Chapter 10

Vocational Personalities of School Principals: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to reveal how school principals construct their careers and how their vocational personalities influence their career construction stories. A phenomenological design was used in this study and data were collected by means of semi-structured in-depth interviews. The study group was formed by maximum variation sampling and snowball sampling. Nine school principals voluntarily joined the study and narrated their career construction stories. In the study, it was found that school principals started their career by the influence of an administrator, a colleague in their workplace, or their spouses. Majority of the participants started their management career as vice-principals. The changes in work environment increased their management skills and helped them gain experience. It also provides them with dynamism, but changing the workplace every four years brought about negative effects as it was too short to improve a school.

INTRODUCTION

Early career theories (Super, 1957, p. 282) conceptualized career as a staged, upward and linear progress in a hierarchical organization or as stable, long-term employment within an occupation. In line with this conceptualization, related conceptions, such as vocational development and counseling, were shaped in accordance with relatively stable work environments. Early in the 20th century, person-environment fit model emerged in career counseling and focused on matching the employees to the work requirements. In the middle of the 20th century, a new model, called the vocational development model, came into view of researchers. This model mainly focused on advancing a career in an organization or an
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occupation. For example, career development in this period referred “the process through which people come to understand themselves as they relate to the world of work and their role in it” (Hansen, 1976), which implies conformity to sectoral and organizational norms. Individual qualifications, compatible with the work environment, were crucially important for job satisfaction and pursuing a career within an organizational context (Savickas, 2002). For instance, according to Holland (1985), the match between vocational personality and work environment was prerequisite for career satisfaction. Accordingly, the main goal of early career theories was matching individuals with their work environments (Bacanlı, 2011).

However, the post-industrial societies of the 21st century require dynamism rather than stability. Individuals need to change their organizations and even sometimes their professions to pursue their careers. Extreme adaptation to an organizational environment does not bring career success, since the responsibility of career planning and personal development has gradually shifted from the organization to the individual who has to update his skills for improved employability in the event that his organization no longer needs his services (Clarke, 2009). Considering these changes, Sullivan and Baruch (2009) offer a new career conceptualization: “an individual’s work related and other experiences, both inside and outside of organizations, that form a unique pattern over the individual’s life span.” This conceptualization suggests that career development should focus on challenges, such as coping with developmental tasks required by job changes, adapting to predictable and unpredictable changes in the work environment and building a strong sense of vocational identity to make appropriate career decisions in turbulent environments (Savickas, 2013).

In recognition of these challenges, Savickas (2002) developed career construction theory to portray contemporary careers and a narrative counseling method to help clients fit work into their lives instead of fitting themselves into their jobs (Gladding & Drake Wallace, 2010). The theory makes use of three perspectives to describe vocational behavior: the differential, developmental, and narrative. Individual differences perspective mainly focuses on vocational personality types and what type of work individuals choose to do. The developmental perspective focuses on career adaptability of individuals and how they tackle with developmental tasks, work transitions, and traumas. The narrative psychology perspective deals with life themes through which individuals attribute meaning to a vocational behavior and why individuals match their works into their lives in different ways. These three perspectives enable researchers to explain how individuals choose and use occupations in their lives (Savickas, 2002; 2013).

VOCATIONAL PERSONALITY

Savickas (2013, p. 151-153) defines vocational personality as an individual’s career abilities, needs, values, and interests. According to Holland (1997, p. 2), vocational personality is the product of a complex interaction among “a variety of cultural and personal forces including peers, biological heredity, parents, social class, culture and physical environment.” In other words, it is a reflection of an individual’s basic trait structure (Holland, 1996). Holland (1996) identified six different personality types and corresponding work environments by using a hexagonal model towards vocational choices of different professionals. These were labeled realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional (RIASEC). Vocational personality types form similar socially-constructed clusters of attitudes and skills mainly depending on the social constructions of time, place and culture (Savickas, 2002). Most people are thought to have a dominant type that they mostly resemble. Moreover, there are additional subtypes that they resemble to