

EXAMINING HOLLAND'S THEORY OF CAREER CHOICE

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Students' level of satisfaction is assessed based on personality type and academic major using Holland's theory of career choice.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the correlation between a student's choice of academic major and personality type. Holland (1973) hypothesized that students whose personality types match their academic and living environments will have a higher level of satisfaction than those whose personality types do not match their environment. Holland noted that all student affairs professionals are vocational coaches since a student's major is the ultimate reason for attending college. Therefore, student affairs professionals are in a position to help students with this important issue.

According to Holland (1973), each academic major creates its own unique environment with different levels of competitiveness, classroom size, faculty to student ratios, expectations, reputations, learning formats and career opportunities. Most persons can be categorized as one of six personality types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising or conventional. Also, there are six kinds of environments: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. Each environment is dominated by a given personality type, and typified by physical settings posing special problems and stresses. In addition, Holland asserted that people search for environments which allow them to exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles. Further, the search for environments is carried on at different levels of consciousness and over a long period of time. To a lesser extent, environments select people through recruitment and friendships. Finally, Holland assumed that a person's behavior is determined by an interaction between their personality and the characteristics of their environment.

These assumptions are supplemented by several secondary assumptions that can be applied to a person and an environment. Consistency within a person or an environment occurs when the primary elements of the personality or environment are similar. Differentiation refers to environments or persons which are dominated by a single type. In the study it was determined that all environments were differentiated. Congruence occurs when the person's type matches the environmental type. Incongruence occurs when the opportunities and rewards provided by an environment are not understood by the individual.

Method

The researchers surveyed 68 residence life staff members, collecting data on academic major and level of satisfaction with major. The research tool, based on the *Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory* (1981), was designed to determine personality type. The researchers were primarily interested in the respondents' perceptions of their satisfaction level in their environment. The self-reporting instrument was well suited to this task. A pretest was distributed to check for clarity and possible problems with the instrument. Part I of the survey solicited demographic information in addition to general information regarding the individual's choice of major and future plans. The researchers equated class standing with the amount of time spent in the environment, hypothesizing that the longer students were in an environment, the more satisfied they would be with that environment. Similarly, age was equated with experience, and the researchers hypothesized that older returning students may be more aware of their satisfaction level in various environments. Subsequently, older students' choices of academic major should be more congruent with personality than younger students. The researchers asked for respondent's sex to check for any gender differences.

Part II of the instrument was derived from the *Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory* (1981) which is based on Holland's theory of career choice. Using a five point Likert scale, respondents were asked to rate 20 activity statements according to how much they would enjoy doing them. Each statement was indicative of one of Holland's six personality types.

Results

Of the 68 surveys sent out, 54 were returned, for a response rate of 80%. To analyze the data from these surveys, each major was categorized according to the six environmental types (Holland, 1973). For each respondent, a score was determined which represented the differentiation of the personality type. This score was compared to their environmental type and each respondent was then categorized into one of the following: (a) differentiated and congruent with environment, (b) differentiated and incongruent with environment, (c) undifferentiated and congruent with environment, and (d) undifferentiated and incongruent with environment. For the respondents who were differentiated but incongruent with environment, the researchers examined the written responses in Part I.

The data was analyzed and each respondent was categorized according to a dominant personality revealed in the assessment (see Table 1). Twenty-seven academic majors were reported and then categorized into environmental types according to Holland's theory (see Table 1).

Forty-three percent of the population was differentiated, or dominant in one of six personality types, while 57% was undifferentiated in personality type. The data showed that 33.3% had consistent personality types. As shown in Table 2, the data revealed that 46.2% of the total population was undifferentiated and congruent with environment.

In determining the level of satisfaction students felt with their choice of academic major, the data revealed a high overall level of satisfaction of 4.2 out of 5. The data, as shown in Table 2, indicated a high level of satisfaction of choice of major

in all four categories. The lowest level was the undifferentiated and congruent with environment group at a 3.7 level of satisfaction.

Table 1

TYPE	PERSONALITY TYPES		ENVIRONMENTAL TYPES	
	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
Social	14	25.9	14	25.9
Enterprising	13	24.0	27	50.0
Realistic	11	20.4	3	5.5
Artistic	3	5.6	2	3.7
Conventional	5	9.3	3	5.5
Investigative	1	1.8	5	9.3
Respondents with no dominant type	7	12.0		

Table 2

DIFFERENTIATION, CONGRUENCY AND LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

TYPE	TOTAL	PERCENT	LEVEL OF SATISFACTION
Differentiated and congruent with environment	12	22.2	4.1
Differentiated and incongruent with environment	11	20.3	4.2
Undifferentiated and congruent with environment	25	46.2	4.1
Undifferentiated and incongruent with environment	6	11.1	3.7

Discussion and Implications

The following conclusions based on Holland's theory of career choice were drawn from the study. In support of Holland's hypothesis, the researchers found that (a) older students are more congruent than younger students, (b) students with a higher class standing are more congruent with their environment, (c) students with a higher class standing are more satisfied with their academic major environment and (d) male and female students are not significantly different in level of satisfaction or congruence with environment.

The results generally support Holland's theory of personality type and environment type. However, the differentiated and incongruent subgroup did not have the

expected correlation between perception of satisfaction, and personality and environment type. According to Holland's theory, people who are differentiated in personality and incongruent with their environment should have a low level of satisfaction. However, the researchers did not find a low level of satisfaction in this group.

It was hypothesized that a population consisting of residence life staff members would exhibit a social orientation. Additionally, it was hypothesized that this population would answer the social questions on the assessment more strongly. Analysis proved this true, 58% of the differentiated/incongruent group were social personality types. The results suggest these respondents may have their social personality type needs met in the job environment, and their other personality type needs met in their academic environment.

These results may have been obtained for several reasons. Interviewing residence life staff members may have limited the number of personality types, thus creating a biased sample. The staff members may also have answered that they liked working with people since it is a commonly held job expectation. Other limitations of the survey may include distribution timing, sex biases in the assessment tool and a potentially outdated occupational classification used to type individual majors.

A major limitation of the study is that the population was surveyed only once. Ideally, a longitudinal study, keeping in mind Holland's assumption that the person becomes more like the environment over time, would be more thorough.

The implications for programming, staffing and further research are numerous. Holland's theory may be used to train residence life staff members to serve as vocational coaches and educational programmers in areas of academic major or career selection. The tool could also be used to match residence life staff members with specialized housing units. Further research should focus on developing a longitudinal study which assesses the long-term effects of the individual's interaction with their environment.

In conclusion, the researchers found a direct correlation between students' personality types and academic majors as hypothesized by Holland. Students whose personality type were congruent with their academic environment reported a higher level of satisfaction than incongruent students.

REFERENCES

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A DEVELOPMENTALLY BASED PROGRAM FOR PROBATIONARY RESIDENT ASSISTANTS

Kellie Gray

This article proposes a program to assist the practitioner in formulating individual developmental programs for RAs with probationary status.

Introduction

This article provides an individualized program of challenges and supports to improve job performance and foster cognitive development in Resident Assistants (RAs) placed on probation due to less than satisfactory job performance. This individualized program, based on the theory of cognitive development outlined by Perry (1968), matches intervention level with the RA's developmental level. Each intervention in this program is tailored to fit the needs of the individual RA on probation. With this approach, RAs can better comprehend areas needing improvement and determine methods for realizing better job performance.

Perry (1968) developed a continuum of nine developmental positions divided into four major stages. Stage one represents dualism, in which students view knowledge as existing absolutely, established authorities as possessing all the "right answers", and the student's role as mastering these answers (Knefelkamp, Widick, & Parker, 1978). In the second stage, multiplicity, students acknowledge the existence of multiple perspectives to a given topic or problem. Differing views or opinions are accepted as equally valid by these students, however, these differences are not subject to evaluation (Knefelkamp, Widick, & Parker, 1978).

In the third stage, relativism, students evaluate views and opinions acknowledged in the previous stage, finding merits in each alternative (Knefelkamp, Widick, & Parker, 1978). At the fourth stage, commitment in relativism, students better understand their roles in the world, establishing identities and life styles consistent with personal themes (Knefelkamp, Widick, & Parker, 1978). Blake (1976) found that most RAs appear to be at the dualistic, multiplicitic, or relativistic level. The occurrence of an RA at the committed stage appeared to be rare. Therefore, the probationary program outlined focuses on stages one, two, and three.

Application

The first step in establishing a program to assist the development of probationary RAs is to determine the RAs' cognitive developmental levels. This determination can be made using an interview format focusing on key developmental clues (Stonewater & Stonewater, 1983). Developmental clues are comments or questions providing information about developmental level. Stonewater and Stonewater (1983) provided examples of attributes and clues representative of each of the developmental levels (see Table 1).

Table 1

DUALISM

Attributes

1. Expects to be told what to do.
2. Thinks the "right answer" is out there and the authority knows it.
3. Gets very frustrated with the authority who won't give the answers in clear cut terms.
4. When the student sees differences of opinion, is either confused or thinks it is a "trick" to "get me to figure it out."

Developmental Clues

1. "Nobody will tell me which program I should do."
2. "My residents don't respect me. How do I make them respect me?"
3. "That Coordinator is lousy. She keeps giving us all this information on discipline but won't tell us how to handle every situation."
 - a) "The Coordinator knows what I should do, but she wants me to figure it out for myself."
 - b) "Both roommates tell me a different story. I don't know which one is right."

MULTIPLICITY

Attributes

1. In some areas, we just haven't found the answer yet.
2. Is more tolerant of people with different viewpoints.
3. Understands multiple possibilities with "we all have a right to our own opinions" or "one answer is as good as another."

Developmental Clues

1. "The Coordinator is really clear on some stuff, but with some of the material, it seems like she just hasn't figured it out yet."
2. "You know those Moslems on my floor have some interesting beliefs—makes you think."
3. "I don't agree with that RA but I guess her ideas are as good as anybody else's."