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PREFACE

To say that this book was a long time in the making would be droll understatement. When I contracted to write this book, it was intended to be a second edition of *The Clinical Practice of Career Assessment: Interests, Abilities, and Personality*, which was published in 1991. That book introduced my three-domain model of career assessment, and it was well-received. In fact, in his foreword to the volume, the late John Holland, father of modern occupational interest theory, stated

Lowman has taken the guts of three separate (perhaps “isolated” is a more fitting word) types of literature and created an integrated model or strategy for the conduct of career counseling. His integration is not a simple eclecticism. He has used the theoretical work in these divergent domains and his clinical experience as a career assessor to develop an assessment strategy that is comprehensive, explicit, and psychologically sound. . . . This book is a major contribution to a quiescent area of practice. (Holland, in Lowman, 1991, p. viii)

Why did it take me so long to complete this new expanded career assessment book? For one thing, Holland’s foreword set a high bar for me. For another, I had overambitiously imagined that I could prepare a second edition of the original book a couple of years after the first one was in print and while also working on other books and research articles. Mostly, however, my own career had a mind of its own, and jobs in academia, creating and running my own consulting firm, academic administrative positions on a steep upward rise, and a number of geographic moves asserted priority. The situation was a little more complicated than that because I had actually published extensively through all of those positions and relocations (I am probably one of the few people who edited a professional journal while serving as a university president, both during the Great Recession).

It was not until I retired from my professorial and academic administrative duties that I finally had some uninterrupted time to work on this project and the book latched on to me, becoming both a passion and a sentence. It's one thing if you are writing a book about a psychological model that covers one domain, but when your model aims to cover three of them (interests, abilities, and personality), plus a number of other relevant variables, not to mention integration across those areas, there is a lot to be done. Since the original volume, the literature on interests, abilities, and personality, not to mention careers, had burgeoned and with increasingly rigorous studies.

Although the structure of the current book has some similarities to the first one, the editors at APA Books and I realized that this volume is not really a second edition of my previous book; it is a new book in its own right. For one thing, this book it is longer and covers a lot more territory. It also builds on my own research in this area and over 30 years of applied career assessment work with clients experiencing a variety of career- and work-related concerns.

Throughout the zigs and zags of my own career, my interest in helping to advance this career assessment field and enhance the services clients receive has never waned. I hope that readers will find the result to be useful. At stake is nothing less than our being able to help career assessment clients have satisfying and successful careers.

INTRODUCTION

The Interdomain Model of Career Assessment

Few choices are as important in life as one’s career. Career and work contribute significantly to personal and life satisfaction—and, when they are problematic, to personal unhappiness and stress. Work helps to determine people’s socioeconomic status, income, personal identity, and educational level. It will also influence who one’s friends and partners will likely be.

When people are unhappy in their careers and work, there are often psychological consequences. Occupational stress arises and the potential for depression and health concerns increases. Work dissatisfaction can also spill over into home and family life. For those still charting their career courses, they may lack a sense of identity about who they are and where they fit in to the world. Not inappropriately, they may move from one college major, job, or career to another, testing out hypotheses about what they are best suited to do. Partly this is associated with the normal developmental process of trying out a number of things to see where the fit feels best and the rewards—both psychological and economic—the highest. However, when this process persists year after year, one false start after another, professional help may be needed. Others, possibly more methodical, seek confirmation before pursuing training or finalizing a choice.

Contemporary searches for well-fitting and satisfying careers are made more complex by the absence of a stable work environment. Times change, as does the nature of work itself. Whereas people once saw career choice as a once and forever one, with the full career likely spent with one employer, contemporary

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work may call for a number of changes of job duties and employers, including self-employment, even by those not particularly entrepreneurially inclined.

Radical change in the nature of work creates different kinds of occupations and work contexts—more rapidly changing, less structured, and often more complex and intellectually demanding. Yet, the nature of people themselves has not changed. They still face the same need to understand the types of available work and careers for which they are best suited. They need to know how their personal characteristics—their interests, abilities, and personality—relate to a changing world work and career opportunities.

You might think people would readily know what they like, what they are good at doing, and what their personality preferences are. After all, a number of these factors are at least partly built into our genetic makeup and influence behavior from an early age. For many, particularly those likely to seek out career help from a professional, however, that is often not the case. People can sometimes be pretty unaware of their personal characteristics, resulting in decisions that do not really suit them very well.

When people are motivated for it, career assessment—the systematic evaluation of characteristics of people that influence their occupational preferences and fitness for various types of work—can help. It does so by identifying aspects of people that have a demonstrated relationship with work and career outcomes. For example, general cognitive ability, or intelligence, is a powerful predictor of success in a number of careers. Spatial abilities are important in science and art. Occupational interests, preferences for particular types of work, also are very important in identifying types of careers likely to be satisfying and motivating versus those that are not. Personality variables, in turn, help determine the right niche within a particular occupation.

Those whose job it is to advise clients on career choice and change therefore have the opportunity to help people better understand themselves and to advise them on their career concerns and choices. They can help the high school student whose parents see their child struggling with lack of direction or motivation. They can help those who have not yet decided upon their best-fit careers and want better to understand why. They can also help people well established in their careers who are restive in their current career paths. And they can assist those making major life transitions such as in retirement or after experiencing financial or physical changes that necessitate new career directions. They owe to their clients knowledge of people that will affect their choice of careers, skill in translating complex assessment data to be useful to clients in making concrete decisions about their lives, and understanding and appreciation of how people change.

This book is intended to help professionals-in-training and already-trained professionals who are themselves changing career directions to learn about the content and process of career assessment. It focuses on three major types of variables (or domains)—occupational interests, abilities, and personality—each of which has proven its value in career assessment across a broad range of career concerns and with an array of presenting concerns. Each of these

domains has a large literature and, in many cases, appropriate psychometric measures.

There is a lot of material in this book to master. This relates both to the volume of the literature and the areas covered in the book. Further, the process of learning career assessment requires not just understanding individual differences in the context of work environments, but also learning how clients actually experience them. Additionally, the career assessor must become skilled at providing feedback in a way that maximizes impact and at understanding the process of change.

The career assessment model used in this book is called the Interdomain Model of Career Assessment. It focuses on interests (what people like to do), abilities (what people are able to do), and personality (the persistent and preferred ways of relating to others). The three domains are not three variables but rather three collections of variables, each of which has a demonstrated track record in predicting work and career issues. Further complicating things, these domains overlap with each other and combine to form patterns, or profiles, each containing an assortment of variables within it.

There is more. Assessment is always done in service of a goal; it is not the goal itself. Applied assessment therefore involves understanding the client's purposes for undertaking the assessment, the relevant measures to be used to address the referral questions, interpreting the findings in a way that is maximally useful to the client, and providing feedback from the science-based assessments to the real-world problems of the client. "Should I change career paths?"; "I'm not happy in my college major"; "Should I move to another, better paying job, even though I'm very happy in my current one?"; "I keep changing jobs and never seem to be happy in the new ones; why, and what should I do about it?" are examples of questions to which clients seek answers and for which the assessment instrumentation needs to be relevant.

To address such questions, and to be helpful to clients, assessors will need considerable expertise. Gone are the days when knowledge of a single personality or interest measure would be sufficient to conduct competent career assessments. This book is intended to help career assessors learn in depth about major psychological factors affecting career choice and change and how clients can use them to advise real-world decisions.