

The Systems Theory Framework of Career Development and Counseling: Connecting Theory and Practice

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The practice of career counseling has been derived from principles of career theory and counseling theory. In recent times, the fields of both career and counseling theory have undergone considerable change. This article details the move toward convergence in career theory, and the subsequent development of the Systems Theory Framework in this domain. The importance of this development to connecting theory and practice in the field of career counseling is discussed.

KEY WORDS: systems theory; career counseling; career theory; counseling theory.

Systems theory has been proposed as a potential overarching framework for dealing with many issues in human behavior. Contributors to systems theory have come from many diverse fields, including physics (Capra, 1982), biology, anthropology and psychology (Bateson, 1979). The work on living systems by Ford (1987) and Ford and Ford (1987) has served to develop an integrated framework of human development and has furthered the development and understanding of systems theory. Developmental Systems Theory (DST; Ford & Lerner, 1992) and Motivational Systems Theory (MST; Ford, 1992) have illustrated the applicability of systems theory principles to human behavior.

Patton and McMahon (1999, 2006) have extended the utility of systems theory in their application of it as a metatheoretical framework for career theory, and as a guide to redefine career counseling practice. The field of career development, as with many other fields of psychology, is characterized by a variable and complex theoretical base. The early thinking by career theorists had ranged

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