

What Influences Your Career Choice?

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When we think about career choice, several things immediately come to mind – job description, training and education required, career outlook, and salary – but there are a number of other factors that may influence your decisions. Let's explore some of these factors as addressed by multiple career development theories. Theories can help us frame why and how things happen. In this case, career development theories help us explain why and how we choose to pursue specific career fields.



There are a lot of theories to consider in the relatively new field of career development. As you read through the factors below, you'll see that many of the related theories address some of the same issues. No one theory explains everything, so it's good to consider these factors from multiple perspectives.

Influence Factors

Skills and Abilities – Considering your skills and abilities and how they may fit a particular occupation comes out of one of the earliest career development fields, [Trait-Factor](#) theories, and is still used today. These theories recommend creating occupational profiles for specific jobs as well as identifying individual differences, matching individuals to occupations based on these differences. You can identify activities you enjoy and those in which you have a level of competency through a formal assessment. There are many available online, including the Skills Provider at CareerOneStop.

Interest and Personality Type – [Holland's Career Typology](#) is a widely used to connect personality types and career fields. This theory establishes a classification system that matches personality characteristics and personal preferences to job characteristics. The Holland Codes are six personality/career types that help describe a wide range of occupations. You can find out your Holland Codes, and receive a list of related occupations, by completing a questionnaire such as the one provided by the U. S. Department of Labor's [O*Net Interest Profiler](#).

Life Roles – Being a worker is just one of your life roles, in addition to others such as, student, parent, and child. Super's Lifespan theory directly addresses the fact that we each play multiple roles in our lives and that these roles change over the course of our lives. How we think about ourselves in these roles, their requirements of them, and the external forces that affect them, may influence how we look at careers in general and how we make choices for ourselves. For more information, read about [Super's Life Career Rainbow](#).

Previous Experiences – Krumboltz's Social Learning and Planned Happenstance theories address factors related to our experiences with others and in previous work situations. Having positive experiences and role models working in specific careers may influence the set of careers we consider as options for ourselves. One aspect of [Social Cognitive Career Theory](#) addresses the fact that we are likely to consider continuing a particular task if we have had a positive experience doing it. In this way, we focus on areas in which we have had proven success and achieved positive self-esteem.

Culture – Racial and ethnic background, as well as the culture of an individual's regional area, local community, and extended family, may impact career decisions. Our culture often shapes our values and expectations as they relate to many parts of our lives, including jobs and careers. Multicultural career counseling has emerged as a specialized field to take these influences into consideration when counseling clients and students. We can't attribute the predominant characteristics of a culture to any one of it's individuals, but having an awareness of the values and

expectations of our culture may help us understand how we make our career choices.

Gender – Both men and women have experienced career-related stereotypes. Gender is a factor included in multiple career development theories and approaches including, Social Learning and multicultural career counseling. How we view ourselves as individuals may influence both the opportunities and barriers we perceive as we make career decisions. Studies of gender and career development are ongoing as roles of men and women in the workforce, and in higher education, evolve.

Social and Economic Conditions – All of our career choices take place within the context of society and the economy. Several career theories, such as Social Cognitive Career Theory and Social Learning, address this context in addition to other factors. Events that take place in our lives may affect the choices available to us and even dictate our choices to a certain degree. Changes in the economy and resulting job market may also affect how our careers develop.

Childhood Fantasies – What do you want to be when you grow-up? You may remember this question from your childhood, and it may have helped shape how you thought about careers then, as well as later in life. Career counseling theories are expanding as programs related to career choice are developed for all ages, including the very young. [Ginzberg](#) proposed a theory that describes three life stages related to career development. The first stage, fantasy, where early ideas about careers are formed, takes place up to age 11.

Work with your career counselor!

It's important to understand that career choice is not made based on any one factor. Our choices are subject to many influences – individual, cultural, social, and environmental. The combination and interaction of various influences on your decision-making are unique to you and your situation. There may also be multiple options, several "good-fits" for you, instead of a single, right choice. Keep in mind that as you change, learning and experiencing new things, and external factors change, such as the economy, you will continue to revise and fine-tune your career choices.

There is a lot to consider, but you don't have to figure it all out on your own. Work with a career services counselor at your institution's career center or your [State Workforce agency](#). These professionals will be able to assist you with assessments and additional resources, and discuss how different theories may be applied to your career development process.