

Chapter 13 - Ensuring Quality in Theory, Research, and Practice: *The Career Development Quarterly*

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As a field, it is imperative that vocational psychology continues to ensure high quality integration of theory, research, and practice. Perhaps no place is more important for this integration to occur from a scholarly perspective than in the journal *The Career Development Quarterly (CDQ)*. *CDQ* is the flagship journal of the National Career Development Association (NCDA). The journal publishes four issues a year, which are received by its entire membership consisting of thousands of career development professionals, most of whom are full time practitioners (NCDA, 2015). Accordingly, articles in *CDQ* have a high degree of visibility to individuals working in a variety of career-related professions. As a member of *CDQ*'s editorial board and as an author of eight articles in the journal in the last ten years, I will discuss ways in which *CDQ* attempts to maintain quality integration, and I will also discuss opportunities to make this integration stronger and more accessible.

The Relevance of Integrating Theory, Research, and Practice

Many journals in vocational psychology are dedicated primarily to research. Given the history and readership of *CDQ*, although most of the articles present research findings, the articles are much more likely have a practice focus. Since 1911, *CDQ* has gone

through various incarnations in terms of structure and title but has always maintained a strong connection to the American Counseling Association and its focus on counseling practice (Pope, 2008). This makes the desired structure and content of *CDQ* somewhat unique. From a foundational level, it is important that authors follow the guidelines of the American Psychological Association's publication manual for the formatting of papers submitted to the journal. Ten years ago, a journal editor told me a piece of wisdom that has stuck with me. He noted that he can reliably tell if the manuscript will be accepted or rejected based on how well the first three pages of a manuscript are formatted (title page, abstract page, and introduction first page). Having reviewed hundreds of manuscripts myself, I can attest to this statement. Because there are a strict set of guidelines on how a paper needs to be formatted, these become ingrained like a second language to journal reviewers. When papers are submitted that deviate from these guidelines, it raises a red flag around the authors' conscientiousness and attention to detail, which often spills over in the meat of the manuscript. Although this formatting point may seem rather minor when discussing larger issues around integration, proper formatting is the first hurdle manuscripts must overcome to make it to publication.

For papers that pass this first hurdle, the integration of theory, research, and practice is extremely

relevant and important. *CDQ* is no different from other vocational journals in that a strong article will be based in some established theory. If someone were to examine some of the most read and most cited empirical papers in *CDQ*, they would likely see that many of these papers start with a few introductory paragraphs and then flow into a section entitled “Theoretical Framework.” Here authors will ground their research ideas in a particular theory, which can legitimize hypotheses and give readers a frame for interpreting the results. As *CDQ* is a practice focused journal, strong papers will both present a theory and focus on its practical components. For example, when presenting social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), authors might discuss meta-analytic findings that support the empirical ideas within the theory (Sheu et al., 2010) while also discussing articles that showcase how constructs such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations can be developed and nurtured in career counseling (Brown & Lent, 1996).

Papers with a strong theoretical base are also often the strongest from a research perspective. Theory often allows for a coherent way of structuring variables that the research can build upon. Strong papers in *CDQ* will present research in a structured way using subheadings; detailing the participants, instruments, and procedure; and eventually presenting the results themselves. The results will document the types of analyses used to examine theory based hypotheses. The analyses will document whether these hypotheses were supported, and the discussion section will be used to elucidate why or why not support exists. Strong articles will use the results and ensuing discussion to build to a final section on practical implications. For articles in *CDQ*, the practical implications section will be substantially longer than in other journals and should be set up in the introduction. Specifically, authors will note in the introduction how the results are geared to inform practice and foreshadow an in-depth connection of research and practice that will occur in the practical implications sections. As is noted in the recently updated author guidelines, “Each manuscript should include implications for practice because *CDQ* is concerned with fostering career development through the design and use of career interventions” (p. 188, *CDQ*, 2016). The seamless connection of each of these three areas—theory, research, and practice—will substantially increase the value of the manuscript, especially in *CDQ*.

The Challenges in Integrating Theory, Research, and Practice

The section above detailed what an ideal manuscript would look like in *CDQ*. It would be a well formatted paper grounded in theory, use a specific method to examine research hypotheses, and tie directly into helpful and practical implications for career practitioners. Although this is ideal, achieving this threshold is extremely difficult. First, the field of vocational psychology has historically been guided by only a handful of theories. On the one hand, this might be because these theories are excellent and capture the entire career development process. On the other hand, these theories may not address all the ways one might research vocational behavior. If this is the case, it may be difficult for many manuscripts to be grounded in an existing theory. Anecdotally, much of the research I do is on the construct of work as a calling (Duffy & Dik, 2013). This construct is not embedded within any vocational theory nor has a theory been developed to date around this construct. Since it cannot be grounded in theory, this often means hypotheses are not as strongly developed and the tie to practice is not as clear.

Second, similar challenges exist in integrating research and practice. Although *CDQ* is a practice focused journal, the vast majority of papers accepted in the journal are research focused and written by individuals whose primary job is to produce research rather than provide practice. These individuals may be disconnected from counseling practice; thus, the research ideas may not be practice oriented and/or the practical implications section may lack interest and creativity. Speaking from personal experience, I know that the practical implications section is always the most difficult section for me to write, as I haven’t done career counseling in over seven years. In fact, when I am working with doctoral students on papers, I usually leave this section for them, as they are more likely to actually be doing face-to-face career counseling.

Finally, even in best case scenarios where an integration of theory, research, and practice exists within a manuscript, the precise ways these ideas can trickle down to the actual work career counselors are doing is a mystery. Reading a journal article is likely not a top priority for busy counseling professionals. Even if there were time and interest from counselors to delve into the

research literature, the applicability of ideas and findings may be tenuous given the uniqueness of a counselor's role and clientele. In sum, all of these factors make true integration of theory, research, and practice challenging, especially for a journal like *CDQ*.

The Opportunities for Integrating Theory, Research, and Practice

One of the strengths of vocational psychology is how well we—theorists, researchers, and practitioners—have integrated theory, research, and practice. Most of our major theories have been supported by quantitative and qualitative research, and these findings have served to revolutionize the ways career counselors help clients make career decisions and be satisfied at work. As the field continues to move forward in maintaining this integration, I believe our greatest opportunity exists in applying this integration to populations who have often been neglected from traditional vocational research. This primarily includes children, adolescents, and adults who do not have much choice in their careers paths, often the result of high levels of economic constraints and/or marginalization experiences (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016).

I see targeting this population as our greatest opportunity because I believe the vast majority of individuals around the world do not have much choice in their career paths and are often pushed to work in unsatisfying, uninteresting, and often dangerous jobs to meet survival needs. What exactly does integrating theory, research, and practice look like for this population? Certainly, the work of David Blustein (Blustein, 2006; Blustein, 2008; Blustein et al., 2008; Duffy et al., 2016) has helped push this conversation forward by developing a new theoretical framework and by challenging vocational psychologists to move beyond the study of the privileged class. However, the critical missing piece to this equation is practice integration. Although our field has greatly improved in theorizing about and researching the work lives of the underprivileged, integration of this theory and research into hands-on-practice with clients is lacking. In my opinion, finding a way to make this integration occur is our greatest opportunity and leads into my proposed future recommendations.

Recommendations for the Future

The missing piece of truly integrating practice into theory and research is the voice of the practitioner. In the United States, for example, we know through research that the vast majority of college students and working adults feel limits in their ability to choose desired career paths (Duffy et al., 2016). As such, the majority of a career counselor's clients likely do not have the privilege of simply selecting desired careers and pursuing them. Rather, compromises are made, and these compromises likely vary given the extent to which clients face economic constraints and/or marginalization. In graduate school, I spent two years providing career counseling at a local community college. My work here, more often than not, involved helping clients find decent work of any kind, with work that matched their values, interests, and skills being a nice—but not expected—bonus. I suspect that this experience is shared by most full-time career counselors, particularly those working outside of a four year college or university.

Hearing the voice of the practitioner is where *CDQ*—the journal focused more on practice than any other—can play an important facilitating role. My first future recommendation is for *CDQ* to publish a special issue that pairs major theorists with full time practitioners. Here articles would be written about how practitioners use specific theories in counseling to work with individuals who have little to no choice in their career paths. Although as a researcher, I might be able to guess how social cognitive career theory or career construction theory is helpful with these types of clients in the real world, these guesses may have little to no connection with what actually happens. Second, building from this special issue, I would like to see *CDQ* commit to publishing one article per issue authored by a full time career counselor who has unique strategies for working with underprivileged clients. This section of the journal could be labeled something like “Practitioner’s Toolkit” or “Practitioner’s Corner,” and I suspect these articles would interest other practitioners in the field. Third, I would like to see a focus on integration specifically delineated in the *Guidelines for Authors* (*CDQ*, 2016). By making this integration a necessary part of manuscript submission—which could be evaluated by reviewers as part of the overall disposition—over time, authors would likely hone their skills in this area, ultimately making for stronger contributions.

As the National Career Development Association's flagship journal, *CDQ* offers the best platform, in my opinion, for showcasing advances in the integration of theory, research, and practice with populations who have often been neglected from vocational research. I hope this chapter will help those seeking to write successful articles for *CDQ* as well as those seeking new strategies for building integration that reaches those who need it most, practitioners.

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