

# Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 20, 1993

## WELCOME TO THE PARTY! AN EXPRESSION OF VOCATIONAL PREFERENCE

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### ABSTRACT

Holland's Self-Directed Search (SDS) is often used to identify occupational interests by assessing an individual's skills and abilities, interests, and affinity. The assumption that individuals possess the greatest occupational skills in areas that they enjoy may be invalid when experiences are determined more by chance or circumstance than by choice. The exercise in this paper classifies by interest and affinity, and is, therefore, useful to confirm SDS scores for some students, and to provide a more legitimate measure of those preferences for others.

### INTRODUCTION

One contemporary approach to career theory stresses the successful matching of individual preferences with occupational characteristics (McFarlin and Rice, 1992; Scarpello and Vandenberg, 1992). Holland's vocational preference profile (Holland, 1985) is an example of this type of career theory. Vocational preferences can be characterized by six identifiable occupational themes

Realistic - Rugged, robust, practical, task and mechanical interests

Investigative - Scientific, task-oriented, abstract, ambiguous interests

Artistic - Creative, sensitive, emotional, independent, original

Social - Concerned with others, extroverted, cheerful, popular

Enterprising - Energetic, extroverted, persuasive, competitive

Conventional - Stable, dependable, predictable, ordered, routinized

which are measured with a variety of instruments, such as the Self-Directed Search. Individuals tend to score high on some, but not all, of these occupational themes. A vocational preference is determined by the identification of the three highest scores.

Patterns developed from the representation of high and low scores on these themes may be drawn to identify an individual's vocational preference. Figure 1 illustrates such patterns, with the first letter of each preference used to identify a point on the hexagon. The representation in Figure 1 is a multidimensional scaling diagram -- the distance between the letters may be used as an indication of congruence. Congruent themes (adjacent letters) possess mutually supportive characteristics. For example, Enterprising and Social (E-S) are congruent preferences. The shared characteristic is extroversion, or a desire to be with people. Letters separated on the diagram are not congruent, and have mutually exclusive characteristics. For example, Realistic and Social (R-S) are opposing themes. Realistic individuals prefer to work with things rather than people, while Social individuals prefer human interaction to isolation in the workplace. These opposing themes are at opposite sides of the diagram. Work environments may be also characterized with these same six

FIGURE 1  
STRUCTURE OF HOLLAND'S THEMES



vocational themes. For example, a research laboratory provides workspace for one individual. Such a work environment could be characterized as Realistic (practical, mechanical, with equipment rather than people for interaction), Investigative (opportunity to explore, probe), and Artistic (not a routine or highly structured work process). Such an environment is a good match for the scientist who is Investigative (inquisitive), Artistic (finds her own way through a problem), and Realistic (prefers solitary work opportunities),

"Welcome to the Party" provides an experience of Holland's vocational preference model that is based on interest and affinity. For individuals with vocational preferences accurately identified by the SDS measure, the

exercise often confirms those scores. For individuals who deny the accuracy of their SDS-derived vocational profile, this exercise often provides a more legitimate measure of Holland's vocational preferences.

### EXERCISE

#### Resources/Preparation

1. Before participants enter the room, instructor places conspicuous signs on the interior walls, arranged in the Figure 1 pattern. For example, the Realistic location sign could be "WORKSHOP".
2. Arrange room so that participants may move around easily.
3. Provide "WELCOME TO THE PARTY" instructions (shown in the Appendix) for each participant.

#### Process

1. Greet participants at the door with a copy of "WELCOME TO THE PARTY!" and instruct them to proceed to their first location choice when they have read the instructions. Prompt their discussion with others who have chosen the same location: Why are you here? I am really interested in ---. I would come to this group because
2. Allow five minutes for discussion, more if all groups are still lively. If this exercise is part of an ongoing class, ask students to locate their other group members. Tell them to "Wave across the room."
3. Instruct participants to proceed to their next choice of group location. Don't allow anyone to stay in the same location.
5. Repeat step 3.
6. Repeat step 4. Make sure the third choice is a new location.
7. Repeat step 3.
8. Have participants be seated. Discuss relevant theory.

### VARIATIONS/CAUTIONS

Occasionally, a group will have only one participant. The facilitator should join that person and say, "I would be here because providing appropriate activities from the Holland theory. Discuss why s/he is there, not about how out of place s/he feels because no one else showed up. If pressed for time, allow three minutes per group location rather than deleting the third group location.

### APPENDIX WELCOME TO THE PARTY!

Welcome to the party! You have just arrived, and there are six different conversations going on. Read the descriptions of the conversation groups, and then choose the group, which you would most like to join. You know some of the people in each group.

1. Actually, this group is heading out to the workshop/garage area to admire (and perhaps tinker with) some machine that your host owns.
2. This group is talking about new discoveries in space and life on other planets. That does not surprise you. The topic in this group usually centers on new discoveries in some field.
3. Most of this group has been to the newest art exhibit in the community, and they are talking about that exhibit. They are also planning a trip together to another cultural event (dance, drama, etc.).
4. This group is just friends, enjoying casual conversation.
5. Everyone in this group looks very important and very successful.
6. This group is playing a board game with well-defined rules, one that you know well. (i.e., Trivial Pursuit).

Please write "1" next to the group you would join. If later during the party you went to a second group, which group would that be? Write a "2" next to that group. If, later still, you could join a third group, which group would that be? Write a "3" next to that group.

REFERENCES: Available from the author.