Chapter 6
THE BIG FIVE CAREER THEORIES

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Career guidance and counselling in the western world, most notably in the United States (USA), has developed a comprehensive system of theories and intervention strategies in its more than 100 years of history. It began in the years of Frank Parson as a trait-factor approach in the early twentieth century (Betz, Fitzgerald, & Hill, 1989; Zunker, 2002), and slowly evolved to become a rather mature discipline today in the twenty-first century with a strong theoretical and empirical base, with the potential to further develop into a more “global” discipline in the years ahead. Indeed, vocational and career related issues are salient across different cultures and nationalities (Hesketh & Rounds, 1995; Leung, 2004). In an age of economic globalisation, all individuals are affected by an array of work related concerns, some of these concerns are unique to certain cultures, but others are common to many cultural groups. The search for life purposes and meanings, the journey to actualise oneself through various life and work-related roles, and the efforts by nations to deal with problems of employment and unemployment, are examples of universal issues that seem to affect many individuals from diverse cultures. Under the theme of career development, there are experiences, concerns, and issues that we could share, explore, and discussed at a global stage (Richardson, 1993; Lips-Wiersma & McMorland, 2006).

The development of career guidance and development into a global discipline requires a set of theoretical frameworks with universal validity and applications, as well as culture-specific models that could be used to explain career development issues and phenomenon at a local level. The focus of this chapter is on the five theories of career development that have guided career guidance and counselling practice and research in the past few decades in the USA as well as internationally. These five theories are (a) Theory of Work-Adjustment, (b) Holland’s Theory of Vocational Personalities in Work Environment, (c) the Self-concept Theory of Career Development formulated by Super and more recently by Savickas, (d) Gottfredson’s Theory of Circumscription and Compromise, and (e) Social Cognitive Career Theory. Given that the “big-five” theoretical models were developed by scholars in the USA, most of the existing reviews and summaries covering

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these frameworks (e.g., D. Brown & Associates, 2002; S. D. Brown & Lent, 2005; Swanson & Gore, 2000) have drawn from the literature in the USA. To augment the literature, this chapter will adopt an “international” perspective and will seek to selectively review studies conducted in regions around the world. With that as a backdrop, this chapter aims to achieve three objectives. First, to review the core conceptual propositions and the evolvement of the “big five” career development models, and discuss specific components of these models that are attractive to international career guidance professionals. Second, to review recent international empirical work (that is, studies conducted outside of the USA) that has been done in relation to the “big five” career development models. Third, to discuss directions that researchers and practitioners could take to advance and “indigenous” the big five career theories in their own cultural regions.

**Theory of Work Adjustment**

The Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) (Dawis, 2002, 2005; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) is a class of theory in career development that is anchored on the individual difference tradition of vocational behaviour (Dawis, 1992) called person-environment correspondence theory, viewing career choice and development as continual processes of adjustment and accommodation in which: (a) the person (P) looks for work organisations and environments (E) that would match his/her “requirements” in terms of needs, and (b) E in turn looks for individuals who have the capabilities to meeting the “requirements” of the organisation. The term satisfaction is used to indicate the degree that P is satisfied with E, and satisfactoriness is used to denote the degree that E is satisfied with P. To P, the most central requirements to meet from E are his/her needs (or reinforcers), which could be further dissected into categories of psychological and physical needs that are termed values. To E, however, the most central requirements are abilities, which are operationalised as dimensions of skills that P possesses that are considered necessary in a given E. Overall, the degree of P’s satisfaction and E’s satisfactoriness would jointly predict P’s tenure in that work environment.

Recent formulations of TWA speculated on the effects of diverse adjustment styles that could be used to explain how P and E continuously achieve and maintain their correspondence (Dawis, 2005). Four adjustment style variables are identified, which are flexibility, activeness, reactiveness, and perseverance. Flexibility refers to P’s level of tolerance to P-E dis-correspondence and whether he/she has a tendency to become easily dissatisfied with E. Activeness refers to whether P has a tendency to actively change or act on E to reduce dis-correspondence and dis-satisfaction. Reactiveness, conversely, refers to whether P would resort to self-adjustment in order to deal with dis-correspondence without actively changing or acting on E. Meanwhile, perseverance refers to P’s degree of resolve and persistence to adjust and accommodate before choosing to exit E. Similar adjustment styles also influence E’s approach to deal with dis-correspondence and dis-satisfactoriness.