

## Social-cognitive career theory

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by Robert W. Lent (2013, p. 115) is based on A. Bandura's approach to the complex interaction between people and their environments. It is assumed that people are capable of self-direction to a certain extent and are able to deal with facilitating or hindering environmental influences accordingly. SCCT emphasises three important cognitive variables, namely self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations and personal goals.

- **Self-efficacy** is not a unified or comprehensive personality trait (such as self-esteem, with which it is often confused) but a dynamic view of oneself in relation to specific fields of action and activities.
- **Outcome expectations** are directed towards the consequences of an action and have been formed from a variety of previous learning experiences in similar situations.
- **Personal goals** can relate to the content or the quality standard of an action.

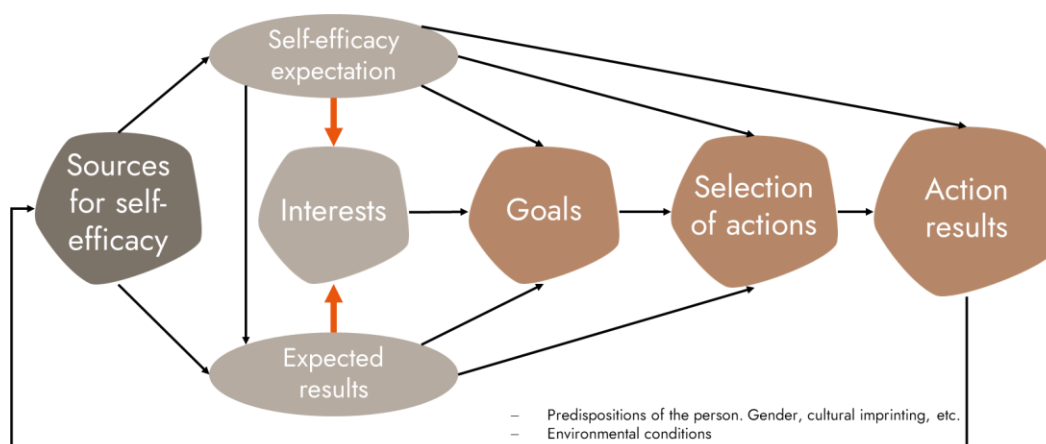


Figure 1: Social-cognitive career theory. Source: own representation, adapted from Lent (2013, p. 120).

SCCT assumes that the choice of performance goals depends on self-efficacy and outcome expectations but that, conversely, successful goal achievement also positively influences self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. Like the developmental approach, SCCT views career choice as part of a comprehensive process that is shaped by prior developments of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, interests and skills in different fields of action. It is postulated that self-efficacy and outcome beliefs together influence interests, which in turn are responsible for the choice of certain career goals. With positive reinforcement and low obstacles regarding the preferred career path, the probability of being able to translate interests into career goals increases.

For young people, from the SCCT's point of view, the ideal scenario for career choices and their realisation is as follows:

- Appreciation of their interests, values and talents;
- Understand the relationship of these characteristics to career options;
- clear objectives that appropriately link these characteristics to career paths;
- appropriate skills for making decisions, setting goals and realising them;
- an environment that supports these goals;
- basic personality traits that are generally important for decision-making processes and the realisation of life choices (e.g. reducing indecisiveness and strengthening stamina).

Lent (2013, p. 143) sums up his theoretical approach in the following key phrases:

- Interests are fundamentally reliable predictors of educational and occupational choices, but self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations are important influencing variables in determining direction.
- Counselling support that focuses on effectiveness is particularly helpful in cases where individual interest profiles are not well-developed, or experience is limited.
- The gradual building of positive experiences, combined with accompanying interpretation, can be useful for promoting self-efficacy and outcome expectations.
- Expectations of results can be positively influenced by valid information about such educational and career paths that correspond to the client's ideas.
- Content- and behaviour-related goals are important motivators for achievement levels and perseverance in education and work. It is therefore important to define them clearly and specifically (also with sub-goals) and to highlight their instrumental character for the individual approach to life.
- Professional development takes place in the context of social learning. Therefore, providing favourable conditions for development and reducing barriers (e.g. cultural restrictions or gender discrimination) is crucial.
- Job satisfaction and good performance can be promoted through measures that focus on self-efficacy and outcome expectations, as well as individual goals, in combination with favourable working conditions.

## References

Lent, R. W. (2013). Social Cognitive Career Theory. In: St. D. Brown/R. W. Lent (Eds.): Career Development and Counseling. Putting Theory and Research to Work. 2nd ed. Chapter 5, 115-146. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.