



Choosing a career:

Theories of career
decision making



...‘rigorous counselling and career guidance should be available throughout medical training’

- *Medical Careers, The Next Steps 2004*

Introduction

- This presentation gives brief introduction to theories behind career decision making
- It outlines some of the methods used by career counsellors; it does not attempt to describe how to use them!
- There are links at the end of the presentation to an expanded summary of these theories

Scope

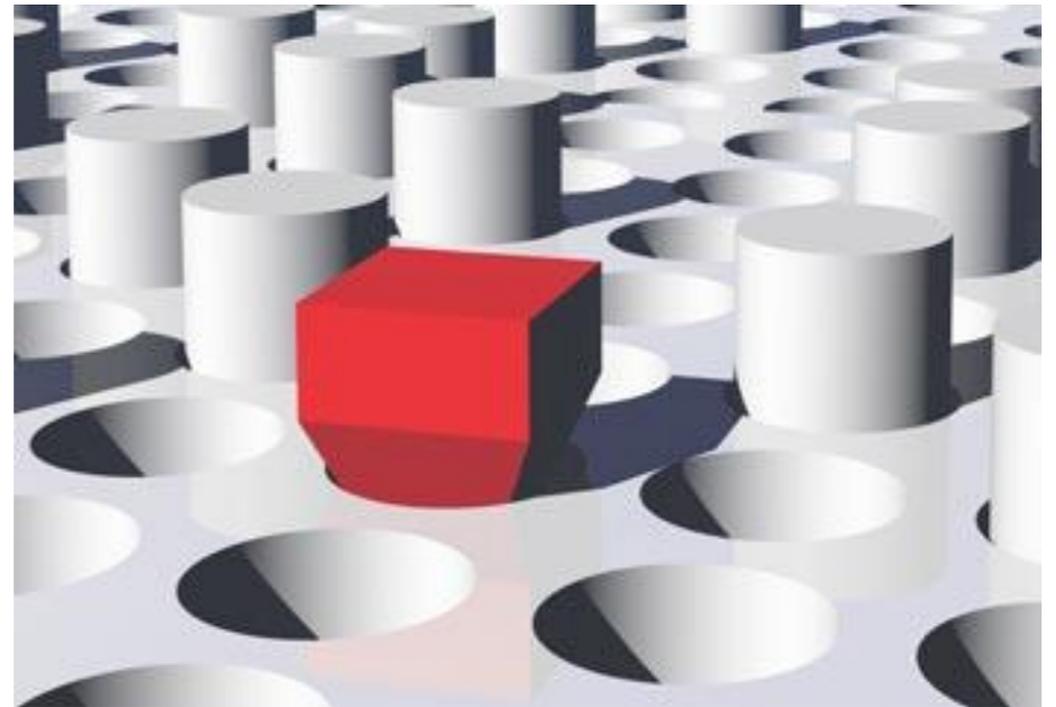
- Theories of career decision making:
 - Trait matching
 - Developmental
 - Structural
 - Community interaction
- Summary
- Suggested further reading



Trait Matching

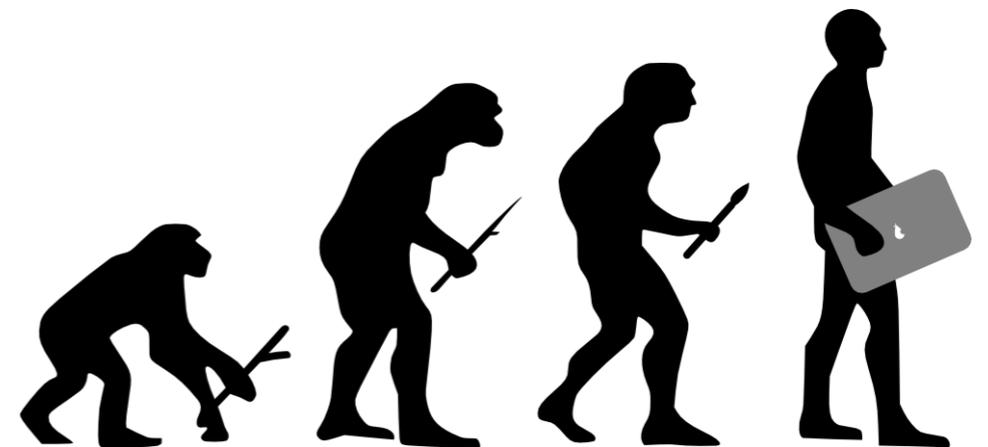
(Parsons 1908, Roger 1952, Holland 1985)

- Trait matching theory attempts to find congruence between a person & a particular job or specialty
- Using an inventory of a job's 'content' and a questionnaire to assess an individual's aptitude, a degree of person to job 'fit' can be assessed
- 'Sci 59' is a questionnaire which assesses an individual's likes and dislikes, then ranks 'their suitability' for 59 medical specialties



Developmental (Super 1957)

- Developmental theories of career choice recognise that choosing and adjusting to work is a continuous process, and use psychological concepts to explain processes of career development.
- Donald Super is widely associated with such theories describes an individual passing through 5 'life-stages' (growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and decline) as his career progresses.



Structural (Roberts 1968)



- Structural theories attempt to explain careers and career choices in sociological terms: the social position of an individual and his family background will influence opportunities that are open to him (Bowles & Gintis 1976).
- Roberts (1968) states that social stratification is an important determinant of career and argues that career guidance is of limited value when social and structural forces play such an important role.

Community Interaction (Law 1981)

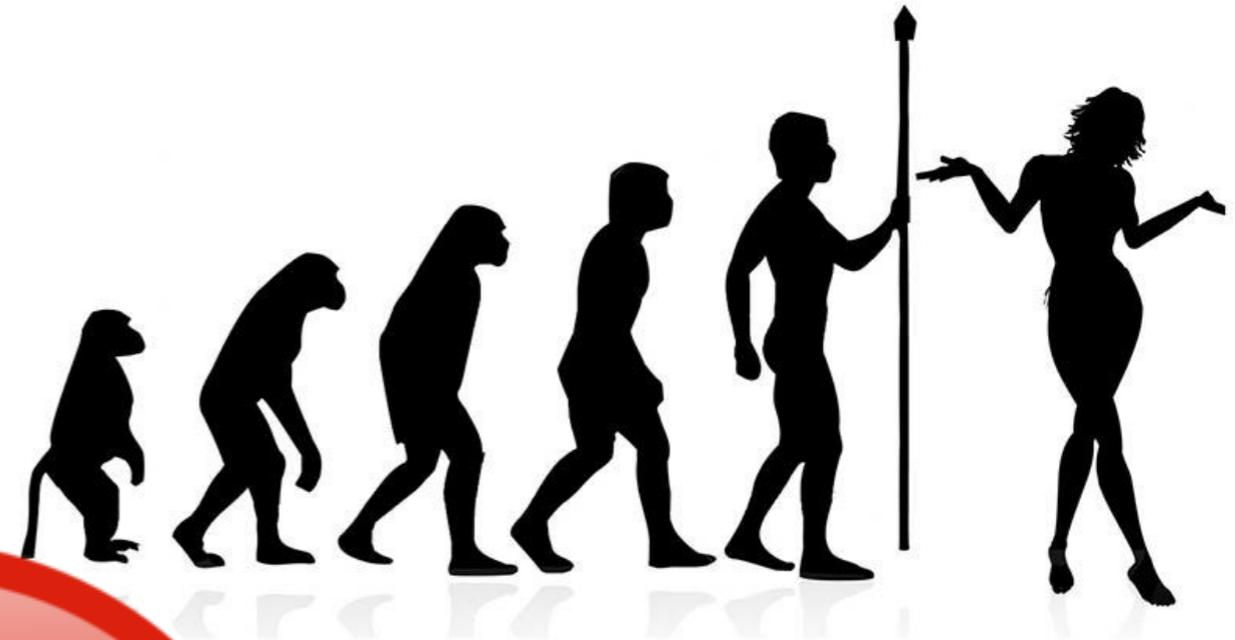
- Law (1981) describes how the community in which an individual lives and works can motivate him to a particular career goal.
- The community in this context includes all the people that a person interacts with: partners, family, friends, colleagues and others.
- We listen to and take advice from such people all the time: their advice is important to us, and it matters.
- Trying to make important career decisions without the input of such important influences will make any career decisions more difficult.



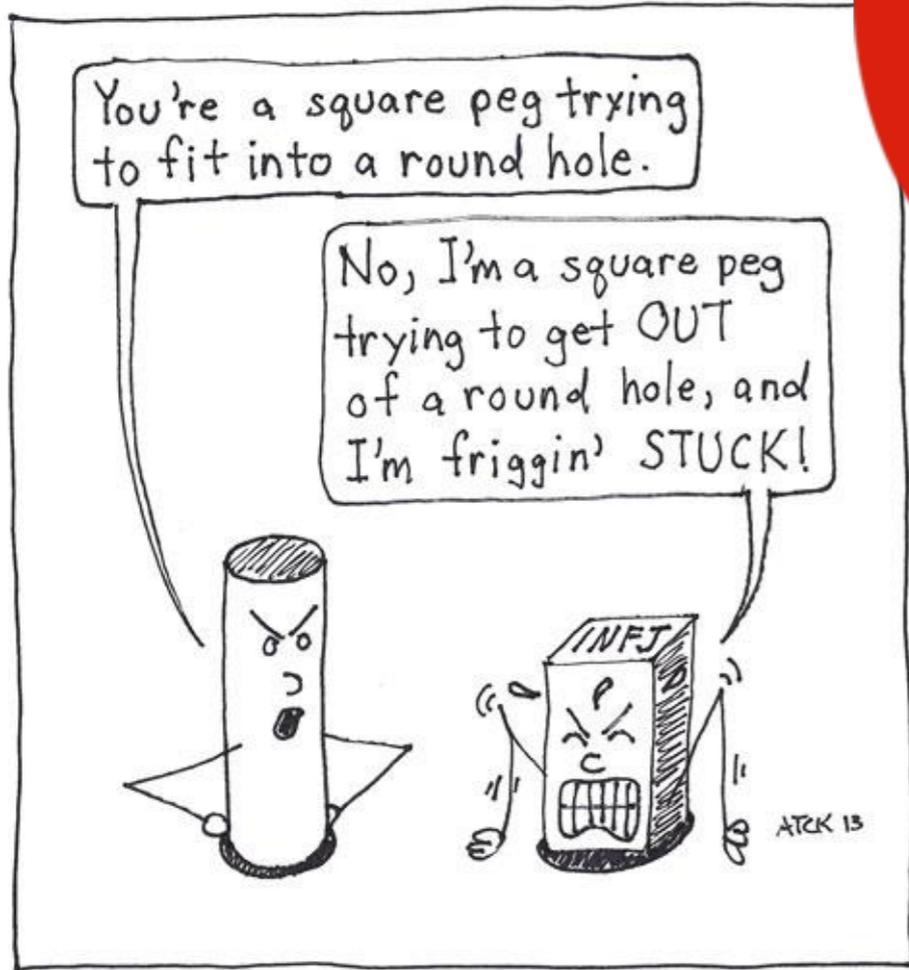
Summary

- Trait matching (person:fit) theories try to match a person to a specialty using questionnaires and inventories
- Developmental theories suggest a person develops as their career does
- Structural theories remind us of the importance of social factors: not all people have the same opportunities to make an 'open' career choice
- Community interaction theory describes how we don't act in isolation: we listen to people that matter to us when deciding to do anything, and this includes choosing our career or specialty.

**“I PROMISE
TO NEVER
FORGET WHERE
I CAME FROM”**



YOU



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Suggested further reading:

- [*Theoretical Models of Career Decision Making: FICM June 2017*](#)
- Bowles, S. and Gintis, H. 1976. *Schooling in capitalist America*. London: Routledge.
- Holland, JL 1985. *Making vocational choices: a theory of vocational personalities and work environments*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hal
- Law, B. 1981 'Community interaction: a mid-range focus for theories of career development in young adults', in *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 9 (2): 143-57
- Nathan, R & Hill, L. (2006). *Career Counselling* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Parsons, F. 1909. *Choosing a vocation*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Roberts, K. 1968. *The entry into employment: an approach towards a general theory*. *Sociological Review* 16: 165-84
- Roger, A. 1952. *The Seven Point Plan*. London, National Institute of Industrial Psychology
- Super 1957. *The psychology of careers*. New York: Harper and Row