CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEXT

FESTSCHRIFT FOR FRED VONDRAKE
Abstract
This chapter uses Fred Vondracek’s Living systems theory of vocational behavior and development to analyze how his personal lifespan development helped shape his approach to education and work. Based on more than 50 years of common history at the Pennsylvania State University and Fred’s accounts of his early family history during World War II and his immigration to the United States, Fred’s career development from tile setter’s apprentice to internationally recognized scholar and academic leader is examined. Evidence is presented to demonstrate how vocational development pathways emerge from creating, performing, and evaluating goal directed behaviors in varied contexts.

Keywords: Fred Vondracek, Living Systems Theory, Vocational behavior and development
Introduction

Fred views individuals’ effective performance of work roles as a cornerstone of both individual satisfaction and societal development. The primary goal of his scholarly work for the last third of a century has been to construct an evidence based theoretical model of the developmental dynamics of individuals’ creation of their patterns of vocational behavior that would be sound and useful both for individual and societal development. He took his first major steps toward that goal in the 1980s.

A key guiding assumption was that each person always functioned as an integrated biological, psychological, behavioral and social entity in a specific situation, i.e., a person-in-context unit. That meant that a sound theory of vocational development needed to be multidisciplinary and fit with more general theory and knowledge about human development. He found such a theory in a book titled *Humans as Self-Constructing Living Systems* (D. Ford, 1987; 1994; 2014) that used the integrative and rapidly growing field of general systems theory, which is playing an increasingly powerful role in the natural sciences, as a framework for technological and medical advances, and for understanding human development and functioning as a person-in-context unit.

In 2014 Fred finally achieved his long term goal. His co-authored book, *A Living Systems Theory of Vocational Behavior and Development* (Vondracek, F.W., Ford, D.H., & Porfeli, E.J.), merged all his previous work in that integrative framework. That book provides real life examples of how individuals’ vocational development patterns can be understood using the living systems model, beginning with childhood experiences and continuing through development in the adult years.

This chapter uses Fred’s new theory to analyze his personal lifespan development patterns. It reveals how his vocational
life and scholarly accomplishments evolved and provides an interesting way to view his work. I will present Fred's story of his development and scholarly contributions in four time periods: 1941-1960; 1960-1969; 1969-2000; and 2000-the present.

The information and events described in this chapter come from Fred, friends, my memory and things written by him and others. I met Fred in 1965 when I appointed him as a graduate assistant in our psychological services program for Pennsylvania State University students and their families, called The Division of Counseling. Over the next 50 years our relationship evolved from student to colleague, co-author and friend.

Childhood/Adolescence and Basic Education/Apprenticeship
1941-1960

The guiding goal for the first part of Fred's life and for his family was survival in the context of war raging around them. Fred and his twin brother were born in 1941 just when Germany's success in WWII was nearing its peak. His father, Paul, had been drafted in the German army in 1940, and the oldest son, Ernest, was drafted in 1944 (at age 16).

The family continued to live in their home in Sankt Augustin (near Bonn) until 1943 when the massive air attacks by the allies became so severe there that the German government evacuated his family - mother (Katharina) two sisters (Magdalene & Marliese) and the 2 year old twins (Fred & Hans) - east to Silesia, a safer part of the country. By February of 1945 that too became very dangerous because of Soviet advances from the east, and with the help of a kind neighbor, the family walked 12 miles to the nearest functioning train station to make their way to Thuringia in the central part of the country.