A COMPARISON OF VOCATIONAL INTEREST TYPES AND JOB SATISFACTION IN ADULT CAREER DEVELOPMENT

A Study of Unskilled Workers in Australia

by

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B.B.S.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in the University of Technology, Sydney School of Adult Education

February, 1996
I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help I have received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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Karin F. Hosking
Acknowledgments

In the course of this research, many wonderful people generously gave their time, in interviews and surveys, to share their experiences with me. I am very grateful to these people, and to their supervisors who kindly allowed my visits.

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Dr J.A. Athanasou, for his encouragement, patience, and reassurance throughout the project. His advice and guidance over the past three years have been invaluable, and greatly appreciated.

Dr R.T. Pithers also assisted with the data collection for Sample 3, and oversaw my work when Dr Athanasou was absent from the university.

A number of people, including Joseph Moore of the NSW Chamber of Manufactures, Bernice Melville of UTS, and various colleagues in the Department of Employment, Education and Training, suggested possible workplaces for me to visit, and their suggestions were appreciated.

I also want to thank Andrew Davidson, who has provided technical assistance (and rescued me from numerous computer crises) with good humour and good coffee; and Trudi Deane, for her support and encouragement over the years.
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Abstract

The career development theory of Holland (1985) maintains that people whose vocational interests have congruence (or “fit”) with their work environments will be more satisfied than those whose interests are incongruent. This study investigated whether this theory held for a group of 120 unskilled workers, and for 54 teachers. The key issues were whether interest-job congruence correlated with job satisfaction, and whether the congruence-satisfaction relationship was a function of the congruence measure used. While previous studies showed positive correlations between person-job congruence and satisfaction, most of these used professionally-employed subjects, and some used students; few researchers investigated the experiences of unskilled workers. A meta-analysis of previous research, carried out in this study revealed an overall mean correlation between congruence and satisfaction of .16, which was very low.

Structured interviews in workplaces were used to gather data from the unskilled subjects, and a questionnaire was devised for use with the skilled subject group. The interviews and questionnaires used a card-sort procedure to ascertain subjects’ vocational interests, asked questions about subjects’ jobs, collected details on education levels and job tenure, and concluded with a job satisfaction measure. The data gathered were analysed in various ways. Two different interest coding systems, and four congruence measures were applied, to see whether different measures gave differing results. Congruence levels were significantly higher in the skilled subjects than the unskilled subjects when one set of interest codings were used, but were low for both groups when the other codings were applied. Average job satisfaction levels were similar in each group of subjects. When congruence and job satisfaction were correlated, no significant correlations were found, using either subject group, either interest coding method, or any congruence measure. Similarly, when certain factors (tenure, education levels and gender) were statistically controlled, there were still no significant
correlations between congruence and total job satisfaction scores. Certain individual items on the job satisfaction questionnaires showed significant correlation with congruence levels, however, indicating that congruent people were happier than incongruent people with certain aspects of their jobs. On the whole, the results did not support Holland’s (1985) theory of vocational choice. The current study suggests that interest may not be a strong predictor of satisfaction, at least in the group of Australian workers sampled. There are implications for career guidance with less academically-inclined people; careers advisers must address other needs as well as interests, in assisting clients to make work and study decisions.