

## Assessment of John Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice: Implications for Counselors

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### Abstract

The thrust of this paper is to examine John Holland's theory of vocational choice with their corresponding implications for counselors. The paper began with introduction and statement of the problem. This is followed by the significance of the study and review of related literature. The typology of Holland's personality characteristics in relation to occupational environment was discussed in detailed. Implications for Holland's theory were elucidated. Criticisms of the theory and counselors tasks were also outlined. Finally, conclusion and recommendations were provided. It was recommended that counselors should employ the knowledge of this theory to classify individual personality characteristics and clarify the various occupational environments.

**Keywords:** Assessment, John Holland's Theory, Vocational Choice, Implications, Criticisms, Counselor's Task.

### Introduction

John Holland (1959) is one of the leading theorists of vocational guidance. He noted that personality and environment constitutes major determinant of individual career choice. He observed that individual expresses his personality in connection to his environment. He opined that career choice has direct relationship with the individual heredity and environment. According to him, an individual career choice is an extension of his interest, needs, abilities, values and motivation. According to Holland, occupation is an individual way of life. It is an extension of one's personality characteristics and clear attempt to implement one's road map of personal behavioral strategies in the context of a job.

This means an individual vocational choice has a direct correlation with the personality characteristics and a good indicator of his personality development. He asserted that one's occupation is a total reflection of his total life style which defines an individual status, standard of living and general life style. An individual perception of a given job, whether of high or low socio economic status, is likely to have impact on both the psychological and sociological aspects of his life.

Holland (1959) maintained that people's needs, interest and developmental histories are never the same. It varies from society to society and from environment to another environment. As a result of these developments, people create their own environmental set up to reflect these needs. An individual derives pleasure and satisfaction from his job which

is in conformity of his interest, needs and personality development. People chose work environment where their attitudes, abilities and skills are valued and appreciated. Similarly, they abandoned environment that is not in conformity with their personality characteristics. He asserted that one's occupation is a total reflection of his total life style which defines an individual status, standard of living and general life style. An individual perception of a given job, whether of high or low socio economic status is likely to have impact on both the psychological and sociological aspects of his life.

### Statement of Problem

The choice of a vocation is an important decision a person makes for himself. It is a long process with a lot of considerations. It does not occur of a sudden but as a result of developmental process of the individual. Vocational choice takes place as a result of a developmental process which has been traced to early development of the individual life. Vocation being the implementation of the self-concept when parents fail to achieve it during their own career, they seek it through the choice of career of their children.

Holland (1959) postulated that the personality characteristics of the individual and environment determine his career choice. This means that the individual expresses his personality through the choice of his occupation. He noted that career choice as a product of heredity and environment. According to him, the choice of a career is a reflection of the individual interest, needs, abilities, values and motivation. The purpose of this paper is to examine how Holland classified individual personality characteristics and their corresponding occupational career choice environment.

The paper attempts to relate individual personality to his occupational environment as postulated by Holland. It provides a typology of vocational behavior corresponding to individual personality types.

### Significance

One of the major significance of this theory is that vocational choices can be classified based on individual personality characteristics. An individual life happiness and satisfaction should be in harmony with his occupational environment. The paper will also help individual who wrongly choses an occupation not congruent to their personality type, to develop healthy and positive attitudes towards vocational career choice.

### Literature Review

Personality is the integration of the socio psychological behavior of the human being, represented by habits of actions and feelings, attitudes and opinion. On the basis of these definitions there are two main approaches to the study of personality:

- 1) The psychological
- 2) The sociological

The psychological approach considers personality as a certain style peculiar to the individual. This style determined by the characteristic organization of mental trends,

complexes emotions and sentiments. The psychological approach enables us to understand the phenomena of personality disorganization and the role of wishes, of mental conflicts and of repression and sublimation in the growth of personality. The sociological approach considers personality in terms of the status of the individual in the group, in terms of his conception of his role in group of which he is a member. What others think of us plays a large role in the formation of our personality. Other definitions of personality include:

Totality of an individual's behavior and emotional characteristic: Personality embraces a person's mood attitudes, opinion, motivations, and style of perceiving, speaking and acting. It is a part of what makes each individual distinct.

The Personality Psychologists are interested in the unique characteristic of Individuals as well as similarities among group of people. Based on this assertion, Personality is made up of the characteristic pattern of thought, feelings, and behavior which makes a person unique, in additions to this; personality arises from within the individual and remains fairly consistent throughout life. From this definition, the following facts can be deducted:

- Consistency: that is a generally recognizable order and regularity to behavior. Essentially, people act in the same ways or similar ways in variety of situation.
- Psychological and Physiological: Personality is a psychological construct, but research suggests that it is also influenced by biological Processes and needs.
- It has impacts on behaviors and actions: Personality does not just influence how we move and respond in our environment, it also causes Individuals to act in certain ways as well as similarities among group of people.
- Multiple expressions: Personality is displayed in more than just behavior. It can also be seen in our thought feelings, close relationship and other social interaction.

According to Carver and Schemes (2000) Personality is a dynamic organization inside the person of psychophysical systems that creates a particular characteristic pattern of behavior, thought and feelings. From this definition, the following information can be obtained:

- Dynamic organization: this suggests that personality is an ongoing process.
- Inside the Person: suggests the patterns are internally stored, according to the notion that personality influence behaviors.
- Psychophysical systems: indicates that the physical characteristics are also incorporated in who we are.
- Characteristic patterns: showed that consistency/continuity which are uniquely identifying of an individual?
- Behavior, thoughts, and feelings: implied that personality includes a wide range of psychological experience /manifestation; that personality is displayed in different ways.

It is clear from these definitions, that personality includes various aspects of individual behavior, and each of these aspects being integrated to manifest in dynamic organization relating to inter personal behavior of the individual. Personality is made up of situation

which is different from one another. In addition to this characteristic pattern, it should be relatively stable in the individual.

## School and Vocational Issues

School is a central organizing experience in most adolescents' lives. This is because it offers the opportunity to learn information, acquire new skills and sharpen old ones; to participate in sports, the arts and other exercises; to explore vocational choices and to be with friends. It widens intellectual and social horizon of the individual.

## Influences on School Achievement

Historically, in the United States, education has been the ticket to economic and social advancement and to successful adult life. Nearly 83% of Americans age 25% or older- more than ever before- have completed high school. Furthermore, the proportion is growing in younger children: Among 25 to 29 year –old, it is about 88% (Day and Curry, 1998).

Several factors, including parental beliefs and practices, socio economic status and peer influence, affects parents ability to shape the behavior of their children's achievement. As with other aspects of development, parents, own perceived self- efficacy- their belief in their ability to promote their children academic growth- affects their success in doing so. Parents who are economically secure and who have high aspirations for their children and a strong sense of parental efficacy tend to have children with high academic goals and achievement, who can resist negative peer pressures (Bandura et al.1996).

## Personality and Occupational Types Propounded by John Holland

- 1) **Realistic personality type (motovic):** People who belong to this category of job environment are active and their preference is to work with real objects rather than abstract things. Occupations which demand subjectivity, display of individual intellectual abilities, verbal or other inters personal skills are avoided. The avoidance could be in a conscious or unconscious state. People in this category includes, drivers, soldiers, farmers, boxers, wrestlers, crafts, mechanics etc
- 2) **Intellectual personality type (investigative):** They concentrate on abstract thinking which will enable them to implement scientific decision. They prefer to work with ideas, organized and understand situations rather than to persuade and dominate. They are creative and innovative and have unconventional attitude and avoid close interpersonal relations. Usually unsocial and introversive because they need quietness, isolation and engage in theorizing. Examples of people in this category include researchers, engineers, anthropologies, biologist, and editor of scientific journal, chemist mathematicians, programmers, authors, lecturers and professors.
- 3) **Social personality type (supportive):** As the name implies, this group of people are sociable in nature and extroverts, they are responsible humanistic, religious and requires attention. They are normally found in people oriented activities where they will be able to interact and socialize with people. They seek close inter personal

situations and very skilled in their interpersonal relations. They usually avoid challenging intellectual activities. Example of people in this category include teachers, nurses, doctors counselors, Educational administrators, house wives etc

- 4) **Conventional personality type (conforming):** This group of people shows great concern for rules and regulations, self-control, and conforms to norms and principles. They subordinate their personal needs to the requirements of their jobs. They identify strongly with status and power. They abide by majority of opinions even though they may not have their own opinions. They value economic matters and choose occupations related banking statistics, tax, budget review. Examples are bankers, Policemen, Soldiers, clerks, administrators and Librarians.
- 5) **Enterprising personality type (persuasive):** These are people who are equipped with verbal skills which they utilize proficiently in manipulating others. They dominate, persuade and indoctrinate others, difficult to listen to other people, generally in accommodative of other people opinions. Very zealous, adventurous, devoted extroverted and offensive. He is enforced by power to satisfy his leadership roles. Examples are politicians, lawyers, insurance workers, businessmen, buyers, hotel managers.
- 6) **Artistic personality type (aesthetic):** These group of people like to express their feelings and prefer occupation where he express his creative abilities. They prefer to engage in physical activities and interpersonal relationship. They are usually emotional and have feminine relationships and customs. Example are Fine artist, interior decorators, musicians, fashion designers, poets, composers, play writers, dramatist etc. (Sharma 1997, Abdulrazaq 2006 and Ipaye,1986)

#### Implications of Holland Theory

1. It makes it possible for students to examine the categorization of personality and determine whether their choice makes any sense to them
2. It provides useful information for the understanding of and interpretation of people expression of their choices
3. It guides the counselor in understanding the personality characteristics in relation to the environment and personal aspirations of the individual.

#### Criticisms

1. Absence of basic techniques and skills which can be used by the counselor during his meeting with the counselee.
2. It did not specify when and how the individual should be guided in the choice of typical vocation in conformity with his personality characteristics.
3. Social and economic factors that could affect career choice were not discussed.
4. The relevance of this theory could hardly be explained in a country like Nigeria where unemployment becomes the order of the day.

## Counselor's Task

1. The test can be used to classify vocational choices and personality characteristics.
2. Individual can be guided to understand himself and his expectations which are associated with the work environment.
3. Test can be used to find out the underlying factors which inhibit vocational indecision or decision of the client.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, John Holland theory of personality provides important and useful information for the comprehension and interpretation of people's personality in relation to their vocational choices. This indicates that relationship exists between vocational choices and individual personality characteristics. It also gives adequate guidance to the counselor in the understanding of the occupational environment in relation to the expectations and aspirations of the individual.

## Recommendations

- i. Researchers on vocational choices must have thorough understanding of John Holland theory
- ii. Individuals should be guided in the understanding of themselves and their working environment
- iii. Use test to identify individual personality categorizations
- iv. An individual happiness and satisfaction should be in harmony with his occupational environment.

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