

## The Next Decade in Vocational Psychology: Mission and Objectives

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This article discusses the 10 separate analyses of vocational psychology's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that appear in this special issue, entitled "Vocational Psychology in the Next Decade." After identifying points of convergence, attention turns to summarizing, in the form of a mission statement, what vocational psychologists seem intent on doing in the coming years. The mission for vocational psychology in the next decade concentrates on advancing scientific understanding of vocational behavior and providing information to shape career interventions and inform public policy. Eight objectives that aim to execute this mission are proposed and discussed. The article closes with a consideration of how the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* can implement strategies to realize the eight objectives and thus contribute to fulfilling vocational psychology's mission. © 2001 Academic Press

Each author in this special issue, entitled "Vocational Psychology in the Next Decade" has provided an insightful and invigorating analysis of the discipline's current strengths and weaknesses as well as a sagacious appraisal of its future opportunities and threats. Although written from different perspectives, the articles converge in viewing vocational psychology's mission as advancing scientific knowledge about vocational behavior and furnishing information that can be used to shape career interventions and inform public policy about work.

In the diverse analyses of the weaknesses and threats faced by vocational psychology, one common problem stood out. Many of the authors concluded that the science of vocational psychology, lacking a disciplinary home, has become insular. It has become an island because researchers have circumscribed the topics they study and restricted the theoretical models they use. Actually, it might be more precise to liken vocational psychology to two islands. Inhabitants of the two islands share an interest in vocational behavior but at different points in the life cycle. Inhabitants on the island off the coast of counseling psychology investigate educational and vocational choice while inhabitants on the island off the coast of industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology investigate work adjustment. Rarely do members of the two cultures visit the other island or even write to each

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other. In addition to not communicating with each other, island inhabitants do not communicate frequently with their respective mainlands. They seem to be on the periphery of their home specialties. This appears to be particularly frustrating to researchers who study vocational choice because, having once been at the center of counseling psychology, they now find themselves on the margins. As their numbers dwindle, concern grows that the discipline could lose its distinct identity or even disappear.

While there seemed to be some consensus in identifying the problem, the authors differed in suggesting how it could be resolved. Some suggested that vocational psychologists move to a new home. One proposal suggested that vocational choice researchers join with I/O researchers interested in organizational careers and become more active in the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, leaving the Counseling Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association (APA) as the home base for career counselors. Another suggestion would have vocational psychologists join with developmental psychologists, which would better situate them to contribute significantly to life-span psychology. Although not mentioned, another possibility would be to unify all those interested in vocational behavior research into a new APA division or an academic society.

It is doubtful that any of these resolutions will be enacted, so it is critical that vocational psychologists who remain on their islands do a better job of integrating their work with mainstream psychology. The authors identified prevailing topics in motivational, personality, and social psychology that should be incorporated into studies of vocational behavior and fed back to the field at large. While linking to mainstream psychology, it is also important to extend research boundaries beyond their current concentration on college students and individuals who work in management and the professions. It would be useful as well to attend more to vocational behavior at the beginning and end of the life course by studying children and older adults. Incorporating the study of vocational behavior into prevailing currents in developmental, I/O, and mainstream psychology will build bridges that invite collaboration and entice graduate students. It has become increasingly difficult for vocational psychologists to identify and recruit investigative scientists from among the Social and Enterprising practitioners attracted to counseling and I/O psychology. Taking all this into consideration, there seems to be an emerging vision of and commitment to vocational psychology's mission for the next decade.

#### MISSION

It is science that attracts researchers to and serves consumers of vocational psychology. In addition to advancing knowledge, vocational psychologists must intensify their efforts to share this knowledge by communicating with psychologists in other specialties, translating theory and research into practice, training new vocational psychologists, updating and learning from experienced career counselors, infusing information and values into policy debates, and contributing to the internationalization of the discipline. Integrating the views of the authors in this

special issue, and considering its place in the community of science, vocational psychology's mission for the next decade can be stated as follows:

Vocational psychology, a specialty within applied psychology, conducts research on vocational behavior among all groups of workers, at each life stage, in order to advance knowledge, improve career interventions, and inform social policy. It is characterized by innovative theorizing to comprehend the diversity of human experience and the changing world of work; the use of diverse epistemologies and research strategies; an emphasis on programmatic and longitudinal studies; and the translation of research findings into models, methods, and materials for career education and intervention

### OBJECTIVES

To fulfill the mission of advancing the scientific understanding of vocational behavior, vocational psychologists seem prepared to actuate, in the coming decade, strategies aimed at realizing the following eight objectives. Achieving these objectives could increase the productivity of vocational psychologists and expand their contributions to mainstream psychology and its specialties.

#### *Reaffirm Research as the Core Activity*

Research has always been the strength of vocational psychology, probably because of its empirical tradition, reliance on theory, and commitment to translating discoveries into applications. In this issue, Gottfredson, Lent, and Tinsley, among others, assert that vocational psychologists should now reaffirm research as their core activity. Research can be vocational psychology's social action if it investigates relevant and important topics. In advancing knowledge about social and cultural concerns, vocational psychologists can provide a scientific basis for social activism, one that can help legitimate efforts for social change. In affirming their commitment to research, vocational psychologists should increase the use of prospective studies and longitudinal designs, seek external funding, attend to outcome and policy research, create a national database and laboratories (Finholt, & Olson, 1997), and participate in interdisciplinary studies of work and workers. It is also time to implement the suggestion by Oliver and Spokane (1988) that a group of researchers "engage in the development of a set of standard measures to be used in career-counseling research" (p. 459).

#### *Articulate a Research Agenda*

It would be beneficial if efforts to revitalize research were guided by an agenda of important topics. The articles in this issue provide many innovative research ideas for graduate students and new investigators. However, vocational psychologists could systematically prepare an explicit agenda for research which graduate students and new investigators might consider as they select their projects. Several important topics are now being overlooked. For example, Gottfredson (2001), Hesketh (2001), and Walsh (2001) highlight the need to reanimate research on occupational and lifestyle information, job analysis, and work environments as well as research to reintegrate overlapping domains in the study of personality, interests, abilities, values, and needs. In conjunction with commitment to conducting

programmatic research, the availability of a research agenda might make more effective use of the limited number of investigators in the discipline.

#### *Forge Links with Related Disciplines*

It is imperative that vocational psychology become less provincial, whether by linking with other specialties or entering into alliances with colleagues involved in the prevailing currents of mainstream psychology (see in this issue Gottfredson, Lent, Tinsley, and Vondracek). Researchers in career development could adopt life-span developmental psychology as its metatheory and researchers in vocational choice and adjustment could link with personality psychology, which itself seems to be living on an island off the coast of clinical psychology (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1996). Of course, vocational psychology must maintain and strengthen its links to psychometrics and environmental psychology.

#### *Bridge the Rift Between Science and Practice*

Although still less of a gap to cross than in other applied disciplines, there is a growing divide between vocational psychologists and career counselors. Vocational psychologists and career counselors can be generally characterized as distinct personality types who pursue different career goals and take divergent perspectives on vocational behavior. As noted by Fouad (2001) and Subich (2001), we must improve communication between vocational psychologists and career counselors. Vocational psychologists could start by critically examining the traditional model of research dissemination and consider alternative models. Vocational psychologists need to communicate theory and research in ways that are meaningful to counselors and that help them apply it in their practice. It would also be beneficial to involve practitioners in the development of theory and research, if not in the actual conduct of research. Fouad (2001) reminds readers that professional organizations provide forums for communication, but practitioners and scientists need to take advantage of these opportunities.

#### *Diversify Epistemology*

Quantitative methods have always been a strength of research in vocational psychology. Yet, the reliance on quantitative methods to assess individual differences seems to have contributed to narrowing research topics and overlooking complexity. Subich (2001) and Walsh (2001) call for the use of epistemologies and methodologies that facilitate *both* discovery *and* justification in the science of vocational psychology. They recommend greater use of qualitative inquiry attuned to context and complexity while emphasizing the need to balance quantitative and qualitative methods, exploratory and confirmatory research, and positivist and constructivist epistemologies. Balance might be best accomplished in programmatic research that uses, in turn, both methodologies in a programmatic sequence explained nearly 50 years ago by Edwards and Cronbach (1952). In the end, the important point is that researchers implement their preferred methods with rigor and critical scientific thinking.

### WIDEN THE RESEARCH LENS

In addition to diversifying the research methods used, vocational psychology should broaden its research lens to be more inclusive in terms of populations studied, problems theorized, and social concerns addressed. Blustein (2001), Fouad (2001), and Subich (2001), in particular, warn that research in vocational psychology remains too focused on middle-class workers. Vocational psychology should do more to advance knowledge about all groups of workers and in so doing help to empower workers and change inequitable systems. This research could also be helpful in entering the policy arena and facilitate more preventive and developmental interventions with poor and working-class youths and adults.

#### *Adapt to Changes in the World of Work*

Contemporary workers must adapt to changes in the very nature of occupations prompted by the global economy, information technology, and postindustrial society (Collin & Young, 2000). In turn, psychologists who study vocational behavior must adapt their work to account for new social arrangements of occupations and workers. Blustein (2001), Fouad (2001), Russell (2001), and Vondracek (2001), among others, encourage vocational psychologists to innovate their models and methods, and even construct new theories to conceptualize changes in ways of working and living. Among these broader issues, exploiting opportunities and resolving problems arising from the use of information technology, such as career counseling over the internet, rank high on the list of research and professional priorities. A concern unique to the work of vocational psychologists themselves is the manner in which testing companies have risen to play a dominant role in the construction, development, distribution, and use of vocational ability tests, interest inventories, and career surveys. It is time for vocational psychologists to reclaim from entrepreneurs the authority and responsibility for validating, providing access to, and insuring the equitable use of these materials. One model for this initiative is Golberg's (2001) collaborative for personality measures.

#### *Recommit to Recruitment and Training*

Vocational psychologist, to insure the viability of their specialty, must do much more to recruit individuals to the discipline (Gottfredson, 2001; Lent, 2001). Lately, it seems as if vocational psychologists have limited their recruiting efforts to the pool of graduate students in counseling who have expressed an interest in career counseling. They have learned that an interest in career counseling does not necessarily indicate an interest in conducting research on vocational behavior. Vocational psychologists might try to recruit, in addition, from graduate student pools with a higher proportion of Investigative types, such as those in developmental psychology, personology, and educational psychology. Recruiting more researchers to the field is only half of this objective. The other half is providing excellent training. Currently, advanced training in vocational psychology is impaired by limited curricula, lack of consensus on core readings, and scarcity of research internships and fellowships. Innovative thinking, collaborative efforts, and consortial

arrangements are needed to improve the training available in vocational psychology.

### STRATEGIES

To achieve the objectives outlined herein, vocational psychologists, through their professional organizations and collaborative networks, must construct and implement a strategic plan. The *Journal of Vocational Behavior* editorial board will play its part by forming a strategic plan that enables the *Journal* to prompt and ease movement toward these goals. As an interdisciplinary journal, *Journal of Vocational Behavior* can do more to forge linkages with colleagues in other specialties who produce research on vocational behavior and to initiate relationships with researchers in the mainstream of psychology. Of course, the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* will continue to play a key role in facilitating and publishing research on vocational behavior and in encouraging the work of graduate students and new professionals. It will redouble its efforts to prompt studies that use diverse methodologies and widen the research lens. The *Journal of Vocational Behavior* will actively seek articles that report innovative theorizing about and research into the changing world of work and its social context. And finally, it will initiate strategies to bridge the divide between scientists and practitioners as well as improve curricula and training in vocational psychology. The authors of this 30th anniversary issue have already begun to identify, either implicitly or explicitly, strategies that the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* can use to realize these objectives, including publishing review articles that provide research updates written by colleagues in other specialties and special issues that address topics such as technology and careers, training vocational psychologists, models for research dissemination and application, and research on occupational and lifestyle information. In the end, however, it is you, the reader, who will shape the next decade of vocational psychology. We look forward to your future contributions.

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Received May 29, 2001