

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter reviews past writings on interest ‘fit’ or congruence, job satisfaction and vocational choice. It is divided into several sections, firstly looking at the concept of person job ‘fit’ or congruence (and research into this topic), ‘fit’ or congruence measures, then other research into interests and/or satisfaction and it concludes with an overview of the current research project.

#### **Research and Theories**

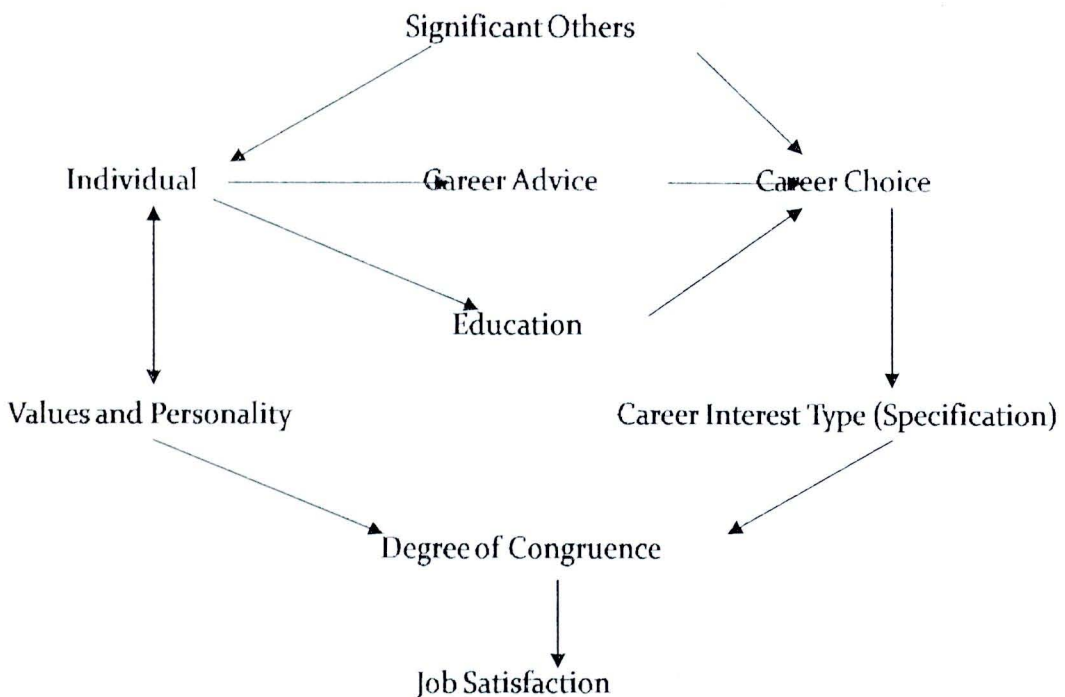
Holland’s (1985) theory of vocational choice is well-known, extensively utilized, and has been evolving for several decades. His vocational typology is used to sort people and work environments into six “types” Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional with the assumption that each of the six different kinds of work environments is dominated by a given personality type. He thought that individuals sought environments which allowed them to express their attitudes and values, and that behavior could be understood through analysis of the individual’s interaction with their environment (Holland, 1985).

Holland’s theory saw vocational interests (which he equated with personality) as relatively stable. The concept of ‘fit’ or congruence” (person-environment fit) was central to Holland’s theories and he thought people were

most likely to find vocational satisfaction and achievement in work environments which suited their personalities. Many researchers have tested Holland's theories of interest 'fit' or congruence, with varying results. In an earlier study, Werner (cited in Holland, 1985), looked at students in occupational training centres. He found that, although students in congruent environments had higher achievement levels than those in incongruent environments, 'fit' or congruence appeared to be related to satisfaction for males but not for females. Conversely, Peiser and Meir (1978) conducted a longitudinal study over seven years, and found that satisfaction with current occupation was positively correlated with interest 'fit' or congruence in both females and males. Holland's theory has also been applied to interpersonal situations (such as client-counsellor, and marital relationships) by various researchers.

Another theory of person-environment fit is that of Dawis and Lofquist (1984). These researchers looked at individuals' personalities and work environments, and how these interacted to lead to "work adjustment". Their theory of work adjustment (depicted in Figure 5, below) stated that "the mutual responsiveness of the individual and the work environment to each other's requirements is a continuing process called work adjustment" (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984, p. 56), and that the indicators of work adjustment were satisfaction (of the individual with the work environment), and satisfactoriness (the individual's work performance). They regarded the individual's work personality as being made up of skills (also abilities) and needs (values), and they theorized that work adjustment could be predicted

from the correspondence between the work personality and the work environment. Their theories have a range of potential applications, for example, in recruitment and selection procedures, vocational counseling, job design (or redesign), the development of training packages and the improvement of employee morale (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984, p. 135). Dawis and Lofquist also developed a number of research instruments, such as the Minnesota Importance Questionnaire, the Minnesota Job Description Questionnaire and the Minnesota Satisfactoriness Scales, for use in position analysis and career counseling.



**Figure 5** Conceptual model for prediction of work adjustment.

Gottfredson (1981), studied the ways in which occupational aspirations took a different view. The author viewed vocational development as dependent on Self-concept, and therefore as beginning to occur in the very earliest years of life. There are four stages which children may go through in developing Self-concept and occupational preference.

“Boys’ occupational preferences rise . . . in prestige level . . . they shift away from blue-collar work toward major professional and executive jobs . . . in contrast, girls’ preferences move toward lower level jobs— from jobs as lesser professionals (e.g., teacher and nurse) and toward semi-professional and clerical work” (Gottfredson, 1981, p. 562).

By this stage in their development, children begin to place “ceilings” and “floors” on their preferences, and she estimated that by age thirteen they would have identified the (prestige) level and sex-type of work they would prefer. He called this process “circumscription”, and saw the next step as “compromise”, that is,

“changing one’s goals to accommodate to uncontrollable circumstances . . . [because] the jobs people want may sometimes be very different from the jobs available to them” (Gottfredson, 1981, p. 569).

This theory presented occupational aspirations as more closely related to sex, social class and intelligence than to interests, and for this reason, did not show interest job ‘fit’ or congruence as leading to job satisfaction.

Literature on vocational interests and job satisfaction, has found that there are definite links between job satisfaction and performance (e.g., Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Gati, 1990; and Holland, 1985). It may therefore be in the

in interests of employers, to consider ways respondents may gain satisfaction from their day-to-day tasks. Many studies have been carried out, investigating relationships between vocational interests and satisfaction, gender influences, career compromise, differences between professional, skilled and unskilled respondents, and the measurement of person-environment ‘fit’ or congruence”. As noted by Quarstein, McAfee, and Glassman (1992), the consequences of job satisfaction are important to organisations, in terms of efficiency, productivity, absenteeism and staff turnover. Zeffane (1994) suggested that

“ . . . if employees can be kept happy in their jobs, they will be more likely to develop those desirable attitudes which will eventually . . . enhance productivity and have positive effects on broader organizational outcomes” (p. 63).

The current study aims at investigating whether Holland’s (1985) theory of vocational choice can be applied to Thai professional respondents. While this theory has been evolving for nearly four decades, and has been tested by numerous researchers, the testing has tended to focus only on certain groups of the population. Past researchers have used accountants (Aranya, Barak, & Amernic, 1981), nurses (Hener & Meir, 1981), teachers (Wiggins, 1976; Wiggins, Lederer, Salkowe, & Rys, 1983), engineers (Meir & Erez, 1981), managers (Doty & Betz, 1979), bankers (Gottfredson & Holland, 1990; Meir & Navon, 1992) and other professionals, as well as many students (for example, Kane, Healy, & Henson, 1992; Nafziger, Holland, & Gottfredson, 1975; Smart, Elton, & McLaughlin, 1986) in establishing links.

The issues under investigation in this dissertation are the degree to which the respondents' reported interests matched their jobs (known as 'fit' or congruence, or "fit"), and the level of job satisfaction reported by the respondents.

### **Person-Environment 'Fit' or Congruence**

'Fit' or congruence" refers to the level of agreement between a person's interests, and their occupational choice. For example, a person with "social" interests working in a field involving people could be regarded as congruent; a person with "artistic" interests working as a machine operator would not. The concept of 'fit' or congruence is central to the theoretical propositions of Holland (1985), who believed that job satisfaction was enhanced when: "the personality of the worker is congruent with his or her work environment" (Smart et al., 1986).

It has also been referred to as occupational correspondence (Breedon, 1993), and as person-environment fit.

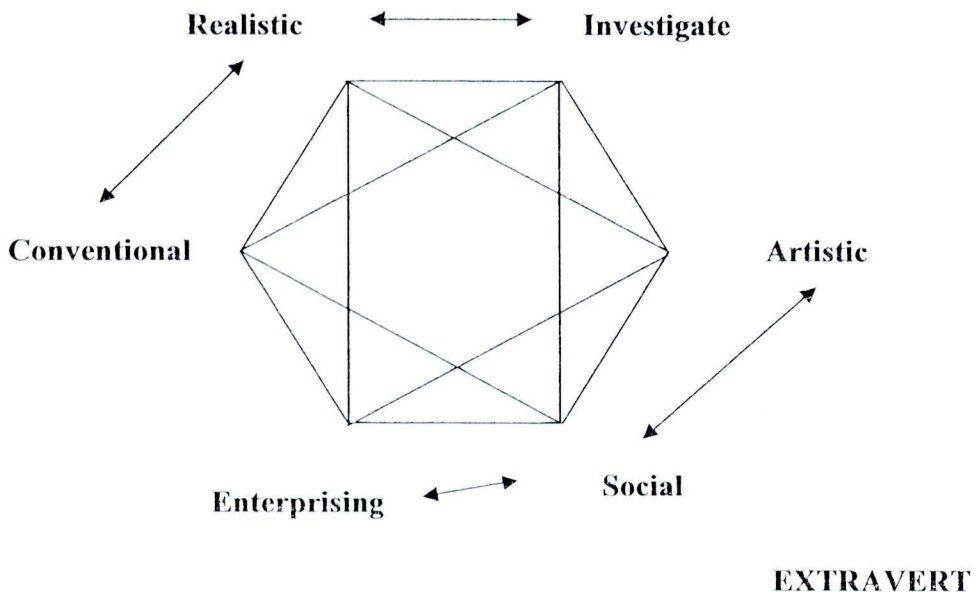
### **Measures of 'Fit' or Congruence**

A variety of 'fit' or congruence indices, used to measure similarity between interest inventory scores and occupations, have been developed. These have tended to be designed for use with the personality types suggested by Holland's (1985) theory.

Holland's (1973, 1985) theory of vocational choice is often used in career counseling. The theory suggests that individuals and environments can be classified into one of six personality types, namely Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising or Conventional, and the system can be used to quantify individuals' 'fit' or congruence with their work environments. Holland theorized that individuals sought work environments which matched their personalities, and that person-environment 'fit' or congruence" led to job satisfaction. He also devised a hexagonal model (see Figure 6) to show the relationships among the six personality types, with adjacent personality types being more similar to one another than types which are not adjacent to each other in the hexagon.

Holland devised two instruments with which to measure person-environment 'fit' or congruence, the Self-Directed Search (SDS) Holland, (1979), and the Vocational Preference Inventory (VPI) Holland (1979). Both of the measures could be used to derive a code, usually comprised of three letters, to show the interest profile of a person or occupation.

INTROVERT



**Figure 6** A hexagonal model for defining the psychological resemblance among types and environments and their interactions.

---

*Note.* From *Making Vocational Choices: A Theory of Careers* (p. 55), by J. L. Holland, 1985, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

### **Studies Comparing Males and Females**

Some researchers have investigated whether there are gender differences in the impact of ‘fit’ or congruence on job satisfaction. Some researchers found significant differences in the ways a person’s job ‘fit’ or congruence impacts job satisfaction, particularly as relates to the gender of the respondents.

The interactions among respondents' gender, gender concentration of jobs, and job-interest 'fit' or congruence in predicting job satisfaction was examined by Fricko and Beehr (1992). Much previous research has looked at correlations between worker job 'fit' or congruence and levels of job satisfaction (e.g., Holland, 1985; Spokane, 1985). Fricko and Beehr (1992), recognized this, and hypothesized that worker-job 'fit' or congruence was important to people in jobs dominated by the opposite sex, as cultural pressures often deter people from entering such jobs and they would be more able to withstand this pressure if they were particularly interested in the occupation.

Levels of interest job 'fit' or congruence were also found to be important by Elton and Smart (1988), who sought to identify reasons for job dissatisfaction according to the gender of the worker. The study was conducted over a nine-year period, and asked respondents to rate their level of satisfaction with extrinsic factors: income, fringe benefits, and job security. The study revealed differing levels of dissatisfaction in differing Holland (1985) groupings, and found that people with high interest job 'fit' or congruence tended to be less dissatisfied than those with low levels of interest-job 'fit' or congruence.

To summarize, several researchers have demonstrated differences in the 'fit' or congruence-satisfaction relation, between subjects of different gender. Both Fricko and Beehr (1992) and Peiser and Meir (1978) found stronger relationships between 'fit' or congruence and satisfaction in females than in males, while Smart et al. (1986) found 'fit' or congruence to be related

to different types of satisfaction, in males and females. These studies suggest that there may be differences in the ways males and females relate to their jobs, and that these should be taken into account when utilizing Holland's (1985) theory of vocational choice. Next, 'fit' or congruence studies which used subjects of particular skill levels or occupations will be examined.

### **Cross Cultural Differences**

Some 'fit' or congruence researchers have looked at whether there were differences between the 'fit' or congruence-satisfaction relations in people from varying cultural groups. A study of interest job 'fit' or congruence and job satisfaction in accountants was carried out by Aranya et al. (1981). Three groups of accountants were tested (Californian, English-speaking Canadian, and French-speaking Canadian). The researchers noted that differing results were obtained between the samples, and thus warned against Cross-cultural generalization of Holland's theory without further research. Most of the 'fit' or congruence studies described above are either North American or Israeli.

### **Use of Values in Calculation of 'Fit' or Congruence**

Some researchers have included subjects' "work values" in their calculations of person job 'fit' or congruence. Two such studies are described below.

Rounds (1990) focused on performing a comparative analysis of the prediction of job satisfaction. He noted that there had not been any studies that used both interests and work values to predict job satisfaction, and Rounds's research built on the theories of Dawis and Lofquist (1984) and Holland (1973, 1985). He assessed interests, work values and job satisfaction levels in adult vocational counseling clients in a one-year longitudinal study and found that after controlling for interest congruency, work values were significant in job satisfaction and that interest congruency predicted job satisfaction less in males than in females. His findings suggested that vocational counselors should use work value inventories, as well as interest inventories, in assisting adult clients.

### **Summary**

The field of vocational choice is largely based on the assumption that if people work in jobs which match their interests, they will be satisfied. This concept has been tested by many researchers, using a wide range of occupations and industries. Studies by Elton and Smart (1988), Fricko and Beehr (1992), Gottfredson and Holland (1990), Hener and Meir (1981), Holland (1985), Meir and Yaari (1988) and Wiggins et al. (1983) all showed positive correlations between worker job 'fit' or congruence and measured job satisfaction.

However, other researchers such as Heesacker, Elliott and Howe (1988) have found interest 'fit' or congruence to be less important in the

prediction of occupational satisfaction. There are, undoubtedly, strong links between worker job ‘fit’ or congruence and job satisfaction in many groups and situations, but some sectors of the community seem to defy this. In particular, unskilled or “blue collar” respondents, as studied by Heesacker et al. (1988) and Pond and Geyer (1991), reported more job satisfaction (and were shown to be performing better) in jobs seemingly incongruent with their measured vocational interests. Unskilled people have rarely been used in empirical studies, and it is possible that some theories of vocational choice (e.g., Holland, 1985), and of job satisfaction (e.g., Herzberg, 1966), may not be applicable to this group.

The question of ‘fit’ or congruence” is an enduring one. Some researchers (such as Holland, 1973, 1985) have devoted decades to its study, and many others have sought to further investigate how widely the theories can be utilised. A sizeable body of research has grown, and meta-analyses were performed by Assouline and Meir (1987) and Tranberg, Slane and Ekeberg (1993). While Assouline and Meir’s review did find a correlation of .21 between interest ‘fit’ or congruence and satisfaction, Tranberg et al. (1993), were more reserved. They were concerned that many of the existing studies were not empirically sound, and they found that the studies with the strongest methodologies showed non-significant correlations. Indeed, the studies reviewed used a variety of interest, ‘fit’ or congruence and satisfaction measures, of differing quality. Despite a proliferation of available ‘fit’ or congruence indices”, many of the ‘fit’ or congruence studies discussed in this chapter (e.g., Elton & Smart, 1988; Heesacker et al., 1988; Hener & Meir,

1981; Rounds, 1990; and Swaney & Prediger, 1985) used only 1st letter agreement on the Holland code, to assess 'fit' or congruence or lack thereof. This methodology has been criticised by Camp and Chartrand (1992) Gati (1990) as inadequate and inappropriate for the effective measurement of person-environment 'fit' or congruence. In addition, some of the reviewed research used students rather than employed subjects, and measured academic rather than occupational satisfaction. It is doubtful whether this type of study has any utility in constructing theories of vocational choice. A new meta-analysis carried out for the current study also found a small relationship between interest 'fit' or congruence and job satisfaction.

It may be that interest 'fit' or congruence is of only minor importance in the prediction of vocational satisfaction, particularly in certain groups of respondents. Some researchers have looked at other sources of satisfaction and found that issues such as age (Pond & Geyer, 1991), skill-utilization (Emery & Phillips, 1976) and worker expectations (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982) may all influence how respondents feel about their jobs. In particular, there may be differences between the attributions of satisfaction in white-and blue-collar respondents (Heesacker et al., 1988; Kuder, 1977).