Chapter 7
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CAREER THEORIES: THE INFLUENCES OF CONSTRUCTIVISM AND CONVERGENCE

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The current literature in career theory reflects two key themes: the influence of constructivism and the ongoing drive for convergence of career theories. This chapter briefly overviews the history of career theories, and within the context of the need for a shift in philosophical underpinnings of career theory describes the core principles of constructivism and its role in the focus on convergence in career theory. Second, it explores two recent theoretical contributions which reflect developments in both integration and in the influence of constructivism in career theory. For the purpose of comprehensiveness, the influence of constructivism on the role of these influences in a number of emerging theoretical discussions is also reviewed.

The traditional approach to career needs to be understood in the context of an era in the world of work when vocational guidance was applied to decisions about jobs for life, usually at school leaving age. Indeed, knowledge about the world of work in order to facilitate career decisions at this time ensured that career counselling was largely seen as an objective cognitive problem solving process where matching knowledge about self and knowledge about the world of work was thought to result in a sound career choice. However, world of work changes have changed our understanding of career and career development. While the elements of the systems of influence on individual career behaviour are the same, their nature and their relevance to the individual and his/her career behaviour at different points throughout life are different. Career theories have broadened, new theories have been proposed, and the world of work has undergone dramatic and irreversible change (Amundson, 2005; Brown & Associates, 2002; Patton & McMahon, 2006). In today's world, people change jobs several times in a lifetime, and occupational choice is only one aspect of a broad array of career challenges to confront. Career theories need to be appropriate for the complexity of individuals living in a complex world.

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However, the changes in the context of career and the broadening of the concept of career development have far outpaced the development of theory to account for it. Traditional career theories have been challenged as being too narrow, although the more narrow theories have attempted to acknowledge the influence of elements of the broader system in their revised formulations. Theoretical frameworks have been proposed to encompass elements of the social system and the environmental-societal system, and the potential for integration and convergence of theories has been explored (Chen, 2003; Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006; Savickas, 2005; Savickas & Lent, 1994). Proponents of moves toward convergence in career theory (Chen; Patton, & McMahon; Savickas & Lent) have emphasised the importance of viewing the whole of career behaviour and the relationship between all relevant elements in the career decision-making process to each other and to the whole. In doing so, it is important that contributions from all theories are considered in exploring an individual's career decision-making processes. Thus the theoretical map underpinning our understanding of career behaviour in the 21st century is markedly different from that which existed with the first publication of Parsons in 1909. Indeed Amundson (2005) asserted that recent advances in constructivism, systems theory, action theory and paradoxical theory have emerged to support individuals and counsellors in constructing personal development in a world of unprecedented and ongoing rapid changes occurring within the workplace and in individual careers.

The last decade has seen the most active growth in the development of theories about career behaviour since the decade following World War II. Patton and McMahon (1999, 2006) presented an historical overview of major theories of career development by using a content/process heuristic based on the work of Minor (1992). Early theories focused on the *content* of career choice, such as characteristics of the individual and of the workplace evolved and became known as trait and factor theories (e.g., Holland, 1985). Subsequent development in these theories based on the acceptance of greater individual and environment connection led to modified person-environment fit theories (e.g., Walsh & Chartrand, 1994). Theories which placed more emphasis on the stages and *process* of career development were proposed and became known as developmental theories (e.g., Super, 1957, 1990). Theoretical work first published during the 1980s and early 1990s focused on both *content and process*, including the interaction between these and the role of cognition in the process (e.g., Lent & Hackett, 1994; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002; Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 1991; Peterson, Sampson, Lenz, & Reardon, 2002). More recently, theorists have focused on constructivist influences in career theory and on approaches to convergence of the many career theories, with the field of career development theory continuing to proffer flexible and adaptive theory. In a recent overview, Guichard and Lenz (2005) identified three main characteristics evident in the international career theory literature: "(a) emphasis on contexts and cultural diversities, (b) self-construction or development emphasis, and (c) a constructivist perspective" (p. 17).

Philosophical Underpinnings of Career Development Theory

Before focusing on constructivism in detail, it is important to explore the philosophical underpinnings of career theory. Traditional theorising about career has focused on identification of various relevant constructs and attempts to relate them to career behaviour, for example the role of interests (Holland, 1997) and self-concept (Super, 1990) in career choice. More recent approaches have emphasised that "the complexities that occur within and among the intrapersonal traits and interpersonal interactions are simply too complicated to understand and therefore, we should stop trying to do it, except on an individual basis" (Brown, 2002a, p. xii). Such difference in theoretical perspectives may be accounted for by the philosophical positions or worldviews that underpin them. For most of its history, career development theory has been influenced by the logical positivist worldview which emphasises rationality based on an objective value free knowledge; objectivity over subjectivity, facts over feelings. Core assumptions of logical positivism include the notion that individual behaviour is observable, measurable and linear, that individuals can be studied separately from their environments and that the contexts within which individuals live and work are of less importance than their actions (Brown, 2002a). The trait and factor theories are illustrative of the assumptions of logical positivism.

More recently, there has been a rise in the influence of the constructivist worldview. Constructivists argue against the possibility of absolute truth, asserting that an individual's construction of reality is constructed "from the inside out" through the individual's own thinking and processing. These constructions are based on individual cognitions in interaction with perspectives formed from person-environment interactions. Constructivism views the person as an open system, constantly interacting with the environment, seeking stability through ongoing change. Mahoney (2003) presented five basic assumptions which can be derived from theories of constructivism: active agency, order, self, social-symbolic relatedness, and lifespan development. Active agency implies that individuals are actively engaged in constructing their lives. Constructivism emphasises the proactive nature of human knowing, acknowledging that individuals actively participate in the construction of their own reality. Whereas realism asserts an objective valid truth, constructivism emphasises the viability of an individual's own construction of a personal reality on the basis of its coherence with related systems of personally or socially held beliefs. "From a constructivist viewpoint, human knowing is a process of 'meaning making' by which personal experiences are ordered and organized" (Mahoney & Patterson, 1992, p. 671). The second assumption identified by Mahoney (2003) emphasises the ordering processes, that is the patterning of individuals' experiences to create meaning. The third assumption is that this ordering of personal activity is mainly self-referent, that the focus is on personal identity, with the fourth assumption being that this development of self is embedded in the social and symbolic systems or contexts within which the individual lives. A final core assumption of constructivism is that the activities of the previous assumptions are embedded in an ongoing developmental process that emphasises meaningful

action by a developing self working towards a homeostasis. Mahoney and Lyddon (1988) emphasised this change and stability notion as follows: "Embedded with self-change is self-stability - we are all changing all the time and simultaneously remaining the same" (p. 209).

In discussing the complexity of the notion of constructivism, Young and Collin (2004) referred to the term "constructivisms". Part of the complexity of this literature is that constructivism draws its key components from related theories. For example, the notion of proactive cognition is derived from motor theory which asserts that the mind is an active system which has the capacity to produce its output in addition to the input it receives. The individual is always interacting with the environment while simultaneously internally construing and constructing meaning about it. Knowledge is an interactive process and motivated through feedforward and feedback mechanisms. Hence rather than reacting to external stimuli, the human mind actively constructs reality through internal sorting and processing of stimuli. In addition, constructivism asserts that deep cognitive structures function at tacit and unconscious levels and that these tacit ordering rules govern the individual's cognitive processes.

Systems theory has also contributed to key components of constructivism, in particular in relation to the notion that individuals are self-organising and that all learning and knowing is comprised of complex dynamic processes through which the self organises and reorganises to achieve equilibrium. The human system is viewed as purposive, ever-evolving, and self-perpetuating. The process is interactive, and the human system operates interdependently with other systems (e.g., family, workforce). "Life is an ongoing recursion of perturbation and adaptation, disorganisation and distress, and emerging complexity and differentiation" (Granvold, 1996, pp. 346–347). The following description by Ford and Ford (1987) illustrates the systems theory contribution to this aspect of constructivism, as well as the integration of a range of interconnected theories in understanding human behaviour:

> The Living Systems Framework (LSF) is designed to represent all aspects of being human, not merely a particular facet of behavior or personality… It describes how the various "pieces" of the person - goals, emotions, thoughts, actions, and biological processes - function both semi-autonomously as a part of a larger unit (the person) in coherent "chunks" of context-specific, goal directed activity (behavior episodes). It also describes how these specific experiences "add up" to produce a unique, self-constructed history and personality (i.e., through the construction, differentiation, and elaboration of behavior episode schemata), and how various processes of change (self-organization, self-construction, and disorganization-reorganization) help maintain both stability and developmental flexibility in the organized patterns that result (steady states). Thus the LSF cannot be easily characterized in terms of traditional theoretical categories. Rather, it is a way of trying to understand persons in all their complexly organized humanness. (pp. 1–2)

As constructivism represents an epistemological position that emphasises self-organising and proactive knowing, it provides a perspective from which to conceptualise changing notions of career in post-modern society. These changing notions include the importance of individuals becoming more self-directed in making meaning of the place of work in their lives and in managing their careers (Richardson, 1993, 1996, 2000). Savickas (2000) attributed the influence of

constructivism to the change in the structure of work and the emphasis on individuals becoming agents in their own lives and careers as it provides an alternate perspective from which to conceptualise careers in post-industrial societies. Constructivists assert that individuals actively construct their own reality, and are able to actively construct a meaningful position within the work context.

Constructivism and the Moves Toward Theory Integration

The emphasis of constructivism on individual meaning-making shifts the focus from the theory to the individual for understanding the complexity of career behaviour. It is within the individual that the theories make sense and where construction of meaning around the multiple influences which are relevant to career development occurs. Thus constructivism has been of major significance in developments in the career theory literature in the previous two decades, in particular in moves toward integration or convergence in career theory.

Super (1990) commented on the understandable segmental nature of much theory development in the area of career psychology, "in view of the size of the problem" (p. 221). He acknowledged that theories which attempt to encompass too much may suffer from superficiality, and that future theories of career development "will be made up of refined, validated and well-assembled segments, cemented together by some synthesizing theory to constitute a whole which will be more powerful than the sum of its parts" (p. 221). In adding to this discussion in 1992, Super commented that no theory in itself is sufficient, and that in order to adequately address the complexity of career development, contributions from each of the major theories are necessary.

Patton and McMahon (1999, 2006) presented an extensive review of the theoretical journey toward integration, and identified the range of efforts theorists have made to integrate a range of theoretical perspectives. This section of the chapter will provide a brief historical overview of these theoretical discussions in order to provide a background to understanding the iterative nature of advances in the integration of career theories.

Attempts at integration of career theory constructs have been located from as early as the 1950s when Blau, Gustad, Jessor, Parnes, and Wilcock (1956) recognised the importance of contributions from psychology, economics and sociology in understanding career choice, and developed an inclusive conceptual framework that included a comprehensive outline of relevant schema, drawn from the three disciplines, which are relevant to the process of career choice. The conceptual framework of Blau et al. (1956) was important for its inclusion of psychological and contextual antecedents in career choice.

Other examples of attempts at interdisciplinary integrative frameworks included the work of Van Maanen and Schein (1977) which represented an important precursor to an integration between the psychological differential, developmental and organisational theorising about career development, as well as sociological theorising.

These authors noted how the two frames of reference "have remained remarkably independent" (p. 44) and proceeded to develop an interdisciplinary framework. Their interactional schema was underpinned by the importance of perceiving career development in its total context, within the life-space of each individual.

In searching for a framework for vocational psychology, Hesketh (1985) emphasised the complexity of career behaviour and the improbability of any one theory being able to adequately explain it. She advocated the generation of empirically testable specific theories, or microtheories, and the development of a conceptual framework that provided a structure to integrate findings from research. She identified the following three themes which underlie existing theory in vocational psychology: intervening factors; the role of the individual (how active the individual is); and the degree of emphasis on content or process. She called for a greater integration of the content and process of career development and highlighted the "dynamic active and reactive modes on the part of individuals and organisations" (p. 28).

Also in 1985, Pryor proposed what he termed a composite theory of career development and choice. He commented on the separateness of theorising in vocational psychology from other fields in psychology, emphasising that "Dividing the person up into bits and theorising separately about each piece is a fundamental denial of the totality of the human being …" (p. 226). He therefore attempted to integrate this theory with Gottfredson's (1981) circumscription and compromise theory to formulate a "composite theory", proposing that an integration of the two theoretical formulations would give a more complete account of career development and choice.

Sonnenfeld and Kotter (1982) presented an expansive integrative framework. These authors identified four waves in the evolution of career theory, including the social structure approach, where career outcomes were set from birth as a result of parent's social class; the connection between individual traits and career choice; a developmental focus on the stages; and the lifecycle or life course approach, where the focus was on the interrelationships between career and other areas of an individual's life. A picture of considerable complexity was emerging with the increasing number and array of variables relevant to career choice. Sonnenfeld and Kotter (1982) therefore advocated a fifth approach, an attempt to integrate all factors and show how they contribute to a bigger picture. They developed a two dimensional model, with life-space on one axis and time on another, to illustrate the interaction between occupational, personal and family factors in career development. Nine major sets of variables operating within the two axes included educational environment, the individual's personality, childhood family environment, adult family/nonwork history, adult development history, work history, current work situation, the individual's current perspective, and current family/nonwork situation. While the model serves an illustrative purpose, it offered little in the way of theoretical underpinnings.

Within the context of increasing complexity, a number of theorists have attempted to integrate additional components into their original theories. For example, as previously discussed, Super (1990) had often referred to his theory as segmental as he focused on specific constructs such as self-concept, career maturity, and work values. In a 1992 article entitled "Toward a comprehensive theory of career development", he acknowledged the need for "Not two, but three…" (p. 59)

models to explain career development. These included the life-span, life-space model depicted in the Rainbow, and the determinant/choice model depicted in the Archway. Super indicated that these two models also need a decision-making model to form an integrated theoretical approach.

Gottfredson's (1981, 2002) approach integrated a social systems perspective with psychological approaches. Gottfredson's (1981) theory "accepts the fundamental importance of self-concept in vocational development, that people seek jobs compatible with their images of themselves. Social class, intelligence and sex are seen as important determinants of both self-concepts and the types of compromises people must make" (p. 546). In focusing on developmental stages, Gottfredson also acknowledged the importance of the concepts of time and context to career development, and illustrated the integration of concepts from disciplines such as sociology and psychology.

The concepts of time and context are also recognised in the developmental-contextual approach of Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg (1986). These authors stress that their approach to career development is not a theory but a general conceptual model. Importantly, they firmly linked career development within the field of human development. Second, they argued that it is essential to view the contextual (socioeconomic and cultural) influences on career, and their ever changing nature. Finally, an important concept within the model is the embeddedness of human life within multiple levels of analysis, for example biological, individual-psychological, organisational, social, cultural, historical levels, and the ongoing dynamic interactions between the individual and these areas of context. According to this approach career development is facilitated by the interplay between an active organism and an ever changing environment.

Bridging Frameworks

In addition to individual theorists working to develop an integration and comprehensiveness in theories, the literature on convergence has also focused on broad theoretical areas which may serve as bridging theories, or provide structures for an overarching framework. Savickas (1995) identified six bridging frameworks which have been identified as being applicable to this purpose: developmental-contextualism; learning theory; person-environment transaction; work adjustment theory; developmental systems theory; and systems theory. Patton and McMahon (2006) added social cognitive theory, action theory, and Savickas' (2005) use of social constructionism as a metatheory. This section of this chapter will review each of these briefly.

Developmental-Contextualism

The developmental-contextualist perspective is derived from both the developmental organic perspective and the contextualist perspective. Vondracek et al. (1986) acknowledged two limitations of pure contextualism in the formulation of their

career theory framework based on developmental-contextual theory. First, contextualism emphasises the dispersive nature of life. Believing that development must be more than mere change, and that "a worldview that stresses only the dispersive, chaotic, and disorganized character of life would not readily lend itself to a theory of development" (p. 24), Vondracek and colleagues combined two perspectives in their formulation of developmental-contextualism. Second, contextualism emphasises the current event, stressing the importance of the relation between the elements. A developmental analysis emphasises the changes that exist in the relation among elements over time.

Developmental-contextualism therefore emphasises ongoing change both within the organism and within the environment, and in the interaction between the two. Further it acknowledges the internal stability of the organism, and the dual nature of influence between the organism and the context. Vondracek et al. (1986) also emphasised the self-determinism and agency of the individual. The developmental contextual approach holds that the environment engenders chaotic and reflexive changes in an individual's behaviour, however it also notes the influence of the individual in facilitating or constraining the environment. Within the model, the individual is an active organism operating in a constantly changing environment, hence the concept of dynamic interaction. An individual's career development is a reflection of the continuous interplay of person and context at all possible levels. Thus this approach has the capacity to include elements of content and process as identified earlier in this chapter.

More recently, Vondracek and Porfeli (2002b) have emphasised the potential for an integration of lifespan psychological and sociological life course approaches to our understanding of career development, in children (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2005) and adults (Vondracek & Porfeli, 2002a). Vondracek and his colleagues have drawn heavily on advances in life-span development theory (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Baltes, 1997; Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 1998) to present their discussion of an updated integrated perspective.

Learning Theory

Most theorists have championed learning theory as being crucial to any integrated theory as it is such an important underpinning of individual behaviour. For example, Holland (1994) suggested that "The most promising integration would be to insert the Krumboltz learning theory into every other vocational theory" (p. 45). Earlier frameworks (e.g., Pryor, 1985) also highlighted the value of merging learning theory with other theories. Super (1990) referred to learning theory as the cement that bonded the segments of his archway, and Subich and Taylor (1994) referred to it as "a central glue in explaining the learning processes underlying other career theories' core constructs" (p. 171). However, Savickas (1995) asserted that its value lies more in providing a more fine grained analysis of existing constructs than in providing a framework for an overarching intertheory analysis.

Person-Environment Transaction

A number of authors have identified person-environment (P-E) transaction as a central unifying principle for converging theories (Rounds & Hesketh, 1994; Spokane, 1994; Walsh & Chartrand, 1994). However, these authors also acknowledged that P-E is defined differently across related theories and that this definition needs to be sharpened before any convergence work is undertaken. Savickas (2002) drew on the distinction of person and environment transaction in structuring aspects of his discussion of a developmental theory of vocational behaviour (discussed in more detail later in this chapter).

Theory of Work Adjustment

The Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) was conceived as useful in integration of career theory as early as 1985 (see Hesketh, 1985 earlier in this chapter). As Dawis (1994) has stated, TWA was initially constructed to integrate several related concepts from different areas in psychology: ability, reinforcement, satisfaction, and person-environment correspondence. As such, it was initially constructed as an early example of convergence. Dawis (1994) illustrated the already strong correspondence between TWA and Holland's (1985) theory. The only major difference is the focus of Holland's work on career choice and of TWA on work adjustment. As both TWA and Krumboltz's (1994) theory are closely based on learning theory, there are already points of convergence. More recently Dawis (1997) noted that Roe's theory of personality development and career choice could be productively incorporated into the Theory of Work Adjustment "to yield hypotheses about the functioning of need structures in organizational settings and the development of need structures as a result of early childhood experience" (p. 295).

Developmental Systems Theory

Vondracek and Kawasaki (1995) have further developed the developmental contextual model using the Living Systems Framework (LSF; Ford & Ford, 1987). This framework furthers our understanding from the description of human behaviour to an understanding of the underlying processes – the "how and why of the behaviours that determine the work lives of individuals" (Vondracek & Kawasaki, 1995, p. 118). Vondracek and Kawasaki (1995) illustrated the value of both Developmental Systems Theory (DST; D. Ford & Lerner, 1992) and Motivational Systems Theory (MST; M. Ford, 1992) to furthering our understanding of adult career development in particular. At this stage, however, the principles of these theoretical frameworks have not been incorporated by these authors into a comprehensive overarching theoretical framework for career theories. Rather, they have shown how DST and MST can be used to understand the vocational behaviours of adults.

Systems Theory

Both Blustein (1994) and Bordin (1994) acknowledged the value of systems theory as a basis for a convergence framework. Similarly, Krumboltz and Nichols (1990) applied the LSF to provide an inclusive "map" for specific career decision-making frameworks, its value being in its ability to integrate all of the determinants of human development, and specifically career choice and career development. Krumboltz and Nichols (1990) commented that the LSF expands the conceptual areas that have traditionally been considered in current theories of career behaviour. While Krumboltz and Nichols believed that existing career theories could be embedded within the overall living systems framework, there has been no further development of this work by these authors.

The Systems Theory Framework (McMahon & Patton, 1995; Patton & McMahon, 1997, 1999, 2006) was the first attempt to comprehensively present a metatheoretical framework constructed using systems theory. The STF is not a theory of career development; rather it represents a metatheoretical account of career development that accommodates career theories derived out of the logical positivist worldview with their emphasis on objective data and logical, rational process, and also of the constructivist worldview with its emphasis on holism, personal meaning, subjectivity, and recursiveness between influences. Indeed, one of the advantages of the STF is that it values the contribution of all theories. This framework will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

Other systems theory approaches which have attempted to integrate the complex array of career development influences and processes include the ecological approaches of Szymanski and Hershenson (1997) seeking to represent people with disabilities, and Cook, Heppner, and O'Brien's (2002a, 2002b) ecological systems representation of women's career development.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Lent and Hackett (1994) viewed their emerging Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) as a model of convergence through its integration of existing theoretical constructs. Their model focuses on a number of constructs which exist in other theories (e.g., types in Holland's theory; role salience in Super's work) and brings them together within the framework of Bandura's (1986, 1997) theory. Lent et al. (2002) asserted that "SCCT was designed … to help construct useful conceptual bridges, to identify major variables that may compose a more comprehensive explanatory system, and to sketch central processes linking these variables together" (p. 257).

Contextual Explanation of Career

Young, Valach, and Collin (1996, 2002) proposed a framework for understanding key aspects of many contextual approaches to career. Further, they proposed

action theory as a means of integrating aspects of contextualism. These authors defined the basis of contextualism as "the recognition of a complex whole constituted of many interrelated and interwoven parts, which may be largely submerged in the everyday understanding of events and phenomena" (Young et al., 1996, p. 479). Context consists of multiple complex connections and interrelationships, the significance of which is interpreted according to an individual's perspective. Young and colleagues identified several aspects of the contextualist metaphor crucial to their contextual explanation of career, including the goal directed nature of acts, acts which are embedded in their context. Change is integral within this perspective, and "because events take shape as people engage in practical action with a particular purpose, analysis and interpretation are always practical" (Young et al., 1996, p. 480). Young and Valach (2000, 2004) emphasised that the action theory of career serves as an integrative approach to career theory in that it not only integrates social-contextual and psychological perspectives, but also "explicates social perspectives that have the effect of moving (the theory) beyond traditional career approaches and linking it directly to constructionism" (Young & Valach, 2004, p. 501).

More recently, Savickas (2001, 2002, 2005) has presented career construction theory, a developmental theory of career construction wherein he has proposed a further integration of the segments of Super's theory of career. Savickas accessed social constructionism as a metatheory, and then drew on McAdams' (1995) framework for organising personality theories as a framework for incorporating "into one overarching theory the three classic segments of career theory: (1) individual differences in traits, (2) developmental tasks and coping strategies, and (3) psychodynamic motivation – or, for short, the differential, developmental and dynamic views of careers" (Savickas, 2005, p. 42–43). Career construction theory will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Summary

It is clear that the developing worldview of contextualism, and the development of constructivism in cognitive psychology, have been important influences in the move toward the integration and convergence of career theories. Savickas (1995, p. 29) called for a "sophisticated framework" that could adequately deal with the diversity of epistemological and theoretical groups within vocational psychology. In their view to the "future of career", Collin and Young (2000) emphasised the importance of two crucial issues – the construction of individual identity and the importance of regarding the individual in his or her context, spatial and temporal. Collin and Young were calling for theories of career that would provide a new framework for the postindustrial world and relate to the epistemological root metaphor of contextualism (Collin, 1997; Collin & Young, 1986; Lyddon, 1989). This chapter will now describe in detail two theoretical frameworks which have attempted to address both these calls, the Systems Theory Framework and Career Construction Theory.

The Systems Theory Framework

The Systems Theory Framework (STF; Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) was first presented in 1995 (McMahon & Patton, 1995) and was significantly formulated by 1997 (Patton & McMahon, 1997). The STF contributes to the development of theory of career in two key ways. According to the spirit of convergence and transtheoretical integration previously discussed, the STF is presented as a metatheory of career. It also operates as a vehicle to operationalise constructivist and social constructionist theories of career (i.e., constructivisms, Young & Collin, 2004). It is constructivist because of its emphasis upon the individual. It represents as social constructionist because of its location of the individual within myriad social influences. Its focus on process influences, in particular *recursiveness*, and the role of *story*, emphasise the centrality of the individual actively construing the meaning of his or her life within multiple content and process influences. Brown (2002b) noted, in his perspective on the convergence of career theories, the emergence of the STF as a possible integrative framework for career theory. Amundson (2005) also acknowledged STF and its role in the new global context of career.

Assumptions of systems theories. Patton and McMahon (1999, 2006) identified a number of key features of systems theory that were influential in their formulation of the STF. These included:

1. Wholes and parts, a concept which emphasises that each element of a system or subsystem is interdependent upon other elements and that these elements should not be considered in isolation. Hence a systems approach is holistic.
2. Patterns and rules, emphasising that relationships exist within and between elements of a system which emerge as patterns within the system. Rules are special types of patterns formed by human systems and vary across different systems.
3. Acausality, emphasising the multiplicity of relationships between elements, and thus the inherent difficulty in reducing and isolating simplistic causal linear relationships.
4. Recursiveness, a concept which describes non-linear, multidirectional feedback amongst all elements of a system. It implies a dynamic, fluctuating process within the system as each element communicates with others in an ongoing manner.
5. Discontinuous change, emphasising that a system is always in flux, albeit balanced by internal homeostatic processes. The term discontinuous emphasises the unpredictability or suddenness of internal or external changes.
6. Open and closed systems. A closed system has no relationship to the environment in which it is positioned, whereas an open system communicates with its environment. Its openness to its context is necessary for its regeneration.
7. Abduction, a concept which stresses the importance of abductive reasoning which is concerned with the emergence of patterns and relationships, and lateral thinking. Deductive and inductive reasoning are linear and therefore limited as processes.
8. Story. It is through story that the whole accounts of relationships and patterns within systems are recounted.

The Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) describes influences in terms of *content* and *process* and positions those influences at (and across) the levels of the *individual system* and the *contextual system*, which is conceptualised as the *social system* and the *environmental-societal system*. These authors acknowledged the influence of the systems of Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979) in the construction of the STF. Thus the social system of the STF is representative of the microsystem, and the STF environmental/societal system is representative of the exosystem and mesosystem. While Patton and McMahon acknowledged the pervading influence of a macrosystem of broader attitudes, values, cultural influences and major societal systems as identified by Bronfenbrenner, within the present framework these were viewed as pervading each of the other systems rather than as a system which can be identified separately. Such an approach was seen to be more in keeping with the recursiveness, or recurring interaction, between the systems. The influences identified in the STF are depicted in Fig. 7.1 (for further detail of their relationship to the extant body of career theory, refer to Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006).

The individual system. The individual is conceived of as an active, participative, unique being and is at the centre of the STF. The individual is not defined in terms of reduced and isolated elements (e.g., abilities, traits), but as a whole. The individual system includes the following: gender, values, health, sexual orientation, disability, ability, interests, beliefs, skills, personality, world-of-work knowledge, age, self-concept, physical attributes, ethnicity and aptitudes.

The social system refers to the proximal social system through which the individual interacts with other people systems. The social system comprises the following influences: family, peers, community groups, education institutions, media, and, workplace.

The environmental-societal system. The environmental-societal system of influences consists of the following: political decisions, historical trends, employment market, geographic location, socioeconomic status, and globalisation. While these influences are distal to the individual, they are crucial to the social construction of context.

Process influences identified in the STF include recursiveness, change over time and chance. The STF adopts the notion recursiveness because it implies multiplicity of influences, and dynamics of nonlinearity, acausality, mutuality, and multidirectionality across past, present and future. The influence of constructs changes over time and in interaction with other influences in the whole system and subsystem. The openness of the influences to the effects of others and for them to affect others, was described by Patton and McMahon with reference to the permeability of open systems and is graphically represented as broken lines in Fig. 7.1.

The notion of influences changing over time within a recursive framework is central to the STF. Discontinuous change within an individual's career, the nonlinearity of a person's career over time, is represented in the STF's circular depiction of the system. The notion of nonlinearity supports the social constructionist challenge to stage-based explanations of career.

The inclusion of chance as a key feature of the STF emphasises the unpredictability of influences within each of the systems and has been formulated as a source for naturally occurring chaos within an individual's career and life, reflecting a growing literature around this notion (e.g., Bloch, 2005; Bright, Pryor, & Harpham, 2005; Chen, 2005; Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). Chance, or unpredictability, now seem to be inherent in the post-industrial world-of-work and need to be accounted for by theories of career. Chance is depicted as random flashes in Fig. 7.1.

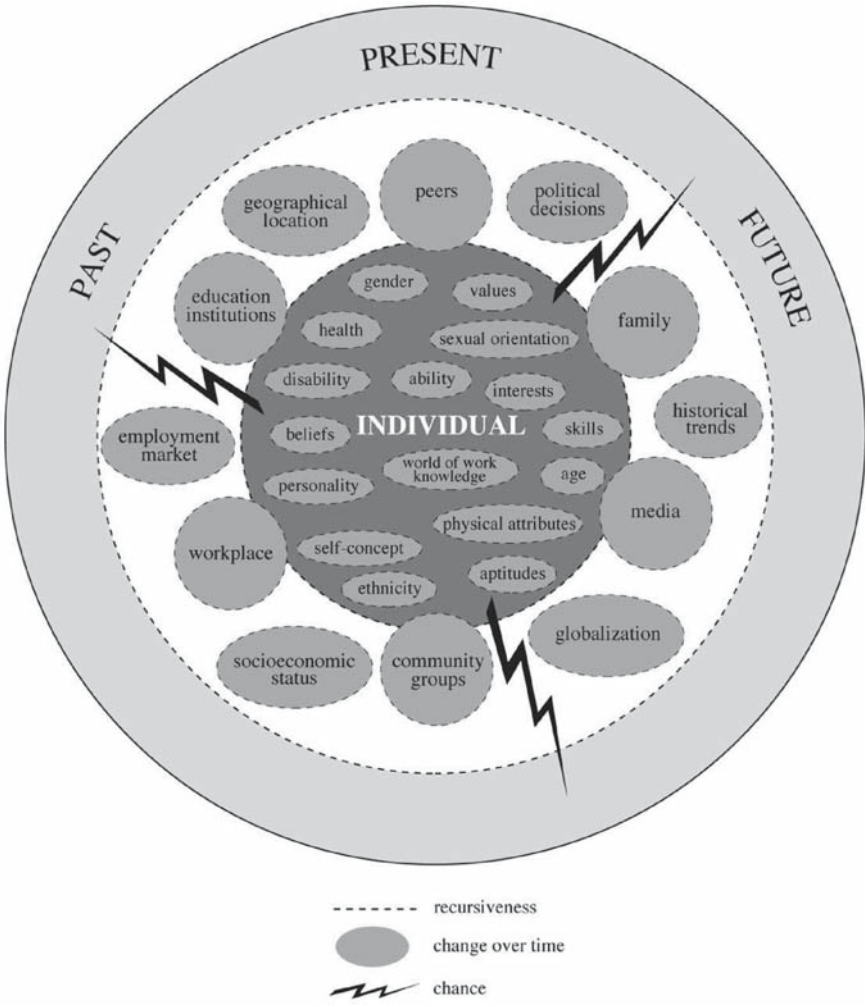

Fig. 7.1 The Systems Theory Framework © Patton & McMahon (1999)

Career Construction Theory

Career construction theory (Savickas, 2001, 2002, 2005) has contributed significantly to our understanding of the roles of both integration and constructivist influences in career theory development. Savickas identified this work as being positioned within the metathory of social constructionism, commenting that career construction theory addresses "how the career world is made through personal constructivism and social constructionism" (2005, p. 43). This notion was further emphasised in the following definition of career:

> individuals construct their careers by imposing meaning on the vocational behaviour and occupational experiences. ….. the subjective definition [of career] is not the sum of work experience but rather the patterning of these experiences into a cohesive whole that produces a meaningful story. [Career] denotes a subjective construction that imposes personal meaning on past memories, present experiences, and future aspirations by weaving them into a life theme that patterns the individual's work life. Thus, the subjective career that guides, regulates, and sustains vocational behaviour emerges from an active process of making meaning, not discovering pre-existing facts. It consists of biographical reflexivity that is discursively produced and made "real" through vocational behaviour. (Savickas, 2005, p. 43)

Savickas (2002) distinguished between the objective and subjective career. For career construction theory, the term "career" signifies *subjective reflection* upon an individual's vocational activity, that is, reflection on the objective career, such as occupations, tasks, and duties. The reflective process can also focus upon the meaning ascribed to career events, that is, the "subjective career".

Career construction theory has been formulated over time and this process will now be described. Initially, Savickas (2001) advanced the life-span/life-space aspect of Super's developmental theory through the integration of theoretical constructs from personality, developmental and motivational psychology. This work was built upon the three-tiered model of personality proposed by McAdams (1995, 1996) who suggested that the personality could be conceptualised at three levels which allow for the determination of differences amongst individuals: (a) dispositional signatures: personality traits; (b) contextualisation of lives: personal concerns; and (c) the problem of identity: personal narratives. Savickas advanced McAdams' framework by adding a fourth level relating to development.

Savickas' proposition of a comprehensive model of careers therefore included four propositions. At the first level of analysis, personality was conceived in a traditional sense as broad descriptors of individual differences around extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. McAdams (1995) asserted that traits were not sufficient to differentiate individuals because they lacked the ability to identify the uniqueness of individuals. Within this analysis, "the emergence of the RIASEC structure of personality as a precondition for adaptation" (Savickas, 2001, p. 314) emerges, with Savickas noting that personality traits "frame how adaptation takes place" and "give(s) the individual a sense of continuity and coherence, as well as provide coping processes to master developmental changes and to adapt flexibly to changing circumstances" (Savickas, 2001, p. 314). The second

proposition, based on McAdams (1995, 1996) "personal concerns", draws on a range of personality constructs (e.g., motives, coping styles, life tasks, values). Exploring these constructs provides further information with which to differentiate the uniqueness of individuals. This second proposition suggests that a secondary system of self-regulation emerges with personality self-organisation, and that these self-regulatory mechanisms mediate an individual's adaptation.

The third proposition, career narrative, is drawn from McAdams' conception of personal narratives. It is within these narratives that the story of an individual resides, wherein an individual "seeks to specify the actual processes of continuity and change in career adaptation" (Savickas, 2001, p. 315). Savickas (2001) proposed an additional fourth level or proposition to account for action in the process of career development, the processes of learning, cognition, and decision-making.

Savickas (2002) clearly indicated that the theory of career construction was closely linked to developmental theory, further advancing Super's (1957, 1990) work. In addition, the 16 propositions presented which underpin the theory of career construction identify a connection with other theories as Savickas subdivided the propositions according to the categories of developmental contextualism, vocational self-concepts, and the developmental tasks as the core of individual career construction.

More recently, Savickas (2005) presented the more developed "theory of career construction" as a framework consisting of three broad components, the what, how, and why of career: vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes. In this later revision, Savickas subsumed mechanisms of development into a broader conceptualisation of career adaptability at level two.

Vocational personality. This aspect of career construction theory integrates aspects of Holland's (1997) work on interests in relation to individuals' subjective explanations of career, with Savickas (2005) commenting that the theory focused upon the "implementation of vocational self-concepts, thus providing a subjective, private, and idiographic perspective for comprehending careers to augment the objective, public, and nomothetic perspective for understanding occupations" (p. 44). Social construction theory views interests and other related traits as dynamic and evolving, and Savickas emphasised that interest inventories and related measures need to offer suggestions of possibilities rather that predictions when used with individuals. Vocational personality incorporates the level one proposition discussed earlier, and constructivist thinking in the emphasis upon subjective implementation of self-concepts as distinct from the understanding oneself from the perspective of shared, public forms (i.e., traits) is evident.

Career adaptability. Savickas (2005) defined career adaptability as "a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current and imminent vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and personal traumas" (p. 49). He positioned developmental tasks and stages within career adaptability, noting that it "deals with how an individual constructs a career whereas vocational personality deals with what career they construct" (p. 48). Savickas emphasised the career construction theory does not focus on the P or the E with respect to the P-E fit abbreviation; rather it focuses on the dash (-). This position indicates the theory's assumptions that the construction of a career is a

psychosocial process through which self and society are synthesised. He argued that developmental tasks served as indicators of social relativity through which individuals could construct their sense of self and career. At a higher conceptual level, Savickas posited developmental tasks in a theme of grand narrative about socially expected life development.

The stages and developmental tasks of Super's (1990) theory are a feature of career adaptability across the lifespan. The stages of growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement may be regarded as a maxicycle across an individual's career. However, they may also be regarded as minicycles "around each of the many transitions from school to work, from job to job, and from occupation to occupation" (Savickas, 2005, p. 50). Individuals may recycle through minicycles in each of the many transitions they may experience across the lifespan. The stages represent a structural account of career adaptability.

The component of career adaptability comprises four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. These dimensions represent resources and strategies available to an individual for their management of critical moments, periods, or events (e.g., transitions) present throughout life. Savickas (2005) incorporated specific attitudes, beliefs and competencies within each and indicated that these would influence an individual's coping behaviours used to deal with tasks, transitions, and trauma. Individuals may develop each dimension at different rates and phases of their life, and disequilibrium amongst the four dimensions may produce variations in patterns of development; disharmony may indicate developmental problems. Savickas (2005) conceptualised an "adaptive individual" as one who is:

1. Becoming *concerned* about their future as a worker
2. Increasing personal *control* over their vocational future
3. Displaying *curiosity* by exploring possible selves and future scenarios
4. Strengthening the *confidence* to pursue their aspirations (p. 52) [original italics]

"Career concern makes the future feel real ….. Thinking about his or her work life across time is the essence of career because a subjective career is not a behaviour; it is an idea—a reflection on the self" (Savickas, 2005, p. 54). As with career concern, career control comprises cognitive and affective features. Savickas (2005) described it as being a belief and a feeling that one is responsible for constructing one's own career. Lack of career control is conceived as career indecision. The dimension of career curiosity refers to inquisitiveness about occupational information and, moreover, learning how one goes about integrating into the world-of-work. This may entail researching career-related information and investigating occupational situations or tasks. The final dimension of career confidence relates to 'feelings of self-efficacy concerning the individual's ability to successfully execute a course of action needed to make and implement suitable educational and vocational choices' (Savickas, 2005, p. 56). Career confidence is underpinned by the development of efficacy in broader life experiences and challenges. These are described in detail in Savickas (2005).

Life themes. The third component of career construction theory, life themes, is a narrative component that focuses on the why of career behaviour. Savickas (2005)

suggested that to study vocational personality and career adaptability separately does not adequately take into account the dynamic nature of career construction and the integration of these other components into a whole. In his early work, Super (1957) introduced the idea that life themes were important in the overall development of an individual's understanding of his or her career. Savickas' theoretical work around life themes has been influenced by this early work of Super and the work of Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979). The theory of career construction (Savickas, 2005) advanced the idea of life themes at the level of personal narrative and subjective career, following on from his acknowledgement of the importance of narrative, life theme, and career theme in his earlier work (Savickas, 1992, 1993) in facilitating clients developing their own stories and subjective career.

Savickas asserted that life stories are the crucial threads of continuity that make the elements of vocational personality and adaptability meaningful. Moreover, life stories identify the unique subjective individual as opposed to the stranger (McAdams, 1995), who is conceptualised as a composite of traits and other objective features. Career stories "tell how the self of yesterday became the self of today and will become the self of tomorrow" (Savickas, 2005, p. 58). While stories may appear as discrete, life themes pattern across stories to reveal a degree of continuity that may unify them; "pattern is the primary unit of meaning" (p. 58). Stories play a role in the action of an individual's career adaptation by evaluating resources, limitations and using traits and abilities to work through tasks, transitions, and trauma.

Reflections on the Systems Theory Framework and Career Construction Theory

The theoretical developments of Patton and McMahon and Savickas exemplify the influences of constructivism and convergence within the career theory literature. Despite his emphasis upon developmental tasks, Savickas (2005) has clearly linked his theory of career construction to constructivism in the leading sentence: "The theory of career construction explains the interpretive and interpersonal processes through which individuals impose meaning and direction on their vocational behaviour" (p. 42). Career construction theory is an example of one of the final stages of science which Savickas identified in 1995, unification. Unification involves a synthesis which uses a new "superordinate umbrella, coherent theoretical gestalt, metatheoretical framework or conceptually superior theory" (Beitman, Goldfried, & Norcross, 1989, p. 139). Savickas' (2005) use of "social constructionism as a metatheory with which to reconceptualise central concepts of vocational development theory" (p. 42) is also an example of use of metatheoretical framework. Savickas' most recent conceptualisation of career construction theory moves toward being an example of a conceptually superior theory. He derives key concepts and processes from other career theories (e.g., the work of Holland and Super), in addition to concepts and processes from other theoretical areas, for example personality theory, action theory and developmental-contextualism, and locates them under the umbrella of social construction theory.

The Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) is an example of unification via a metatheoretical framework. As an overarching framework focusing on all the parts as well as the whole, the STF is able to continually include constructs and process elements of new or revised theoretical developments. It represents a conceptual move to provide a metatheoretical framework for integrating existing theories, and theory and practice, and offers a framework for the blending of what different disciplines can bring to career theory, and a congruence between theory and practice applicable to all individuals which did not previously exist. With the individual as the central focus, constructing his or her own meaning of career, constructs and processes of existing theories are deemed relevant as they apply to each individual. The STF encourages pluralism as each individual's career is the prime concern. Finally, the framework also allows for relevant constructs and meanings from other disciplines.

There are other similarities and differences between these two recent developments in career theory. Career construction theory, while developed under the metatheory of social constructionism, is presented as a theory with descriptions of content and processes, the what, why and how of career development. As discussed, a significant number of theoretical propositions have been formulated. The STF is constructed as a theoretical framework wherein understandings of systems theory are applied to the content and process of career development. It differs from the work of Savickas in that the STF facilitates the inclusion of relevant aspects of multiple existing theories within an integrated framework, wherein relevance and meaning is decided upon by each individual. Specific theoretical propositions have not been formulated – the principles and processes of constructivism are seen as important in the individual's enactment of the theory-practice connection. Savickas asserted that an individual's career story is the crucial site of connection between the elements of vocational personality and adaptability. Similarly, Patton and McMahon emphasise that the application of the STF in integrating theory and practice is located within the crucible of the individual.

The Position of Career Theory: Today and Tomorrow

It is clear that the field of career development theory is dynamic and undergoing change, with major impetus being provided by the influence of theoretical convergence and constructivism. While a number of other theories have attempted to provide integrative frameworks (e.g., Lent & Hackett, 1994; Lent et al., 2002) and have emphasised relationships with existing theoretical constructs (e.g., Peterson et al., 1991, 2002), the two theoretical positions presented in the present chapter are the only two wherein both influences are evident.

Other integrative frameworks have been proposed in recent years, some more well developed than others. Drawing on the criticisms related to the lack of attention paid to relevant input from other disciplines (Collin & Young, 1986; Lent, 2001; Sonnenfeld & Kotter, 1982; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977), Blustein (2001) proposed an inclusive and integrative psychology of working, emphasising that much of our

work has been developed in relation to understanding work lives of a small proportion of the population, those that live in relative affluence. His inclusive integrated framework emphasises that vocational psychology must draw upon theories of sociology as well as "theoretical ideas emerging in other domains of psychology outside of the traditional purview of vocational psychology" (p. 177) through studying work in a range of contexts, including organisations, home, and culture.

Chen (2003) proposed a bridging of the gap between objectivist/positivistic and constructivist approaches as a strategy for theoretical integration. He suggested three themes under which theoretical integration could occur, namely career self-realisation, career as a reflection of growing experiences, and career as context conceptualisation. His discussion of each of these themes draws from a range of existing theories, and Chen suggested that these themes "attempt to 'integrate' rather than 'converge' tenets from different theoretical approaches and models" (p. 213). However he suggested that this integration "proposes a flexible and eclectic relationship between theories, in general, and between the two major schools of thinking – positivism and constructivism – in particular" (p. 213).

Other suggestions for integrative frameworks include Schulteiss' (2003) proposal that relational theory be extended to the career domain to provide a more holistic integrative framework "or meta-perspective" (p. 304) that more fully recognises the relational connectedness in people's lives and the incorporation of career and non-career domains of functioning into our understanding of career behaviour. More recently, Guichard (2005) proposed a general theory of life-long self-construction which articulates propositions from sociological, cognitive and dynamic-semiotic domains. Guichard asserted that such a theoretical approach enables a differentiation between universal processes, specific processes and contents.

Despite Brown's (2002a) assertion that the divide between constructivism and positivism means that "convergence among theories and the development of an integrated theory seems less likely today than ever" (2002a, p. 15), the recent proffering of the two significant frameworks presented in this chapter, and the developing frameworks outlined above emphasises the dynamic nature of theorising in this field, and the ongoing strength of the joint influences of constructivism and convergence. As suggested by Patton and McMahon (2006), a focus on the individual making meaning of his/her own career will continue to encourage a holistic understanding of career and an ongoing drawing on theoretical constructs by each individual as they are relevant to the construction of his or her career.

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