planning ("Concern"), professional decisiveness ("Control"), confidence as a professional self-efficacy expectation ("Confidence") and curiosity ("Curiosity").

According to Hirschi (2014a), studies have shown that these four factors are positively related to individual career development, for example, in the job search of the unemployed or in the transition from school to work. However, in his view, important components of success, such as social networks, are not taken into account in the concept of "adaptability".

In his own career resources model (Hirschi, 2012), he combines four decisive variables influencing career success: "Human resources" (especially professional knowledge and key competencies), "Social resources" (networks and mentors), "Psychological resources" (hope) and "Professional identity resources" (such as goal clarity and goal congruence).

In a study, Hirschi (2014b) found "[...] that hope is an important psychological resource for self-directed career management because hope is positively related to professional determination, planning and self-efficacy - as well as to life satisfaction and job satisfaction".

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