

Module 2 Unit 4

This is a **REQUIRED READING**.

National Guidance Research Forum (n.d.). How do we choose between theories?
Retrieved from <http://www.guidance-research.org/EG/imprac/ImpP2/how-do-we> [2 p.]

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How do we choose between theories?

This section identifies criteria for selecting theories for practice and may be of use in navigating the relative merits of the various theories summarised below.

Varied theories have developed to inform practice. New theoretical frameworks are evolving and being added to the established wisdom all the time. How can practitioners and others make sense of this?

This contribution was put together by Jenny Bimrose for training purposes. However, it is informed by her experience both as a practitioner and researcher.

Brown (1990) identifies the following criteria for this purpose:

Relevance:

A good theory should have relevance to life events. In the case of career theory, these events could relate to, for example, the decision making process. Importance is difficult to ascertain and therefore must be determined contextually:

Influence:

A good theory will influence the thinking of others working in related areas.

So, ask yourself:

- How often is theory cited?
- Does it stimulate research in the field?
- Is it adopted in practice?
- Does the theory stand the test of time?

(For new career theories, it will only be possible to judge them against these criteria in the future.)

Timeframe:

A good theory will be able to explain past and future findings, as well as what is already known at the time of its publication. In judging the quality of career theories, the focus should be on how well they have been able to account for the empirical findings that have appeared since their publication.

Comprehensiveness:

Theories of career development should predict and explain diversity in all its forms (gender, ethnicity, age, disability, socio-economic status, etc.). (There is still a lack of research and theory about the career development groups that are demographically different from white, middle-class adolescents and young adults).

Causality:

The interrelationships between and among propositions of a theory should be clear. For example, claiming that a match between personal attributes and occupational

characteristics is essential to job satisfaction is not enough. A theory must also explain why satisfaction is the result of the match.

Accessibility:

To be judged positively, a theory must be an elegant, simple statement. This is difficult and few theorists have achieved this simplicity. However, a good theory will define terms succinctly and ideas will be explained in a straightforward manner.

Heuristic:

A theory explains a set of complex phenomena that need verification. Good research depends on the ability to ask good questions and the tradition in social science research is to generate these questions from existing theory.

Understanding, prediction and control:

It is important for scientists to:

- understand the phenomena they deal with,
- predict when certain events will occur, and
- (if predictions can be achieved) eventually to control phenomena.

Guide to practice:

Good theories will take one step beyond an explanation of occupational choice and/or career development to detail the implications of theory for practice.

Reference

 Brown 1990a

Brown, D. (1990) Summary, Comparison & Critique of the Major Theories in Brown, D., Brooks, L. & Associates Career Choice & Development (second ed), San Francisco: Jossey Bass p338-363

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