A PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVIEW PROCESS FOR CAREER ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT: The authors present a comprehensive four-step process for conducting initial career assessment by interview. The process assesses skills, interests, values, non-work relationships, goals and activities, and psychological aspects such as self-esteem and work attitudes. The interview process is flexible, internally consistent and portable. Step One analyzes the client’s work history and includes reasons why such a history may be inadequate. Step Two examines work-related preferences. Step Three investigates lifestyle context, and Step Four produces a summary of all the accumulated interview information, including options the client wishes to avoid. Detailed worksheets accompany the article.

Over the past two decades, massive technological, organizational and social changes have necessitated an unprecedented focus, within industry and business, on career development. More than ever before, individuals face, among other changes, increasing specialization, frequent job and career changes, opportunities for nontraditional jobs and job settings, collaborative work styles, new levels of responsibility and participation in decision making. At the same time, organizations face the need to be increasingly flexible in management and work style, in the deployment of their human resources and in their response to employee needs (London & Stumpf, 1986). At Global-Tech, a multinational biotechnology corporation, poor turnover rates and lowered morale were felt to support employee complaints about lack of career guidance in the Research and Development Division (Mainiero & Upham, 1986). Appar-
ently, success, for both worker and organization, depends on careful management.

That these individual and organizational needs are mutually dependent is attested to by the recent proliferation of career development activities within business and industry. Gutteridge (1986) gives an overview of these practices, for example: career development programs for women at Columbia Broadcasting Services; internal career ladders at McGraw-Hill; a career resource center at United States General Accounting Service; general use of self assessment computer programs, job-posting, training of managers in counseling skills.

Whatever type of career development program is implemented, adequate assessment is essential. In this chapter we present a step by step interview process, based on the most common aspects of work, that allows for assessment of the client’s values, interests, experience, goals and relationships; the process culminates in an individualized profile sheet summarizing all of this material.

There are several advantages to using this format for career assessment, the most important being its thoroughness. It is virtually a “given” that job selection, performance and satisfaction are related to an individual’s skills, interests and values, but it is not as readily acknowledged that psychological aspects of a worker’s life, such as self esteem, attitudes to work, and the whole realm of non-work relationships, activities and goals also have a profound impact in the work setting (Yost & Corbishley, 1986). The interview process described below includes assessment of all these factors, in a systematic way. However, the step by step approach maintains the focus on work, and thus does not allow for the time-wasting acquisition of material irrelevant to career assessment.

A second advantage of the interview approach is the inclusion of ways to produce an internally consistent, prioritized summary. Typically, career assessment produces voluminous material, often in discrete categories, which is difficult to integrate in a meaningful way. If assessment is to be of practical use, it needs to be condensed and organized into a portable form. Internal consistency is also necessary, to ensure that there are no contradictions in self assessment or that job related interests have been weighed against non-work aspirations.

A further advantage of this particular interview process is its flexibility. Each step of the process can be abbreviated or expanded according to the individual client’s needs. Similarly, the psychological depth of the interview can be adjusted according to the expertise and training of the interviewer, without seriously compromising the value of the information acquired. In order to aid in making these adjustments in length or depth of interview, we include in each step of the process indications of potential problem areas for further exploration.