Archives of Business Research – Vol. 9, No. 11
Publication Date: November 25, 2021
DOI:10.14738/abr.911.11299.
Firkola, P. (2021). A Review of Career Assessment Tools. Archives of Business Research, 9(11). 131-140.

A Review of Career Assessment Tools

Peter Firkola
Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan

ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of career assessment tools. Background on key career concepts is first introduced. A number of career assessment tools are then examined. These assessment tools included reviewing personal history, interest inventories, values assessments, personality assessments, and aptitude tests. The importance and limitations of these career assessment tools is then discussed.

Keywords: Career, Career Planning, Assessment Tools, Career Development

INTRODUCTION

One of the major trends in large global companies worldwide over the past decade or so has been the change of attitude regarding career planning practices, specifically the shifting of responsibility for an employees' career from the employer to the employee. This shift has led to a gradual movement towards making individuals responsible for their own career development. This is forcing individuals to take more responsibility for planning their own careers. In some cases, this can lead to confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty for individuals who have never done this before. This is particularly true for young people who have little or no work experience.

One of the keys to career planning is carrying out a self-assessment. Self-assessment is a process by which a person can learn more about themselves. This can include things like what they like, what is important to them, and how they tend to react to certain situations. Knowing these things can help a person determine which occupations and work situations could be a better fit for them.

This paper provides an overview of some of the main career assessment tools based on a literature review of research and related career planning handbooks. In section two, some key career concepts are introduced. In section three, a number of career planning assessments are examined. These assessments include reviewing personal history, interest inventories, values assessments, personality assessments, and aptitude tests. In section four the importance and limitations of these career assessment tools is discussed.

BACKGROUND ON CAREERS

The term career has been used to refer to a variety of concepts in the literature. One definition of career is as advancement. Here career entails the notion of vertical mobility, moving upward in an organization's hierarchy. By this definition, career represents the sequence of promotions and other upward movements (e.g., lateral transfers to more responsible positions or moves to "better" organizations or locations) during the course of an individual's work life. This concept

of directionality ("up is good, down is bad"), then, is a pervasive theme in this definition of career.

A second way to view career is as a profession. A less common way of viewing careers is that certain occupations represent careers, while others do not. This is related to the career-as-advancement theme, since "career" occupations are generally those in which some clear pattern of systematic advancement (a "career ladder") is evident. For example, in the legal profession, there is a clear advancement ladder from law student to clerk to associate to partner. Doctors, professors, businessmen, and teachers, as well as other professional people, also have a generally understood path of career movement. Jobs that do not generally lead to advancement or to a long-term series of related positions, however, are often viewed as not constituting a career, for example, secretaries and parking lot attendants are not considered to "have" careers.

A career can also be viewed as a lifelong sequence of jobs (objective career). By this definition an individual's career is their job history—the series of positions held, regardless of occupation or level, during the course of his/her working life. According to this definition, all people who work have careers. No value judgment is made about the type of occupation or the direction of movement. An individual's sequence of jobs is referred to as an objective career and the particular experiences he/she has in those jobs as a subjective career.

A career can also be viewed as a lifelong sequence of role-related experiences. According to this definition, career represents the way the individual experiences the sequence of jobs and activities that constitute his/her work history. This is the subjective career, the changing aspirations, satisfactions, self-conceptions, and other attitudes of the individual toward his/her work and life. Using this career-as-life-process view, it is even possible to consider careers independent of work; the term could refer to the history of an individual in any particular role or status, not just in a work role.

The first two meanings of career, advancement or profession, are commonly used in the literature. The last two definitions, however, are more representative of behavioral science literature related to careers. Thus the word "career" is used in a number of different ways, depending on the definition, from "pursuing a career" to "career counseling"; even criminals can be regarded as having a "career".

In this paper a career is defined as *a sequence of positions occupied by an individual during his/her lifetime*. This definition of career is similar to the business perspective of career (career as profession) and is also similar to the sociological perspective of careers as a lifelong sequence of jobs which provide a link between individuals, organizations, and society. Using this definition, a career represents an individual's working life, which is a primary factor in determining an individual's overall quality of life.

A feature of this definition is that career is looked at from an individual perspective. This definition is based on self-reliance and individualism, as well as the notion of self-responsibility. Thus in this definition it is implicitly assumed that individuals have some degree of control over their destinies and that they can manipulate opportunities in order to maximize their

satisfaction and success. It also assumes that a career does not imply success or failure. Career success or failure is best measured by the individual whose career is being considered, rather than by other individuals.

Career planning is a process of helping employees to set clear career objectives and developing activities to help them achieve these goals. This is a continuous process of preparing, implementing, and monitoring career plans which is undertaken by the individual alone or in concert with the organization's career system. Thus, career planning focuses on the individual developing and achieving his/her goals. Career planning implicitly assumes, however, that the individual is responsible for his/her career and that the individual can make decisions about his/her long-term goals. Thus it is the lifelong process of planning and then managing learning, work and transitions in order to move toward a personally determined and evolving preferred future.

CAREER ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Self-Assessments

Self-assessment is usually regarded as the first stage of career planning by which a person can learn more about themselves. This can include things like what they like, what is important to them, and how they tend to react to certain situations. Knowing these things can help a person determine which occupations and work situations could be a better fit for them in order to choose an appropriate career.

A number of career assessment tools will be examined. These assessments include reviewing personal history, interest inventories, values assessments, personality assessments, and aptitude tests.

Personal History

An importance place to start a self-assessment is by looking at past experiences and personal history. This can be done by reflecting on past experiences such as schooling, free time activities, jobs, and achievements, as well as various career ideas. This can be done by writing a mini-biography using a career notebook, either on paper or on a computer. This should include some basic facts such as:
What cities have you lived in?
What countries have you visited?
What languages do you speak?
What schools have you attended?
What were your best subjects in high school and in university?
What honors or awards have you received?
What student activities, clubs or sports have you been involved in?
What community activities or volunteer work have you been involved in?
What jobs have you had?
What jobs have members of your family had?

Past career ideas should also be examined. This should include basic ideas such as:
What did you dream of doing when you were a child?
What was your first career idea?

What were your career dreams in high school?
What did you like or dislike about each job you have had?
What careers have you thought about since you entered university?
What experiences from your past are you proud of or positive about?

Writing a personal history is an important starting point for any self-assessment. By examining your past, most people should be able to find some hints about what they like to do or what they are good at. Thus individuals can gain a deeper understanding of themselves.

Interest Inventories

Interest inventories help to measure those things that most interest an individual, hopefully finding a match between their interests and possible career areas. This type of inventory is designed to help individuals match their interests and skills with similar careers. It can help them begin thinking about how their personality will fit in with specific work environments and careers.

Most people already know many of their interests through past experiences such as past employment, classes and leisure activities. However, many students discover new interests during college through new academic experiences, as well as outside activities and employment opportunities. Many students find that interest inventories are helpful to sort out possible interests.

Most of the widely used interest inventories are based on the research of John Holland. Working as a vocational counselor in educational, military, and clinical settings led John Holland to develop his theory of careers. According to Holland, "the main purpose of the theory is to explain vocational behavior and suggest some practical ideas to help young people select jobs, change jobs and obtain vocational satisfaction. To put it simply, this theory aims to assist people with making satisfying career choices.

To operationally define and make concepts in this theory practically useful, Holland developed interest inventories such as the Self-Directed Search. His theory is the most widely used and empirically supported theory of career choice.

Holland's RIASEC theory is based on the assumption that people can be loosely classified into six different groups. The six groups are labeled Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. The Self-Directed Search inventory estimates how closely individuals resemble each of the six types. The three types they are most like comprise their three-letter code. Thus, if someone is most like the Realistic type, the first letter in their three letter code is R, if the Investigative type next resembles them, the second letter in their three letter code is I, and so on. Holland has classified occupational titles by this same three-letter code system. Most people, and most jobs, are some combination of two or three of the Holland interest areas.

Holland's theory contains four basic assumptions about people and work environments:
1. People can be categorized as one of six personality types:
Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional.

2. Environments can similarly be categorized as one of 6 types:
Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional.
3. People seek environments that allow them to use their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values and take on problems and roles the fit them.
4. Interaction between personality and environment determines individual behavior.

Environments if they resemble a person's personality type will reinforce and satisfy the person therefore leading to stable and predictable behavior patterns. The person thus will find success and satisfaction in the job and, in turn, contribute successfully to the work environment. If the individual and work environment do not match significantly, then job changes and dissatisfaction will result.

Work Values Inventories

What are the things that make people feel good about their jobs? These are values. Values are intangible, and thus difficult to define and even trickier to measure. Values are different for everyone. Some people feel fulfilled when helping others. Others need the opportunity to work independently. Still others become frustrated when their job doesn't allow them to be creative. The key is identifying one's work values.

Work values are different from societal values as there is no right or wrong interpretation and they are a personal issue. Some evidence suggests there are two value systems, expressed and implied values, involved in career decision making. Expressed values are those a person says are his or her values when asked but seem to be influenced by external sources (e.g. parents, friends, environment). Implied values tend to be hidden and usually brought to consciousness by in-depth analysis.

People who are most satisfied with their work find that most of their work values are being met. If someone desires career satisfaction, they should take time to examine their values and make choices that are consistent with them. Understanding one's values is also essential to preventing conflict in the workplace. Learning about employer values through official and off the record sources is also important.

A work values inventory allows a person to examine what motivates and is important to them (a job with an employer who is "family friendly," environmentally conscious, or who values employees highly). Work values inventories help individuals to understand what is most important to them, hopefully helping them find a match between their values and their career. Unfortunately, there is no measure available which matches values and occupations.☐

Values and interests are different. Interests focus on things we "like" or "prefer". Values refer to terms like "important" or "motive" and often require rank order preference among options. Measures of interests and values tend to correlate only moderately.

It is also important to balance values and needs (time, money). Unlike values, needs can change regularly. In some cases, needs can conflict with values. When doing career planning, it is wise to prioritize work needs as well. Few people find a job that satisfies them completely. People

need to know what they are willing to compromise and, maybe more importantly, what they are not.

One widely used work values inventory is based on the research of Edgar Schein. Working as a professor at MIT in the early 1960's led Schein to develop his theory of career anchors. In a longitudinal study of MIT graduates, many graduates referred to being pulled to a job or career that fit them better - thus the metaphor of an anchor.

According to Schein, "a career anchor is a combination of values and motives that you would not give up. Your future career decisions will be easier and more valid if you have a clear understanding of your values and motives." To put it simply, career anchors are the motivating forces that govern career choices. Career anchors may change over time.

Career Anchors are factors or motives that lead people to choose one type of career over another in their work life. A key implication is that individuals with differing anchors require different career paths. Schein's work over several years identified eight *Anchors*: (1) Autonomy/Independence; (2) Security/Stability; (3) Technical-Functional Competence; (4) General Managerial Competence; (5) Entrepreneurial Creativity; (6) Service or Dedication to a Cause; (7) Pure Challenge; and (8) Life Style.

In research in Japan, one more Anchor has been added, Rootedness, to understand students' attitudes towards geographic mobility inherent in many career choices. In Japan willingness to relocate is considered a factor in promotion decisions and thus impacts on an employee's career.

The fastest growing of the anchors is lifestyle. More emphasis is being placed on creating balance between work and the rest of one's life (family, friends, community, and personal interests). Many companies are introducing policies (such as flex-time, work at home, daycare) because of the emerging importance of lifestyle issues. This emphasis on lifestyle is due to many factors such as the downsizing of companies in the 1980s and 1990s, the increase of dual-career couples, and changing values among younger people.

Many people are now choosing to "downshift", that is, earn a lower income but have a more balanced life. These people are choosing to redefine success by choosing less demanding work or reducing commuting time. They lower their expectations in terms of income, possessions, and career prestige. This requires changing spending habits and living a less materialistic lifestyle. Increasingly, more people are choosing work based on lifestyle values.

Personality Type Assessments

Another important factors in determining one's happiness and success in a job is understanding your personality, also referred to as characteristics or attitudes. Understanding personality type can help one in choosing a satisfying career. People are different in fundamental ways. They want different things; they have different interests, motives, purposes, values, drives, and impulses.

The theory of personality types is based on the work of Swiss psychologist Carl Jung. Jung believed that people are different in fundamental ways even though they all have the same basic instincts to drive them from within. One instinct is no more important than another. What is important is our preference for how we "function." Our preference for a given "function" is characteristic, and so we may be "typed" by this preference. Thus Jung invented the "function types" or "psychological types."

Psychological type describes the different ways people:

- prefer to take in information,
- prefer to make decisions,
- are energized by the outside world or by the inner world, and
- prefer to keep things open or to move towards closure.

These four preferences result in a person's psychological type, sometimes called personality type. The theory of psychological type says that people with different preferences naturally have different interests, perspectives, behaviors, and motivations. Awareness of preferences helps people understand and value others who think and act quite differently.

Isabel Briggs Myers and her mother Katherine Briggs took these contributions of Jung and made a simple linear assessment of three main aspects he talked about, then included their own scale of "J/P", and associated simple descriptions of those aspects so people could get a sense of what preferences they have as an individual. Their invention, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) instrument, makes the Function Type theory of Jung available and personally significant to any individual.

The MBTI is based on the idea that everyone has preferred ways of doing things. It helps explain why different kinds of people are interested in different things, prefer different kinds of work and sometimes find it difficult to understand each other, all due to basic differences in how people take in information and make decisions about it.

The assessment is a tool for identifying 16 different personality types that can be used to describe people. An individual’s personally type is much more than a combination of their four individual preferences. Each of the 16 types has its own unique pattern of preferences, this explains why things that are interesting and easy for some people are uninteresting and difficult for others. The two middle letters of one’s type indicate their preferred mental processes.

The MBTI is an instrument that sorts for preferences; it does not measure skills or aptitudes. There are no good or bad responses. Likewise, no type is better than another. We each have strengths and unique gifts, as well as vulnerabilities and areas for personal development. Understanding how one likes to work, which skills they prefer to use and the type of environment where they feel most comfortable can help them choose a career.

The MBTI assessment has been used for more than sixty years. Organizations use it to improve employee communication, teamwork, and leadership. Young people use it to choose careers that are likely to hold their interests and use their gifts. When a person completes the assessment, they make four choices made up of two opposite preferences. Where they focus

their attention, the way they take in information, the way they make decisions, how they deal with the outer world.

Although every one uses all eight preferences people find one preference more comfortable than its opposite. Think of the choices as a difference between using your left and right hand. Both are valuable but most people prefer to reach first with one hand usually more often and become more skillful with that hand.

Aptitude Tests

Aptitude measures what individuals are capable of doing now (ability) and what they are capable of doing in the future if given the opportunity to learn (potential). The benefits of testing include understanding strengths, gaining encouragement and motivation, set appropriate goals, selecting a realistic career, and saving time in choosing an appropriate career.

Some of the main aptitudes include:

1. Business: ability to coordinate, delegate, manage, negotiate, organize, persuade, sell and supervise.
2. Clerical: work rapidly and precisely with details, decode materials, memorize quickly, file and research efficiently.
3. Logic: reasoning skills such as ability to systematize and simplify problems, draw conclusions rapidly, infer information
4. Mechanical: ability to understand basic machines, solve problems involving spatial relationships, develop intricate designs, work with precision.
5. Numerical: ability to work with numbers, estimate possible solutions, read numerical charts and graphs.
6. Social: ability to help others solve personal problems. Ability to motivate others, advise, guide, or counsel others.

DISCUSSION

Although career assessment tools can be helpful it is also important to use caution. Assessments aren't crystal balls and can't offer quick and easy answers. When taking them, it's best to keep their results in perspective. Users should not pigeonhole themselves once they receive results.

To gain a better understanding of oneself, career counselors suggest taking several kinds of assessments and comparing the results. It is suggested to try several assessments, and use intuition while reviewing the results. It is important not to put all of one’s faith in one tool. As well, one should never forget that each person is unique, and in-depth honest personal examination is always the best assessment tool.

When writing about assessment tests, Richard Bolles, author of "What Color Is Your Parachute?", raises a caution flag. "Tests have one great mission and purpose: To give you ideas you hadn't thought of, and suggestions worth following up. But if you ask them to do more than that, you're asking too much."

Even John Holland notes that "Despite several decades of research, the most efficient way to predict vocational choice is simply to ask the person what he wants to be; our best devices do not exceed the predictive value of that method."

Even with these limitations, career planning is still seen as an important activity with many benefits. Many young people often have a narrow, predetermined view of their career possibilities. Career planning can help to broaden an individual's view of potential career possibilities. As well, knowing more about oneself can help a person determine which occupations and work situations could be a better match in order to choose a potentially satisfying career.

References

Asher, D. (2004). *How to Get Any Job With Any Major*. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley.

Bolles, R., and Brooks, K. (2020). *What Color is Your Parachute?* Ten Speed Press, Berkeley.

Buckingham, M. (2005). *Now, Discover Your Strengths*. Simon & Schuster, London.

Burnett, B., and Evans, D. (2018). *Designing Your Life*. Vintage, London.

Citrin, J. (2003). *The 5 Patterns of Extraordinary Careers*. Crown, New York.

Dunning, D. (2010). *What's Your Type of Career?* Davies-Black, Palo Alto, CA.

Fellman, W. (2000). *Finding a Career That Works for You: A Step-by-Step Guide to Choosing a Career and Finding a Job*. Specialty Press, Plantation, FL.

Gratton, L. (2011). *The Shift: The Future of Work is Already Here*. HarperCollins, London.

Gratton, L. (2016). *The 100-Year Life*. Bloomsbury, London.

Jansen, J. (2003). *I Don't Know What I Want, but I Know It's Not This: A Step-By-Step Guide to Finding Gratifying Work*. Penguin, New York.

Krumboltz, J. (2010). *Luck is No Accident: Making the Most of Happenstance in Your Life and Career*. Impact Publications, Atascadero, CA.

Little, B. (2016). *Me, Myself, and Us: The Science of Personality and the Art of Well-Being*. Public Affairs, New York.

Lore, N. (2012). *The Pathfinder: How to Choose or Change Your Career for a Lifetime of Satisfaction and Success*. Fireside, New York.

Luzzo, D. (2000). *Career Counseling of College Students*. APA, Washington, D.C.

Luzzo, D. (2006). *Making Career Decisions That Count: A Practical Guide*. Prentice Hall, New York.

Maltz, S. (2003). *A Fork in the Road : A Career Planning Guide for Young Adults*. Impact Publications, Manassas Park, VA.

Mitchell, K. (2003). *The Unplanned Career: How to Turn Curiosity into Opportunity: A Guide and Workbook*. Chronicle Books, San Francisco.

Moses, B. (2000). *The Good News About Careers*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Schein, E. (2006). *Career Anchors: Facilitator's Guide*. Pfeiffer, San Francisco.

Schein, E. (2006). *Career Anchors: Participant Workbook*. Pfeiffer, San Francisco.

Schein, E. (2006). *Career Anchors: Self Assessment*. Pfeiffer, San Francisco.

Shaw, R. (2005). *Pilot Your Life: How To Create The Career You Want*. Emmis Books, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Simonsen, P. (2000). *Career Compass*. Davies-Black, Palo Alto.

Sukiennik, D. (2003). *The Career Fitness Program: Exercising Your Options*. Prentice Hall, New York.

Tieger, P., and Barron, B. (2021). *Do What You Are*. Little, Brown and Company, Boston.

Zunker, V. (2005). *Career Counseling: A Holistic Approach*. Thomson, Belmont, CA.