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Opinion Piece:

Using Career Counselling to Address Work-Related Challenges by Promoting Career Resilience, Career Adaptability, and Employability

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Background

There is general agreement today that

- a. the occupational world is changing rapidly faster than ever before (driven by developments such as Work 4.0 (Salimi, 2015));
- b. work security offered by firm and stable work-related structures is disappearing fast in multiple contexts;
- c. the world of work and its environment no longer provides the sense of security that characterised it for many decades;
- d. negotiating and obtaining life-long agreements with one employer is becoming a rarity;
- e. negotiating and obtaining short- and sometimes medium-term work-related assignments are becoming the new normal; and
- f. instead of focusing on finding work, the emphasis has shifted to lifelong learning and becoming employable so that workers can manage change and deal with repeated transitions in the workplace more satisfactorily.

Sweeping industrial improvements, many of which stem from the growing need to distribute information across the globe with ever-increasing speed and efficiency, have prompted fundamental changes in the occupational world. Consequently, in the 21st century, workers repeatedly face work-related transitions in their career-lives that must be navigated. Career counselling theory, research and practice are obliged to respond timeously and appropriately because we as career counsellors must devise novel ways to help workers cope with and make the most of these transitions. The language of our discourse has followed suit by articulating innovative terminology to describe what is happening in an effort to regain some ‘control’ over a state of affairs that many have described as soaring out of control. The creation of a host of new terms and expressions designed specifically to describe changes in the workplace pay testimony to this assertion. This includes terms such as:

- a. ‘customised careers’ (many employees today customise their career portfolios in line with their own needs rather than those of their employers) (Benko & Weisberg, 2007);
- b. ‘kaleidoscopic careers’ (careers that are created on one’s own terms and defined by one’s own values, choices, and preferences) (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005);
- c. ‘post-industrial careers’ (terms that convey the idea that ‘stable’ work identities are disappearing fast and that workers therefore often have to redefine and re-identify themselves in modern-day work contexts) (Gershuny, 1993);
- d. ‘boundaryless careers’ (terms that convey the idea of movement towards the increasing independence of workers, outside of ‘traditional’ work agreements with corporations) (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996);
- e. ‘portfolio careers’ (terms that convey the idea that employees’ skills are contracted in various contexts today and that the emphasis is shifting towards self-employment agreements) (Handy, 1995);
- f. ‘protean careers’ (from the Greek God ‘Proteus’; terms that convey the idea workers must repeatedly find ways to remain career resilient to be able to deal with the influence of innovative new hi-tech and other new developments in the occupational world on their career-lives) (Hall, 1996);
- g. the disappearance of ‘standard’ jobs (Savickas, 2007);
- h. ‘hourglass economies’ (Campbell, Baldwin, Johnson, Chapman, Upton & Watson, 2001); and
- i. ‘boundaryless careers’ (terms that suggest that the future labour force will increasingly become fragmented and segmented and that global and local economies will progressively exhibit an hourglass shape) (Moynagh & Worsley, 2005).

However, devising new terminology that describes what is happening in the occupational world in itself does not suffice. A practical response is needed that will enable us as career counsellors to respond practically to occurrences in local and global economies that impact modern-day occupational contexts, as well as the career-lives of workers. Needless to say, a practically useful as well as theoretically sound response is needed. What has been written so far confirms that we as career counsellors have no choice but to advance career counselling (defined by Savickas (2015:129) as “a general rubric that covers a myriad of interventions and services”) in a manner that will empower people to design career-life identities that will make it possible for them to identify multiple new and exciting opportunities facilitated by the very same challenges instead of dreading the ‘threat’ they pose to their career-lives. Embracing change and its impact should replace fear of change, as well as the belief that ‘survival’ against many work-related odds ought to become the ultimate aim and intention of our clients. There are a number of ways in which this ‘dream’ can be facilitated and the novel idea of helping people to design successful lives is one of them; not the ‘only’ one, to be sure, but arguably the most promising at this stage because, as Savickas notes, “[t]he 21st-century perspective on career counselling moves from the empiricism of objective vocational guiding and the humanism of subjective career developing to the social constructionism of projective life designing” (2015:136). The value of Life design locally has been showcased in many publications, and further evidence is presented in this guest issue. Not only does Life design promote people’s career adaptability and their career resilience in occupational contexts that no longer qualify as

'holding' environments; it serves as a vital strategy to enable people to make meaning and find a sense of purpose in their career-lives (Maree, 2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). Most importantly: Life design and related intervention confirms the view that perceived major work-related threats can be converted into opportunities, as has been shown so often in the history of humankind. In the past, seemingly unmanageable advances have often resulted in widespread job losses, but it is also the case that under such circumstances, people have often managed to devise innovative job opportunities. Likewise, the value of Life design intervention in terms of its power to help present-day workers cope with major change, and to convert challenges into opportunities is incontestable. However as noted, I concur with McMahon (2017) where she says that while Life design offers one way of dealing with global career counselling related challenges, there are other approaches and associated interventions that, likewise, can contribute to a solution to these challenges.

As expected, career counselling related matters play a pertinent role in each of the 10 articles in this issue. Moreover, individually and collectively, the contributions shed light on a number of issues that are key to the advancement of theory and practice in the field of career counselling. In this issue, the interested reader will find 10 thought-provoking contributions that range across the research methodology spectrum. Authors deal with theoretical issues but also report on research from quantitative, qualitative, as well as from an integrated qualitative and quantitative perspective. Above all, the authors have crafted 'positive' contributions that can be characterised as solution-focused, concerned with finding opportunities, and inspiring. Typical research questions that have been addressed include the following:

How does contemporary career counselling theory and practice promote occupational success, career employability, and career resilience?

How can we use life design to promote career counselling?

How can career counselling theory and practice advance self-reflection, reflexivity, and, ultimately, change?

How can an integrated career counselling strengthen career-life identity?

How can life design and career counselling advance group-based counselling?

How can career-counselling interventions developed in Euro-North America-centric contexts be adapted to promote career counselling in developing country contexts?

How can we help people manage multiple transitions in the occupational world in a way that demonstrates "prospective reflexivity" (Savickas, 2015:136)?

As always, this issue includes contributions that are diverse in terms of gender and race but also transinstitutional, transnational, national, international, transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary. The contributions are welcomed because there can be no denying the fact that an almost desperate need exists for career counselling in (South) Africa to be revamped and made available to people across the diversity spectrum. The recent establishment of the South Africa Career Development Association (SACDA) and gazetting of Competency Framework for Career Development Practitioners in South Africa (FCDPSA) (Department of Higher Education & Training, Republic of South Africa, 2016) holds exceptional promise in this regard. The current guest issue of the SAJE in a way pays tribute to anyone that has dedicated many hours to this endeavour already, and who will no doubt continue to do so for the foreseeable future. The Chair of SACDA, Chris Beukes, is singled out here for his pivotal contributions and his sterling leadership.

What Readers can Expect in this Issue

Our first article, *Career counselling research-practice disparities: What we know and what we need to know*, was crafted by Prof. Maria Eduarda Duarte (2017), currently President of the Counselling Division, International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), a Fellow of the IAAP (2014), and Chair: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Lifelong Guidance and Counselling Network. In her contribution, she rightly contends that the key practical principle associated with in contextualisation originated in our understanding of everyday life experiences, but is not limited to such understanding. She proffers that its embeddedness in idiosyncratic "cultural [counselling] contours" is key to contextualisation. In addition to the importance of and need to focus on cultural factors and their counselling implications, the significance of a thorough understanding and evaluation of people's unique career-life themes and those contexts in which they become evident need to be considered. Duarte (2017) argues that cultural or contextual issues are key to our understanding of the 'mystery' of career counselling. The author correctly concludes by acknowledging the variety of knowledge-based societies and contexts, alongside the demands that this requirement places on us as career counsellors. It is a must-read for all career counsellors for the reason that it deepens our understanding of the disparities associated with research and practice in career counselling.

In our second article, *Deconstructing career myths and cultural stereotypes in a context of low resourced township communities*, Albiën and Naidoo (2017) articulate the voices of black adolescents who still struggle to escape the legacy of apartheid. Career beliefs that are perpetuated in resource-scarce contexts and adversely influence their career opportunities and development are examined. Drawing on a qualitative research design and implementing a case study approach, the authors found that adolescents from disadvantaged contexts' meaning-making, as revealed by their idiosyncratic assemblage of career influences and ensuing story-telling,

provides a useful means to understand career-life identities in nested township communities. This proves an important and timely contribution on an extremely relevant topic.

Our third (and second international) article, *The therapeutic collaboration in life design counselling: The case of Ryan*, Do Céu Taveira, Ribeiro, Cardoso and Silva (2017) report on their findings regarding therapeutic collaboration facilitated by Life Design Counselling (LDC). The authors found that collaboration between counsellor and client manifested predominantly in the therapeutic zone of proximal development zone, which points to collaborative interaction. The authors conclude that the collaboration-change model and associated coding system promoted understanding of the process of change in LDC. The novel approach applied here should be of interest to career counsellors across the world.

Much has been written about the merits and demerits of using Facebook. Moreover, many authors have argued that Facebook is almost exclusively used to promote social engagement and communication between schools and parents. However, its use in career counselling related endeavours remain largely under-researched. Our fourth article, entitled *Facebook as an instrument to enhance the career construction journeys of adolescent learners*, by Wessels and Diale (2017), draws on a qualitative, multiple case study approach to examine the possible value of using Facebook to enhance learners' career construction journeys. The outcomes promote the impression that Facebook (as a supplementary instrument) can and should be used in career counselling to enhance the identification of alternative career narratives. This proves a timely and highly relevant study that deserves to be taken into consideration by career counsellors.

In our fifth article (reporting on international research), *Structural determinants of students' employability: Influence of career guidance activities*, Pitan and Atiku (2017) argue in favour of promoting attempts to ensure that undergraduate students approach their career-life futures in a more pro-active manner. Using a quantitative approach, the authors investigate the structural influence of career counselling-related activities on Nigerian university students' employability. Careful analysis of the finding that career counselling positively influences students' employability reveal that self-awareness and opportunity awareness exercise the strongest influence on students' employability. Important strategies to promote undergraduates' employability are put forward and should be studied by all of us working in contexts similar to the study context, but also Euro-North America-centric contexts.

Our sixth (and fourth international) article, *Career decision-making of the gifted and talented*, Ozcan (2017) qualitatively investigates gifted and talented Turkish students' views on future careers concerning their awareness of career decision-making, in particular, how they actually manage it. Their views regarding 'best' careers were given special attention. Not unlike many of their counterparts in many countries elsewhere in the world, becoming a medical doctor emerged as the top choice. Financial as well as also social responsibility related factors, safety concerns, as well as status were articulated as part of the rationale for their choices. The results reveal similarities but also differences between the choices of the participants in this study and those of learners from other parts of the world.

Sethlare, Wood and Meyer (2017), in our seventh article entitled *Exploring Group Life Design with teachers in the context of poverty related psychosocial challenges*, explore the possible value of group-based Life Design (LD) in terms of supporting teachers working at an under-resourced school in South Africa with regards to their qualitative insight into their career-related aspirations as well as their personal and professional (career) identity. The authors conclude that the LD process spurred teachers on to take action to attain their career and personal goals. Given the paucity of research on the topic in group-based African contexts in particular, the article deserves to be read by those of us involved in career counselling.

Our eighth (and last international) article, *The relationship between career decision making self-efficacy and vocational outcome expectations of preservice special education teachers* (Baglama & Uzunboylu, 2017) investigates the relationship between two variables that have received much attention in Euro-North America-centric contexts but less attention in the context of this research in particular, namely preservice special education teachers in North Cyprus' career decision self-efficacy and their career outcome expectations. Using a quantitative paradigm, and involving 156 preservice special education teachers, the authors uncovered a significantly positive correlation between the two variables career decision-making self-efficacy. An interesting read that will hopefully stimulate related research in similar contexts.

In our penultimate contribution, *Digital storytelling to engage postgraduates in reflective practice in an emerging economy*, Dreyer (2017) argues that using digital content (technology) may contribute towards narrowing the gap between teacher training and post-colonial, post-apartheid expectations in emerging economies, provided that acceptable educational principles guide such intervention. Using a qualitative design, she introduces postgraduate students to reflective practice through digital storytelling. Her findings confirm that drawing on educational knowledge in isolation does not suffice to prepare teachers for presenting meaningful teaching and learning opportunities for learners. Incorporating digital storytelling in teacher training programmes may enhance reflection-related endeavours for professional development, though. An interesting read on a contemporary topic.

Maree (2017c), in the concluding article *Mid-career construction counselling to instill spiritual awareness and allay fear*, elaborates on a qualitative investigation into the value of career construction counselling for the participant in the research. Implementing an intrinsic, single-case study design and gathering data by means of the Career Construction Interview (CCI), he finds that the intervention rekindled and bolstered the participant's sense of purpose and career-related direction. Maree cautions that more research should be done in diverse settings to examine the trustworthiness of the approach in non-traditional contexts.

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