

OVERVIEW

Interest inventories are among the most popular tools selected by career professionals today (Savickas, 1998). Over 200 reasonably valid and reliable interest measures are available (Walsh & Betz, 1995), providing a dizzying array of options for collecting information about individuals' preferences and motivations. New inventories enter the competition each year in a fast-changing market that promises lucrative rewards. Consequently, career counselors and human resource specialists are sometimes left overwhelmed with the responsibility for selecting an appropriate inventory and evaluating its soundness. Furthermore, many professionals find themselves in a dilemma: their formal training in assessment is years out of date, yet they have little time to wade through the range of newly available test manuals and textbooks.

This book was developed with the goal of providing an easy-to-read, practical, up-to-date, quick reference source that would guide the career professional through the essentials of using the most popular career interest tools. Its focus is twofold. First, it attempts to summarize and highlight important technical aspects of each inventory. Second, it offers step-by-step guidance in interpretation and use of the various inventories. Each chapter includes a number of "Rapid Reference" boxes that summarize important points. "Caution" and "Don't Forget" boxes also are included to emphasize critical issues for interpretation. This volume was not intended as a substitute for the manuals or user's guides for the selected instruments. In fact, the opposite is the intent. Annotated bibliographies are provided for each instrument to direct the reader toward specific resources that provide more detailed information and guidance.

Most of the instruments reviewed in this volume are products of a long history of research in interest measurement. In fact, the assessment of interests has been a critical focus of career counseling and guidance since the field of

vocational psychology began. Frank Parsons (1909), considered the founder of vocational guidance, published the original model of career counseling, in which a fundamental step included gathering knowledge about an individual's interests. Ever since, counselors have relied on interest assessment to understand clients' motivations and to help them with career decisions and life planning.

The first formal interest assessment tool was the *Strong Vocational Interest Blank for Men (SVIB)*, developed by E. K. Strong and published in 1927 (Strong, 1927). Strong, a professor of Business Management at Stanford University, was interested in understanding the unique patterns of interests and disinterests that differentiated members of one occupational group from another. Over the course of the 20th century, research in interest measurement took a variety of directions. Extensive efforts focused on understanding the exact nature of interests and their links to abilities, genetics, and environmental factors (Walsh & Betz, 1995). Although these questions remain unresolved, it has become evident that interests are a complex and powerful source of information, and play a critical role in career behavior.

A recent survey of career assessment practices among counseling psychologists, across six different types of work environments, demonstrated the importance of interest testing to the current practice of career counseling. Researchers found that interest inventories were by far the tools these career practitioners used most frequently (Watkins, Campbell, & Nieberding, 1994). Specifically, they found that the *Strong Interest Inventory* (Harmon, Hansen, Borgen, & Hammer, 1994) and the *Self-Directed Search* (Holland, 1994) ranked first and second respectively across settings as diverse as private practice, universities, community mental health, and hospitals.

Selecting which instruments to include in this volume was a difficult task. Not only did we want to include the most widely used instruments, we also wanted to provide readers with a sampling of the different types of interest measures available to career professionals as well as the public. We decided to focus on three instruments in depth: the *Strong Interest Inventory* (Strong), the *Self-Directed Search (SDS)*, and the *Campbell Interest and Skill Survey (CISS)* (Campbell, 1992). Both the *Strong* and the *SDS* were chosen because of their immense popularity and their solid research foundations. Each of these also represents a different type of interest measure. The *Strong* is a solid example of a formal inventory that measures interests using normative reference groups, and the

SDS is an excellent example of a self-administered and self-scored interest inventory that reports scores without reference to normative samples. The *CISS* was chosen because of its increasing popularity within organizational settings and because it is one of the few instruments that contrasts interests with skills confidence throughout its scales. We begin with the *Strong* in Chapter 2, and follow with the *CISS* in Chapter 3, since this instrument so closely resembles the *Strong* in both construction and format. We complete our featured reviews with the *SDS* in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 then provides an illustrative case example that highlights some similarities and differences among the three instruments when they are used in combination. When reviewing information on the theoretical foundations or interpretation, you can refer to Chapter 5 to view sample profiles of all three instruments.

In addition to the featured instruments, we selected the following career assessment tools to review briefly in Chapter 6: DISCOVER (ACT, Inc., 2000), *Careerhub* (Consulting Psychologists Press, 1999), and *Talent Sort 2000* (Farren, 1998). These tools are less traditional in format and they represent different modes of delivery. They also exemplify the diversity of career assessments on the market that integrate an interest assessment component. DISCOVER is an example of an established computerized career guidance system. *Careerhub* is an example of a state-of-the-art internet-based career assessment tool. *Talent Sort 2000* is an experiential card sort method for assessing interests.

There are many solidly constructed and useful instruments we would have liked to include in this volume but could not. We decided to focus on a limited number of tools in order to provide thoughtful and essential guidance on those, rather than a cursory review of a larger number of instruments. Our intention is to help the reader understand the essential information needed to administer, score, and interpret these well-regarded tools. We provide fundamental details about the instruments for each of the following dimensions: theoretical and research foundations, administration, scoring, interpretation, strengths, weaknesses, and counseling applications. In addition, we direct readers to critical reference sources through an annotated bibliography for each instrument.

Professional use of these measures requires a familiarity not only with basic statistical concepts, but also with legal, social, cultural, and ethical factors. Consequently, we assume the reader to have previous or concurrent training in psychological testing and to be well versed in the responsibilities and compe-

tencies necessary for proper test usage. Also, it is beyond the scope of this book to provide specific guidance in career counseling or to address the integration of interest assessment with other, related measures of personality, development, or ability. However, for readers needing further training, we have provided several references for this chapter to texts that address these concerns.

We hope that this volume will provide you with the essential information you need to understand and evaluate these valuable assessment tools. We also hope this book will lead you to use them with greater confidence and skill, to better meet the career development needs of your clients.