Chapter 18 - The Role of Refereed Journals in Integrating Theory, Research, and Practice

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Plenary IV: "A View from the Editor's Desk: Ensuring Quality in Theory, Research, and Practice" was chaired by Sylvia Nassar McMillan of North Carolina State University and included five panelists representing the core vocational psychology and career development journals. Specifically, the *Career Development Quarterly* was represented by Ryan Duffy of the University of Florida, the *Journal of Career Assessment* by Itamar Gati of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the *Journal of Career Development* by Lisa Flores of the University of Missouri-Columbia, the *Journal of Employment Counseling* by Dale Furbish of Auckland University of Technology and Angie Smith of North Carolina State University, and the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* by Donna Schultheiss of Cleveland State University.

The members of this plenary were charged with the task of reflecting upon how the individual journals they represent can support efforts to integrate theory, research, and practice in vocational psychology and career development. The authors provided journal history or mission information as context for their comments and identified not only the challenges to the theory-research-practice integration, but also recommendations for how to meet these challenges. Several points of convergence emerged across these papers, including four overarching themes that, when taken as a whole, provide a collective vision for refereed journals endeavoring to promote the integration of theory, research, and practice.

Convergence was also apparent in the recommendations offered by these authors, leading to four main suggestions for editorial practice.

Themes

First, there was unanimous support for the goal of integrating theory, research, and practice in our scholarly endeavors. This is likely unsurprising to us, as we are all accustomed to identifying our theoretical framework, detailing the research undertaken, and discussing the implications for practice of our results. At the same time, however, it was also acknowledged by this group of authors that each of these journals may have a differential emphasis or perhaps weight given to these three domains. The emphasis of the scholarship published in a particular journal is based on journal purpose, scope, and audience. For example, the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (*JVB*) was created to be an outlet for theory-driven research and as such, emphasizes the empirical side of the integration continuum. The *Career Development Quarterly* (*CDQ*) and the *Journal of Employment Counseling* (*JEC*) are the flagship journals of two professional organizations whose memberships are largely practitioners. Thus, these journals emphasize more heavily the explicit translation of research findings or theoretical propositions to the actual practice of career counseling, career education, and/or career intervention.

It was also implied, but not directly stated, in this collection of papers, that we should not understand theory-research-practice integration as a unidirectional process. In other words, we should not assume that the direction of influence begins with theory shaping research, which then informs practice. Rather, the authors implicitly encouraged us to appreciate, and indeed capitalized upon, the potential dynamic interaction of the three. True integration and advancement will require us to allow and expect bidirectional influence. We must harness what we learn from practice to identify meaningful research questions and to refine, revise, and/or revise our theories.

Secondly, despite the unanimous support for the integration of theory, research, and practice, it was also acknowledged that integration has challenges, particularly when it comes to the integration of practice. The authors in this plenary pointed out that most articles published are written by individuals in academic positions who, for the most part, are unlikely to be directly engaged in practice activities or who have been distanced from practice for some time. This is not levied as a personal criticism of academics but rather as an observation and an acknowledgement of the realities of our work lives. Duffy (2017) asserts that the result of our distance from practice is that the implications for practice offered are often "underwhelming and uncreative" and may be of little use to practicing professionals. Further, Flores (2017) points out that it is only by involving practitioners that we will be able to appreciate and respond to cutting edge practice concerns. The authors urged us to not be satisfied with this state of affairs, but to develop strategies that will assist us in expanding our integration of practice into our theory development and our research.

Third, these authors urged us to expand our theoretical paradigms and accordingly, our research methods. This recommendation was not offered to suggest that the established theoretical base of vocational psychology is deficient, rather it was suggested as a recognition that all theories are influenced by the context in which they were embedded when developed. As we grapple as a field to understand and capture the complexity of the human experience and the role of work in this experience, we will benefit from borrowing relevant theories from our disciplinary neighbors and incorporating constructivist and postmodern perspectives into our work. Indeed, Furbish and Smith (2017) suggest human variety and uniqueness can be best captured by contemporary models such as those described by Savickas (Savickas et al., 2009), Guichard (2009), and McMahon and Patton (2002), while both Schultheiss (2017) and Duffy (2017) identify Blustein's (2006) psychology of working approach as an example of an innovative attempt to capture the complexity present in people's lives.

And fourth, while we expand our theoretical repertoire, we must also continue to expand our gaze beyond the populations and issues that have been the traditional focus of vocational psychology. The plenary authors were encouraged by our endeavors to be a global field of study, to think both cross-culturally and cross-nationally, to maintain and expand a truly lifespan perspective, and to grapple with the influence of economic disadvantage. Yet they reminded us that there is still much work to be done if we want to be a field relevant to those for whom choice is limited or perhaps nonexistent, who are navigating work and the work-world while living at the intersection of multiple identities, or who are facing the substantive barriers of oppression, discrimination, and economic disadvantage. The plenary authors offered us encouragement, even a challenge, to continue our endeavors to understand the vast complexity of the human experience.

A collective vision emerged from this set of papers that I would express thusly: Theory-research-practice integration requires dynamic interactionism amongst the three processes. It requires us, as scholars, interventionists, and practitioners, to struggle to both appreciate and understand the nature of work and the development of work identities and behaviors in the context of complex human life, human life that is inextricably embedded in multiple levels of organization. The challenge of theory-research-practice integration is far too involved to be adequately undertaken by any one discipline or any one set of professionals. It will require deliberate and concerted efforts on our part to bridge disciplinary and professional gaps. It will require flexibility in the paradigms that guide our conceptualizations and the methods used to address our questions.

Recommendations

Thankfully, the editors and editorial board members included in this plenary offered several suggestions as to how we can collectively work towards this goal of broader integration. First, quite in line with the themes described above, the panel authors resoundingly recommended the use of collaborations, both interdisciplinary and interprofessional in nature. Schultheiss (2017) suggested that a goal of *JVB* has always been to examine the work experiences of individuals and the nature of workplaces. Continued efforts to encourage joint work between vocational psychologists and organizational psychologists is a key strategy for evolving our theories, and expanding the reach of our research. Duffy (2017), Flores (2017), and Gati (2017) emphasized collaborations with practitioners. At the same time, these authors recognized that it is one thing to suggest collaboration and quite another to foster it. Thus, they offered several concrete suggestions for how to encourage such collaborations, such as identifying special issue ideas of cross-disciplinary topics (Schultheiss, 2017) or framing and designing projects "from the ground up" (Flores, 2017). Gati (2017) even suggested that the information technology many of us use can be a natural conduit for fostering collaboration with practitioners and for developing theory-research-practice feedback loops that can advance our knowledge base and our "best practice" repertoire. In many ways, information and communication technology (ICT) represents a collaborative opportunity waiting to happen.

Next, our panelists suggested that the editorial board could, in fact, be used as a tool for advancing our integration of theory, research, and practice. Schultheiss (2017) suggested that crafting diverse editorial boards can foster international and interdisciplinary perspectives, dialogues, and collaborations. Flores (2017) offered concrete suggestions for how to involve practitioners as board members and reviewers. She suggested that journal editors and editorial board members are responsible not only for recognizing barriers that may keep practitioners from involving themselves in our publishing process, but also for finding creative ways to address these barriers. She suggested that a little outreach can go a long way and offered clear guidance around how we might conduct this outreach.

The third set of recommendations that emerged from these papers focused on our use of theory. Collectively, our panelists suggest that continued advancement in theory refinement will only occur if we broaden the range of theories we use and the ways we use them in our research. Gati (2017) suggested that testing a theory's propositions is not enough; we must also develop opportunities to refute theories and contrast them. The recommendation to import or apply theories that have been developed and used in complementary areas or disciplines has already been mentioned above. Also suggested was that we consider the benefit of using constructivist and postmodern theories to guide our work. Furbish and Smith (2017) argue persuasively that in order for research to reflect the realities of contemporary work and work environments, constructivist career theories are needed. They encourage the use of theories that are not focused on explaining universals, but are instead capturing the uniqueness and intricacies of the lived experiences and personal meaning making of individuals.

Conclusion

Panel participants agreed that continued efforts to integrate theory, research, and practice in vocational psychology and career development is a worthy goal. Despite the challenges created by our disciplinary silos and the contextually-bound nature of our theories, concerted interdisciplinary and interprofessional endeavors can facilitate a dynamic and productive interaction amongst these three processes. Journal editors can support such efforts by using special issues, carefully crafting a diverse editorial board, encouraging collaborative article authorship, and including in their journals contemporary models and theories of career development and work behavior that attempt to capture the complexity of human life.

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