

## Chapter 20 - The State of the Art in Integrating Theory, Research, and Practice in Vocational Psychology

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**James P. Sampson, Jr.**

Florida State University

**Emily Bullock-Yowell**

University of Southern Mississippi

**V. Casey Dozier**

Florida State University

**Debra S. Osborn**

Florida State University

**Janet G. Lenz**

Florida State University

**Nathan T. Ross**

University of Southern Mississippi

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Correspondence concerning this chapter should be addressed to James P. Sampson, Jr., Department of Educational Psychology and Learning Systems, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4453. E-mail: [jsampson@fsu.edu](mailto:jsampson@fsu.edu)

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Conclusion chapters in edited books are often written to provide the editors with an opportunity to offer their perspectives on the chapter authors' various contributions. This concluding chapter takes a different approach. Based on the method used in the 2013 review of career development theory, research, and practice literature (Sampson et al., 2014), this chapter examines the state of the art in integrating theory, research, and practice through a content analysis of the book's preceding 19 chapters. The purpose of this review is to identify the nature and examine the frequencies of the challenges and recommendations for improvement by the authors. The chapter continues with method, results, and discussion.

### Method

The method used to conduct the content analysis includes a description of how the main content categories

were established (along with the resulting research question used to guide the analysis), the participants, and the coding process.

### Establishment of Content Categories

Chapter authors of section one (theorists) and section three (refereed journal editors and editorial board members) were asked to include the following content in their chapters:

- the relevance of integrating theory, research, and practice (including a statement noting instances where integration was not necessary);
- challenges in integrating theory, research, and practice;

- opportunities for integrating theory, research, and practice;
- and recommendations for the future (how theorists, researchers, practitioners, professional associations, and policy makers can better cope with challenges and maximize opportunities in integrating theory, research, and practice).

Section two chapter authors (researchers) were asked to provide content related to their specific topic as well as recommendations for the future.

Following an initial review of the 19 chapters by the first and second author of this chapter, two decisions were made. First, content on the relevance of integrating theory, research, and practice was omitted from the analysis in favor of more actionable items related to challenges, opportunities, and recommendations. Second, due to the considerable content overlap in the chapters regarding *opportunities* for integrating theory, research, and practice and *recommendations* for the future, content from these categories were combined under the label of recommendations. This led to analyzing data on *challenges* from two groups (theorists and refereed journal editors and editorial board members) and analyzing data on recommendations from three groups (theorists, researchers, and refereed journal editors and editorial board members). Therefore, the research question that guided our analysis was the following: What are the nature and frequencies of challenges and recommendations for improvement in theory, research, and practice integration among a group of experienced vocational psychologists?

## Participants

Twenty-two vocational psychologists provided data for this content analysis of 19 book chapters. Although each chapter was written from the perspective of a theorist, researcher, or journal editor/editorial board member, there is considerable overlap in these roles. Almost all of these individuals hold or have held two or three of these roles in the profession. The overlap in roles should provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the challenges in integrating theory, research, and practice as well as more comprehensive and viable recommendations for improving integration. Furthermore, the vocational psychologists invited

to contribute chapters were well recognized for their substantive contributions in vocational psychology. The experience and accomplishments of chapter authors contribute to the content validity of the analysis presented in this concluding chapter. The characteristics of chapter authors are as follows: the average length of experience in vocational psychology is 23 years; primary professional titles include professor, department or program chair, and associate dean; authors are from 14 unique locations spanning 11 states in the U.S. and four countries (Australia, Israel, New Zealand, and the United States); and finally, the gender breakdown is 53% male and 47% female.

## Coding

To develop the final chapter's content and direction, each book chapter was analyzed and coded. Each mention of a challenge or recommendation for improvement for the vocational psychology field was noted. A table format was used to log each challenge or recommendation for improvement noted as they arose through a detailed chapter content review. If a previously noted challenge or recommendation was mentioned in a later chapter, that was considered a subsequent mention of the previously logged challenge and/or recommendation. A tally was maintained for how many times a challenge or recommendation was mentioned across all book chapters. As most subsequent mentions of a challenge or recommendation were not exactly the same as the initial mention, themes to encompass the general meaning of the challenges and recommendations were developed. These themes were refined and defined to capture as many challenges and recommendations offered across chapters. Several challenges and recommendations were mentioned once and not incorporated into a theme due to the unique nature of the challenge or recommendation.

## Results

The content analysis resulted in four challenge themes and eight recommendations for improvement themes that were each mentioned multiple times across multiple chapters. This analysis and discussion of results focused on challenges and recommendations mentioned multiple times. There were several important challenges

and recommendations mentioned once and, while those are not thoroughly discussed in the narrative, they are included in Table 1. Additionally, naming the themes required some judgment, and the resulting names do not fully reflect the nuances associated with each detailed account of individual challenges and recommendations. Therefore, a reference to the chapters in which these themes appear is given so readers can explore the themes in more detail.

## Challenges

Unsurprisingly, the most commonly mentioned challenge was difficulties in communication among theorists, researchers, and practitioners. This challenge was mentioned 21 times across Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 11, 13, 15, and 17. The second most frequently mentioned challenge, at 12 mentions across Chapters 9, 10, 14, and 17, dealt with difficulties inherent in the methodology or statistical procedures used for studies in the vocational psychology field. This theme addressed issues such as the appropriate way to conduct a meta-analysis, hurdles to adhering to scientific rigor, and the quality of our measurements/assessments. The current state of journals and publishing was the third most common challenge, mentioned seven times across Chapters 2, 13, 15, 16, and 17. Most challenges addressing journals spoke to editorial bias, hurdles to publishing, and difficulty incorporating theory and practice into a research-focused process. The fourth and final challenge spoke to the complexity of integrating theory into practice in light of 21st century changes for the economy and workers. This challenge was mentioned in Chapters 5 and 6.

## Recommendations

Like challenges, the most commonly mentioned recommendation for improvement theme was how theorists, researchers, and practitioners could communicate more effectively. This theme was mentioned 32 times across Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16. Recommendations for improvement related to journals and publishing were mentioned 23 times across Chapters 2, 5, 7, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17, making this the second most common recommendations for improvement theme. The theme of methodological and statistical use in research was mentioned 18 times across Chapters 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 14, 16, and 17. The fourth

most common recommendation for improvement theme addressed vocational psychologists' opportunities to better integrate diverse perspectives into the way we practice, conduct research, and develop theory. This theme was mentioned 14 times across Chapters 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, and 19. There was a tie at seven mentions for the fifth most common recommendations theme. These two themes addressed the opportunities for training practitioners and better integration of technology into improvements across research and practice. The training theme was mentioned in Chapters 2, 4, 7, 12, and 15 and the technology theme was mentioned in Chapters 5, 7, 10, 11, and 14. The seventh most common theme dealt with the need to engage the public in our research as well as advocating for policy change to enhance the integration of theory, research, and practice. This theme was mentioned five times across Chapters 1, 5, 6, 7, and 11. The last theme was mentioned two times, appearing in Chapters 9 and 12, and provided suggestions for a diagnostic system for career concerns in the form of a common language or searchable best practices system. Challenge and recommendation themes, as well as those challenges and recommendations mentioned only one time, are paraphrased in Table 1 which follows.

A promising finding of the content analysis revealed that three of the four challenge themes also emerged as recommendation for improvement themes. Therefore, challenge themes that addressed communication among theorists, researchers, and practitioners; methodological and statistical use; and journals and publishing were all paired with multiple recommendations on how to address these challenges.

## Discussion

The extent of agreement that was expressed from such a diverse and experienced selection of vocational psychologists regarding challenges and recommendations indicates that there is some consensus regarding the state of the art in integrating theory, research, and practice in vocational psychology. This consensus, while preliminary, helps clarify where we should focus our efforts to achieve the greatest benefit. The overlap between challenges and recommendations also shows that there is some common understanding of issues and opportunities for improvement. The challenge is what to do with the insights we have gained about the integration of theory, research, and practice. As a profession, we

Table 1. Most Frequently Identified Challenges and Recommendations from a Sample of Experienced Vocational Psychologists Regarding in the Integration of Theory, Research, and Practice

Challenges	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are difficulties in communication among theorists, researchers, and practitioners (<math>n = 21</math>).</li> <li>• Difficulties are inherent in the methodology and statistical procedures used to study the field of vocational psychology (<math>n = 12</math>).</li> <li>• Editorial biases in journals, hurdles to publishing, and difficulties incorporating theory and practice into a research-focused process exist (<math>n = 7</math>).</li> <li>• Integrating theory into practice in light of 21<sup>st</sup> century changes for the economy and workers can be complex (<math>n = 2</math>).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve communication among theorists, researchers, and practitioners (<math>n = 32</math>).</li> <li>• Improve journals and publishing (<math>n = 23</math>).</li> <li>• Improve methodological and statistical approaches in research (<math>n = 18</math>).</li> <li>• Improve the integration of diverse perspectives into the way we practice, conduct research, and develop theory (<math>n = 14</math>).</li> <li>• Improve training for practitioners (<math>n = 7</math>).</li> <li>• Improve the integration of technology across research and practice (<math>n = 7</math>).</li> <li>• Improve public engagement in our research, and advocate for changes in policy (<math>n = 5</math>).</li> <li>• Improve the diagnostic system for career concerns in the form of a common language or searchable best practices system (<math>n = 2</math>).</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges and recommendations mentioned once</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theories cannot be copyrighted, limiting the ability of authors to protect their work.</li> <li>• Current academic environments make theory sustainability difficult.</li> <li>• A greater connection between vocational psychology &amp; I/O psychology is needed.</li> <li>• Economic shifts are increasing wealth disparity.</li> <li>• Research-practitioners are not valued in academic environments.</li> <li>• Few conference presentations about Holland but many practitioners use the theory.</li> <li>• The integration of international perspectives is needed.</li> <li>• Information and communication technology-based issues exist.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the integration of theory into practice in light of 21<sup>st</sup> century changes for the economy and workers.</li> <li>• Improve integration among vocational and I/O psychologists.</li> <li>• Realize perfect integration cannot occur and we must recognize some limits.</li> <li>• Explore ways to incentivize journal reviews.</li> <li>• Attend to a broader array of outcomes from career development interventions.</li> <li>• Include explicit documentation of theory, research, and evidence-based practice that developers and publishers use to create resources.</li> <li>• Research ways past narrative structures might be impeding forward movement in lives to open inquiry on how forward movement in lives may help to generate healing narratives of the past.</li> <li>• Use language that specifically pulls unpaid care out of the shadows of domesticity and into the realm of work.</li> <li>• Embrace knowledge constructed in psychology and from other related social sciences.</li> <li>• Creation of interdisciplinary theories embracing economic and sociological factors.</li> </ul>

need to act both *individually* and *collectively* if we are to improve the integration of theory, research, and practice in vocational psychology.

Examples of individual action by vocational psychologists to improve the integration of theory, research, and practice could include the following: (a) creating and revising theory that integrates research and practice; (b) conducting research that integrates theory and practice; (c) delivering career services and creating career resources (practice) that integrate theory and research; (d) communicating and collaborating more regularly with practitioners who are not typically involved in creating theory and conducting research; (e) taking advantage of information technology to improve theory, research, and practice integration; (f) emphasizing theory, research, and practice integration when reviewing manuscripts for our journals as editorial board members or when reviewing presentation proposals for our conferences as conference program committee members; (g) emphasizing theory, research, and practice integration when soliciting and selecting manuscripts for our journals as editors or when soliciting and selecting presentation proposals as conference organizers; and (h) emphasizing theory, research, and practice integration when supervising students-in-training and practitioners in the delivery of career services.

Examples of collective action by vocational psychologists to improve the integration of theory, research, and practice might include using our professional associations to (a) improve communication among theorists, researchers, and practitioners; (b) improve theory, research, and practice integration in service delivery standards and accreditation/training standards; (c) influence standards for research that encourage integration; and (d) influence integration in grant application requirements for research.

If we are to be successful in improving the integration of theory, research, and practice in vocational psychology, we need to be consistent, collaborative, and intentional in our efforts. Stronger links among theory, research, and practice can help us as a profession make our theory more comprehensive and applicable, our research more informative and relevant, and our practice more effective and supported.

## Reference

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