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Skills Confidence Measurement and the *Skills Confidence Inventory*

Individuals have subjective beliefs about their own abilities and skills. These beliefs influence their career behavior as much as their interests in various kinds of work or their objectively measured abilities. Those who believe themselves to be lacking in ability in a certain area are not likely to pursue a career in that area, regardless of actual ability or interest. Similarly, people who have confidence in their abilities in a field are more likely to pursue and stay in a career in that field than those who lack such confidence.

The *Skills Confidence Inventory* gives career professionals a tool for measuring this important variable—confidence. By assessing clients' confidence in their abilities to successfully perform various work-related tasks and activities, the inventory provides career professionals with information that can be key to offering effective career planning or developmental guidance.

To maximize its utility, the *Skills Confidence Inventory* was designed to work in concert with the *Strong Interest Inventory*[®] assessment, one of the most trusted means of measuring vocational interest. Both inventories organize their data in terms of the same categories: the six General Occupational Themes (GOTs) derived from John Holland's theory of vocational choice. With the Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional Themes as a common denominator, results from both inventories can be considered

together to form a more complete picture of the factors that influence a person's career decision making and career satisfaction.

The *Skills Confidence Inventory* is administered along with the *Strong Interest Inventory* assessment. The *Skills Confidence Inventory* measures a respondent's self-perceived ability to successfully complete a variety of tasks, activities, and types of coursework. A respondent's answers to the 60 items on the inventory are analyzed by computer, and the results are reported on a single-page *Skills Confidence Inventory* Profile that is printed with the respondent's *Strong* Profile. Levels of skills confidence for each Holland Theme are reported both individually and in relation to the client's interest level for that Theme. Because they are based on extensive research, career professionals and researchers can be confident that *Skills Confidence Inventory* data are reliable and valid.

Bandura's Theory and the *Skills Confidence Inventory*

Researchers have explored in some depth the relationship between confidence in one's skills and vocational behavior. Underlying much of this research on skills confidence and career choice is Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy expectations (1977), which explains how a person's beliefs concerning his or her ability to successfully perform a given task or behavior are formed and how they affect subsequent behavior.

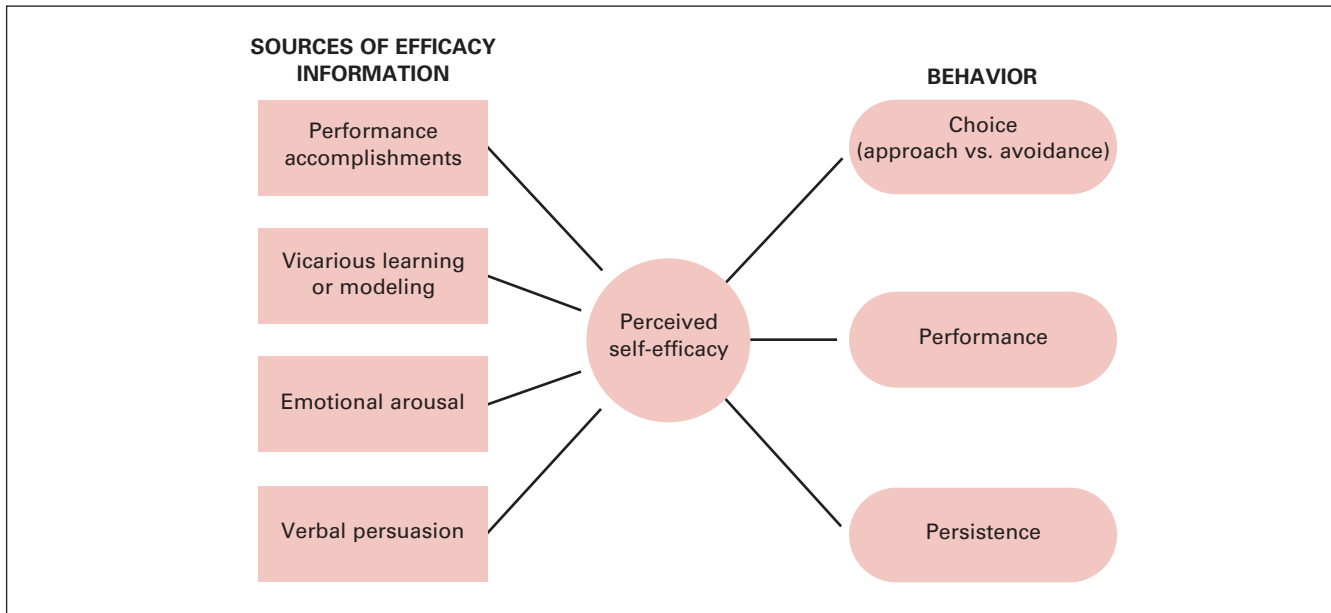


Figure 1.1 Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy Expectations

Besides providing a theoretical basis for investigation in this area, Bandura's theory can be applied to counseling interventions. Thus, it has served as an important foundation in the development of the *Skills Confidence Inventory*.

Bandura postulated that self-efficacy expectations are a crucial consideration because they influence whether an individual will undertake the exploration of a domain of activity (approach behavior) or avoid exploring that domain (avoidance behavior). He reasoned that people are more likely to attempt behavioral domains toward which they feel competent or confident and more likely to avoid those toward which they feel incompetent or lack confidence. Similarly, Bandura saw self-efficacy expectations as determining in part the likelihood of an individual performing successfully in a behavioral area and staying in the area even when faced with obstacles. A model of Bandura's theory is shown in Figure 1.1.

As part of his model, Bandura specified four "sources of efficacy information" that contribute to the formation of self-efficacy expectations. These sources, as shown on the left side of Figure 1.1, are

- Successful performance of the behaviors in question (performance accomplishments)
- Learning the behaviors by watching others perform them (vicarious learning or modeling)

- Having feelings of anxiety connected to the behavior (emotional arousal)
- Encouragement and support from others (verbal persuasion)

For Bandura, the interplay between these sources of information and an individual's self-efficacy expectations in any particular area is ongoing: once formed, self-efficacy expectations can be modified by altering the content of the four sources of information. This part of the model has direct applications for career counseling (see Betz, 1992, 2004), as will be discussed in chapter 4.

Although the phrase *self-efficacy expectations* receives wide use in academic research, its meaning may not be self-evident to practitioners. Therefore, the authors have adopted the synonymous term *skills confidence* to describe what is measured by the *Skills Confidence Inventory*.

Skills Confidence, Interests, and Career Behavior

Hackett and Betz (1981) were the first researchers to apply Bandura's self-efficacy theory in studies of career behavior; this article was the origin of social cognitive career theory (SCCT). Their research and that of col-

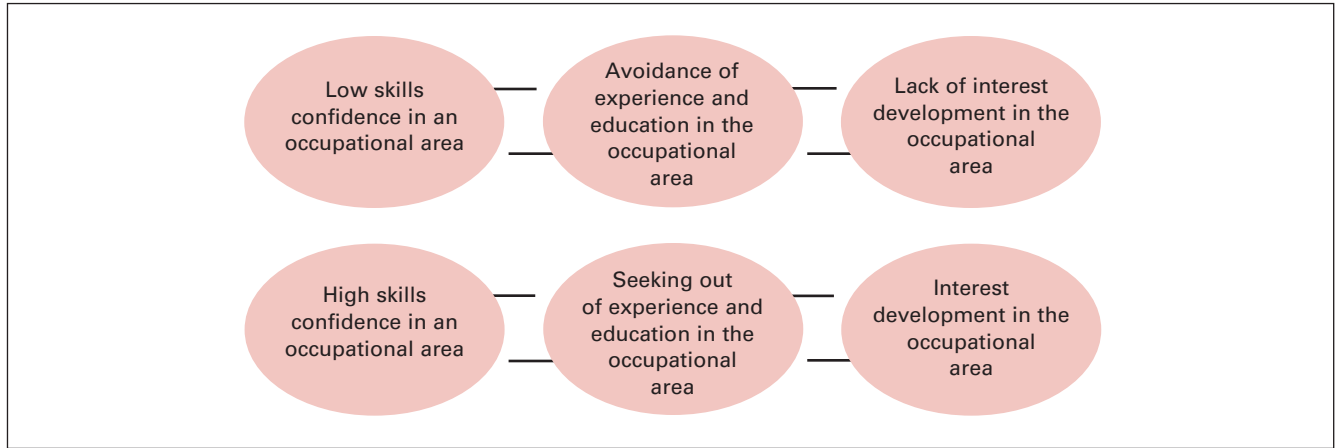


Figure 1.2 Simplified Model of the Relationship Between Skills Confidence and Interest Development

leagues have consistently demonstrated the important role that skills confidence plays in affecting educational and career preferences and choices, outcomes such as academic performance, and persistence in careers (Betz & Hackett, 1986; Hackett & Lent, 1992; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991).

In considering the application of the *Skills Confidence Inventory*, the authors worked from the assumption that promoting individuals' skills confidence in at least one General Occupational Theme area is desirable both for the individuals and for the organizations in which they work. For a variety of reasons, many people have low skills confidence in areas where they have actual ability or the potential to develop it. Low skills confidence, however, is a barrier to the development both of those abilities and interest in the area. Unfortunately, it forms the basis of a self-fulfilling prophesy: it leads to avoidance of potential learning opportunities, which in turn leads to actual as well as perceived lack of capability. The end result is a more restricted range of career options (Betz & Hackett, 1981).

In particular, skills confidence has been shown to have a direct relationship to interest development. If an individual avoids exploring particular occupational areas because of low skills confidence, interests in those areas cannot develop. Betz (1993) has contended that without the moderate level of skills confidence necessary for approach behavior, and thus experiential involvement, it is not possible to adequately evaluate an

individual's potential to develop interest in a particular area.

A model of the relationships between skills confidence level and interest development is provided in Figure 1.2. Low skills confidence in an area leads to avoidance of the area, lack of experience in it, and lack of interest development. The relationship is reinforced as lack of interest development, leading to further avoidance and confirmation of the belief in low skills capabilities. Conversely, high skills confidence can lead to approach behavior in the form of exploration of the area as a career option, which can result in interest development. This relationship is reinforced as interest development, which encourages further exploration and creates opportunities for individuals to confirm their skills capabilities.

Because of these relationships between interests and skills confidence, and the relationship of both to experiential involvement and learning, consideration of skills confidence and interests together assists the career professional in the interpretation of vocational interest patterns. Such consideration, in some cases, suggests counseling interventions that will increase skills confidence. (See the cases in chapter 5, especially cases 2, 3, and 5, for examples of these interventions.) With increased levels of skills confidence, individuals should be willing to explore a wider range of career options and can develop interests in areas that may have been previously ignored.