

Career planning

Dear students:

This is a useful theory and an exercise for students for early career planning and entry into work. Try it!

Your comments are welcome.

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Person–environment fit theories

The idea of person–environment fit (or the degree of ‘congruence’ or ‘correspondence’ between workers and their environments) has been the main framework for understanding occupational choice and decision making over the last century. One of the earliest attempts to describe what happens when individuals choose occupations was that of Frank Parsons, who, in 1908, established his vocational guidance agency in Boston, US. The theory which guided his work consisted of three propositions (Parsons, 1909):

- 1 People are different from each other.
- 2 So are jobs.
- 3 It should be possible, by a study of both, to achieve a match between person and job.

From that time, thinking about occupational choice was increasingly dominated by the assumed need to generate verifiable data about individuals on one hand and jobs on the other.

Psychometric tests were developed, first to assess aptitudes (basic components of cognitive functioning) and later occupational interests (preferences for particular work activities). Parsons’ ‘theory’ may seem simplistic, but his matching approach has been accepted and elaborated upon by later writers. The literature on person–environment fit has been reviewed by Tinsley (2000). He concluded that the overall model is on the whole valid in that individuals who show greater fit between their own attributes and the attributes of their occupations have higher levels of well-being than those with less fit.

Holland’s occupational interests

One of the most influential and widely researched matching theories is that of Holland (1997), who proposed that people seek occupational environments that are congruent with their occupational interests or personalities. The theory states that:

- People fall into six personality or interest types – realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional
- Occupational environments can be classified in the same terms
- Individuals seek to achieve congruence between personality and environment.

Holland's six types are described as follows.

1 **Realistic** – likes realistic jobs such as mechanic, surveyor, farmer, and electrician. Has mechanical abilities, but may lack social skills. Is described as: asocial, conforming, hard-headed, practical, frank, inflexible and genuine.

2 **Investigative** – likes investigative jobs such as biologist, chemist, physicist, and anthropologist. Has mathematical and scientific ability but often lacks leadership ability. Is described as: analytical, cautious, critical, curious, introspective, independent and rational.

3 **Artistic** – likes artistic jobs, such as composer, musician, stage director, and writer. Has writing, musical or artistic abilities but often lacks clerical skills. Is described as: emotional, expressive, intuitive, open, imaginative and disorderly.

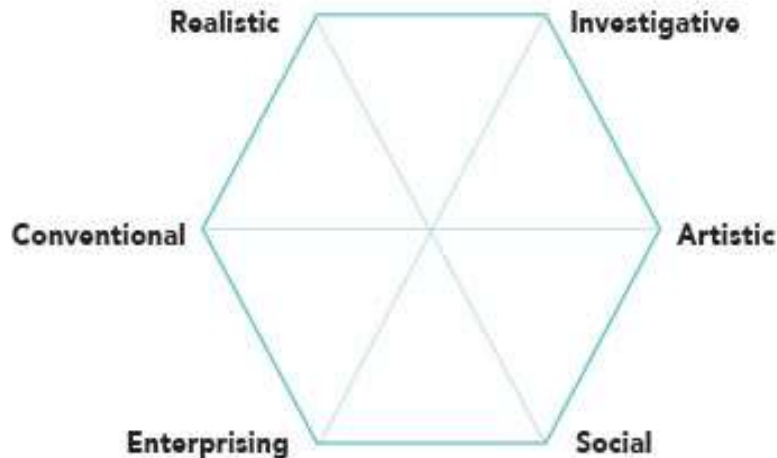
4 **Social** – likes social jobs such as teacher, counsellor, clinical psychologist. Has social skills and talents, but often lacks mechanical and scientific ability. Is described as: co-operative, empathic, sociable, warm and persuasive.

5 **Enterprising** – likes enterprising jobs such as salesperson, manager, television producer, and buyer. Has leadership and speaking abilities but often lacks scientific ability. Is described as: adventurous, ambitious, energetic, sociable, self-confident and domineering.

6 **Conventional** – likes conventional jobs such as book-keeper, financial analyst, banker, tax expert. Has clerical and arithmetical ability, but often lacks artistic abilities. Is described as: careful, conscientious, inflexible, unimaginative and thrifty.

Holland sets out a hexagonal model of occupational interests where some of the six types are seen as more similar, while others are more distantly related.

This model is described with types at adjacent angles more closely related than those at opposite angles.



Holland's model of occupational interests

Source: adapted from Holland, 1985a, p. 29

This type of questionnaire, is often used in career planning materials. The questions are similar to those used in standardized psychometric instruments which assess occupational interests. However, unlike psychometric instruments, the reliability and validity of 'informal' tools like these are unknown. This means that the results should simply be seen as an aid to reflection and discussion, rather than a valid and reliable assessment of occupational interests.

Assessing your occupational interests

This activity is adapted from Hopson & Scally (1984). On this and the next page are six sets of statements. For each of them, show how much you agree or disagree with the statement, using the following scale:

1 = strongly disagree

5 = strongly agree.

Alongside each statement circle the number that represents your level of agreement.

Interests – Group R

1 2 3 4 5 I like fixing and repairing things

1 2 3 4 5 I like to be very fit

1 2 3 4 5 I like making things with my hands

1 2 3 4 5 I like doing things outdoors

1 2 3 4 5 I like hard, physical work

1 2 3 4 5 I feel comfortable working with tools or machines

Add up the numbers Total for R =

Interests – Group I

1 2 3 4 5 I like to understand things thoroughly

1 2 3 4 5 I like exploring new ideas

1 2 3 4 5 I enjoy working on problems

1 2 3 4 5 I like asking questions

1 2 3 4 5 I like learning about new things

1 2 3 4 5 I like to work out my own answers to problems

Add up the numbers Total for I =

Interests – Group A

1 2 3 4 5 I like seeing art shows, plays and good films

1 2 3 4 5 I like to be different

1 2 3 4 5 I like to forget about everything else when I am being creative

1 2 3 4 5 It is vital to have beautiful and unusual things around me

1 2 3 4 5 I like to use my imagination

1 2 3 4 5 I like expressing myself on paper, through painting, music or by building things

Add up the numbers Total for A =

Interests – Group S

1 2 3 4 5 I enjoy being with people

1 2 3 4 5 I like to talk things through with people

1 2 3 4 5 I like to pay attention to what people want

1 2 3 4 5 I like helping people

1 2 3 4 5 I like helping people to develop and learn things

1 2 3 4 5 Who I am with is more important than where I am

Add up the numbers Total for S =

Interests – Group E

1 2 3 4 5 I enjoy trying to persuade and influence people

1 2 3 4 5 I enjoy using a great deal of energy and resilience

1 2 3 4 5 I like people to do what I ask of them

1 2 3 4 5 I like taking risks

1 2 3 4 5 I like making decisions

1 2 3 4 5 I enjoy getting people organized and excited about a task

Add up the numbers Total for E =

Interests – Group C

1 2 3 4 5 I like to be given clear directions

1 2 3 4 5 I enjoy getting the details right in my work

1 2 3 4 5 I like a clear structure and a regular routine

1 2 3 4 5 I can be relied upon to do what I'm expected to do

1 2 3 4 5 I enjoy working with figures

1 2 3 4 5 I like organizing projects, ideas and people down to the last detail.

Add up the numbers Total for C =

When you have added up your scores for each of the interest groups, rank order the letters R, I, A, S, E and C according to which interest group has the highest and the lowest scores for you.

Take your top three scores. These represent your three major interest types.