

The Future of Vocational Psychology: Aiming High

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This article presents the author's perspective about the strengths of vocational psychology, which includes its quantitative foundation, empirical evidence on the career concerns of college students, its theory-driven research, focus on vocational assessment, and its professional organization. Weaknesses of the field include its overemphasis on quantitative methodologies, its lack of focus on contextual factors, class-bound perceptions of work, and the parochial view that limits collaboration with and knowledge from other fields. Opportunities for growth exist in the areas of technology, governmental policies, and changes to the workforce. External threats to vocational psychology incorporate appropriation of vocational psychology by other subdisciplines and appropriation of the practice of vocational counseling by others. The author concludes this analysis with dreams of the future in vocational psychology in the areas of training, science, practice, and social advocacy. © 2001 Academic Press

It is always daunting to make firm projections about the future. The world has a way of changing in ways beyond our capability to envision. A decade ago, who would have guessed the way that the electronic communication would profoundly shape our work and lives? The authors who contributed to the 20th anniversary celebration of the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (Betz, 1991; Camp & Chartrand, 1991; Hackett, Lent, & Greenhaus, 1991; Harmon, 1991; London & Greller, 1991; Osipow, 1991) mentioned technology as a factor in shaping the future of the field, citing the greater statistical power we had available, and the increased need for technical skills in many jobs. However, none of the authors writing in 1990 could have anticipated that 10 years later e-mail would fundamentally alter the style and means of communication and that articles would be written nearly simultaneously by colleagues far apart geographically, submitted electronically, and read on-line. Who would have foreseen that the Internet would create both a more level playing field in accessing information and a digital divide between those who have that access and those who do not? Who would have predicted that the proliferation of cellular phones and personal digital assistants (e.g., Palm Pilots) would have changed how, where, and when people work, albeit at the cost of the blurring of boundaries between work, family, and leisure activities?

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However, although one runs the risk, as Tinsely (2000) put it, of sounding silly in retrospect, it is important to stop occasionally and examine where we want to go as a field. The 30th anniversary of the *Journal* provides a good milestone for that examination, as does the beginning of a new century. I am deeply honored to be able to join the other authors in contributing to this issue and feel much less intimidated knowing that I am only one of several voices and that Nancy Betz will very skillfully bring together the salient themes. The collective analyses of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in this special issue will help to identify areas for continued growth as well as areas in which we need to come together as a field to take advantage of opportunities and guard against threats.

Strengths

Vocational psychology is strongest in the areas in which we have spent the most time collectively, both in the methods we have most often employed and the populations that have interested us the most. The field traditionally has been characterized by a heavy emphasis on quantitative methods, stemming primarily from our evolution within an individual differences approach. We wanted to quantify the differences among people, typically using assessment tools that compared a client to a large group of people and then finding an appropriate environment for that individual. Dawis (1992) noted that the value of the differential approach was that it was “founded on systematic empirical research and not on unsystematic observation or armchair speculation” (p. 11).

For the past 50 years vocational psychologists searched for constructs that could be easily quantified so that they would be able to examine the relationships among those constructs. The goal was to better predict the outcome of career decisions and behavior. If we can understand how variables interact, then we begin to better understand the objective world, better understand and predict our clients' behavior in that world, and help them change their vocational behavior in that world. And, although there are critics of the assumptions of the logical positivism underlying this approach (e.g., Savickas, 1995; Young & Valach, 1996), the empirical rigor of this approach has allowed us to advance the science in vocational psychology.

Recent reviews of vocational literature by Arbona (2000), Brown and Krane (2000), Swanson and Gore (2000), Swanson and Parcover (2000), and Young and Chen (1999) indicate that we have the most concrete knowledge about the vocational choices of college-bound students before and after they graduate from high school. We have evidence about some vocational constructs such as career decision and indecision and the relationship among constructs such as satisfaction and congruence. We know that career interventions are best when clients are given opportunities to clarify their goals, given good occupational information, have good role models and support systems, and when they are given individualized assessment feedback. We also know about students' self-efficacy in making career decisions; the factors related to women's career decision making; and the relationships among vocational interests, self-efficacy, and personality.

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