

Beyond DOTS: Theory and model development

Peter Plant

There is nothing more practical than a good theory. And even more practical is a model, if it communicates well. Tony Watts has been involved in creating a number of models, two of which are mentioned here: the DOTS model and a socio-political model, dealing with dimensions of society/individual and change/status quo. This article discusses the current importance and implications of these models: they have had a long life and a strong impact on the guidance field. As has Tony Watts.

- First, a clear understanding of yourself, aptitudes, abilities, interests, resources, limitations, and other qualities (**S**)
- Second, a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensations, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work (**O**)
- Third, true reasoning of the relations of these two groups of facts (**D**)

(Parsons, 1909)

DOTS

Social and learning aspects of career guidance and career education have continuously come to the forefront in Tony Watts' writings and philosophy. Such examples include the DOTS model (Law and Watts, 1977: 8-10), which introduced four aspects of guidance activities, i.e., support in relation to: Decision making (D), Opportunity awareness (O), Transition skills (T), and Self awareness (S). Or put in everyday language:

- S:** "who am I?" - knowing about self
- O:** "where am I?" - knowing about opportunities
- D:** "what will I do?" - ready for a decision
- T:** "how will I cope?" - ready for the next transition

The DOTS approach reaches back through the history of career guidance. It has some resonance with Frank Parsons' (1909) three-stage model, in particular in relation to the S, the O, and the D of DOTS:

The original DOTS model, however, has shown its vigorous and long-lasting nature in being developed into a career learning model by one of its creators, Bill Law. Whereas DOTS focused on what can be learned through guidance, the New DOTS model focused on how we learn: sensing, sifting, focusing, and understanding (Law, 1996; Law, 1999; Reid, 2000). This adds a strong learning dimension to DOTS: it is a learning taxonomy, as illustrated in Figure 1).

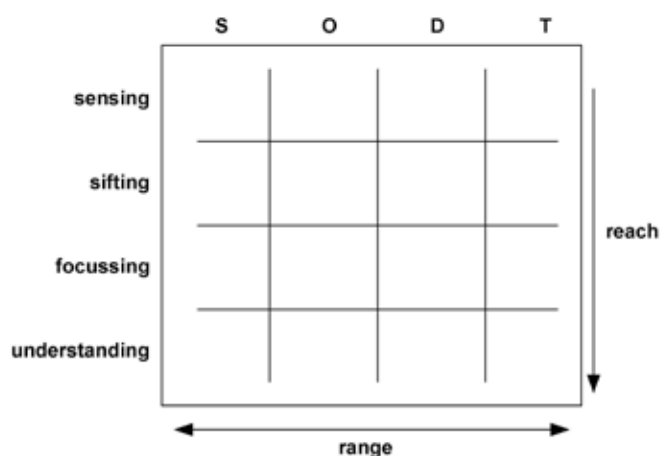


Fig 1: New Dots (Law, 2000)

The learning aspects of career guidance and career education have been carried forward to this day, in several forms. One obvious example is the Blueprint for Life-Work Design which builds on the idea of learning career development competences. Originally from the USA, this taxonomy has now been adopted in Canada and Australia (Blueprint 2006; 2012), where it serves as a common framework for career development work across these vast countries. Even though the Canadian version comprises 44 items, it is clearly inspired by the learning aspects of the DOTS model.

Moreover, on a European level, the EU points to the need for everyone to develop Career Management Skills (CMS), which is the contemporary concept for career learning, both in schools and among adults. Does this presuppose that everyone has a career? The EU thinking is precisely that: we all develop careers, i.e., life trajectories, life stories, as our lives unfold. Thus the career concept reflects a life-wide approach, rather than a traditional hierarchical way of thinking. In post-modern societies we must all manage our careers: this is the message. And we need skills to perform this task: 'Career management skills refer to a whole

range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals and groups to gather, analyse, synthesise self, educational and occupational information, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions.' (Sultana, 2011: 5). Clearly, DOTS and New DOTS are mirrored in these approaches: the areas of self, opportunities, transition, and decisions are all reflected here. In short, the DOTS model has inspired a range of different scholars and policy makers to clarify the aims and aspects of career education and career guidance in a learning perspective. This may seem a mainstream point in 2014, but this was by no means the case in 1977, where more prescriptive trait/factor theories and practices were used in guidance, along with interview check lists such as Rodger's seven point plan (Rodger, 1952).

One further example of the robust and versatile nature of the DOTS model can be found in this illustration (Fig 2, retraced from www.wiley-vch.e-bookshelf.de), which puts Planned Happenstance (Mitchell, Levin and Krumboltz, 1999) at the centre of career development, adding a number of supplementing elements to the original four DOTS, a 'DOTS Plus Model':

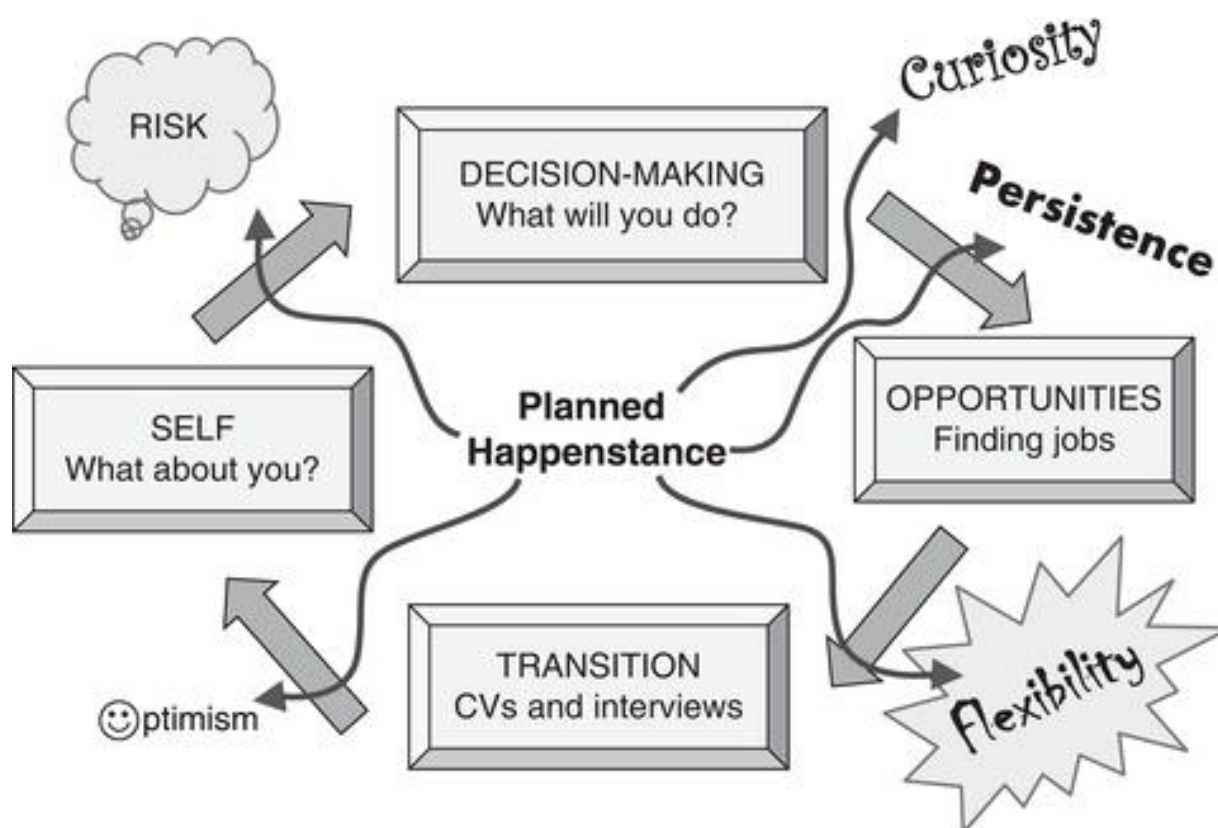


Fig 2: DOTS plus

A critique concerning the implicit liberal free-choice thinking which may be seen to form the backdrop of the DOTS approach (in ‘making decisions’ for example) can be found in the argument that career decisions are not just made. On the contrary, they are heavily restricted by the opportunities at hand, in particular by the local occupational and educational opportunities (Roberts, 1977). We do not choose careers, in fact we are chosen by the local opportunities, by our social capital, by our gender, by class (Colley, 2004). Moreover, collective narratives about ‘the likes of us’ limit our scope, as strongly depicted by Willis (1977) in his research on ‘the lads’ in the British context. All these factors confine and define choices. Such critique points to the importance of considering societal facets of careers work. This leads to another highly influential Watts model: one which deals with the socio-political aspects.

Socio-political model

One further example of a highly influential theoretical model in career guidance by Tony Watts is the socio-political model (Watts and Herr, 1976; Watts, 1996), which highlights four approaches to career education and guidance: with a focus on (a) society or the individual, and (b) on change or status quo. In this model, Tony Watts sets up two axes, based on the focus of the intervention (Fig 3).

Fig 3: Socio-political model

	Focus on society	Focus on the individual
Change	Radical (social change)	Progressive (individual change)
Status Quo	Conservative (social control)	Liberal (non-directive)

This model points to the importance of distinguishing between four approaches:

Liberal: Guidance that is focused on the individual and pursues a non-directive approach. Individuals are supported to make decisions, but their decision making is not challenged.

Conservative: Guidance that serves the current needs of society e.g., matching the labour force to the needs of the market. The process of guidance is about steering people into places that they can be socially and economically useful. Adapting to the present conditions is a key concept.

Progressive: Guidance that encourages and supports individuals to exceed the role that they and those around them might have envisaged. This might involve challenging their self-image.

Radical: Guidance that encourages individuals to challenge the social and economic conditions which constrain their choices, i.e., to move people to change the very social fabric of which they are a part.

Some policy documents aim at balancing the individual-societal issues, and Tony Watts has often stated that guidance is both a private and a public good. It is the invisible hand of Adam Smith (1776) made flesh. Tony Watts has argued that:

In principle, career development could be viewed (not only by economic liberals) as a classic case of Adam Smith’s famous dictum that individuals encouraged to pursue their own interests are led by an ‘invisible hand’ to promote an end that is no part of their intention – the public interest – and to do so more effectually than when they intend to promote it. In this sense, career development services could represent Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ made flesh. Their role is to not to determine what individuals should do, but to ensure that their decisions are well-informed (in terms of, among other things, the needs of the labour market) and well-thought-through. (Watts, 2003)

In times, however, where guidance is increasingly part of other policy areas, it has been forced into a social control role in some European countries such as, for example, in the home country of the author of these lines, Denmark (Plant and Thomsen, 2012). In such cases, this four-fold model is more than just helpful for analytic purposes: it is an instrument to help practitioners and scholars formulate alternatives to what in policy terms is presented under the ‘There Is No Alternative’ heading, i.e., more control, guidance with built-in sanctions, compulsory planning, compulsory educational readiness screening, etc., which are now part of guidance routines. There are

always alternatives, however, as the model depicts so clearly in its four boxes. In this context, discourse analysis approaches may expand the message of this socio-political model. Carol Bacchi (2009), for example, asks the simple, but crucial question: 'What is the Problem Represented to be?' (known as the WPR approach). The point is that policy makers will phrase societal problems in particular ways which will fit to the solutions at hand. Guidance is one such solution... to a number of societal challenges (unemployment, illiteracy, early school leaving, etc). These challenges are phrased and shaped in particular ways for guidance to fit as the obvious solution to problems, which guidance, ironically, may not be in a position to solve. Thus, guidance is linked to solving particular societal problems in particular ways within a particular political mindset. The socio-political model helps scholars and policy makers to untangle and challenge these links.

Although guidance is often seen as a key catalyst for supporting lifelong learning agendas, contributing to workforce development through workforce preparation, adaptability and reintegration programmes, outreach guidance services, and educational drop-out (or even push-out) programmes, this four-fold model also points to some of the difficulties in creating a balance between two important roles of guidance. One role is that of enhancing economic growth, global labour market competitiveness and flexibility, and on the other hand, another role is reflected in the social inclusion agenda, where guidance has a societal compensation role to play, even to the degree as serving as the Trojan Horse within the very systems and institutions which produce educational drop-out and labour market failures (Plant, 2005). Here a radical approach may be needed to change the systems and institutions, but the guidance practitioners may find themselves in, or may confine themselves to, a conservative, social control role.

A model is a model: Conclusion

A model is a simplification. It aims at reducing complexity. In doing so, it provides an overview of a complex area at a glimpse, and, simultaneously, it runs the risk of being simplistic. This is the delicate balance. The map is not the road itself. But the true

sign of a robust model is that it is both concrete and adaptable, and easy and clear to communicate. This latter point is of crucial importance in careers work, both in practical, in policy, and in research terms. More often than not guidance workers and scholars will find themselves in situations where they need to define career education and career guidance to people who have only vague ideas about the concept of guidance. In such situations, and in more scholarly work, a clear and robust model is worth more than many words.

Increasingly, career guidance and career education are part of wider policy areas (youth, employment, social inclusion, sustainable development, etc). This why theory and model development is crucial to critical thinking: practice and policy-making need to be challenged on the basis of theoretical underpinning. Models are important in this context: they communicate.



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For correspondence

Peter Plant,
International NICEC Fellow,
Aarhus University,
Denmark.

pepl@dpu.dk