

Encountering, Experiencing and Shaping Careers

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Thinking About Careers in the 21st Century

 Springer

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For Michael and Ha

Preface Charting a Course Through the Unknown

I never had a doubt in my mind that I wouldn't make it.
—Kay Cottee

A career starts with an idea, a sense of purpose. The idea of a career is a powerful motivator and predictor of intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical outcomes and provides people with a considerable advantage if it comes to fruition. In this book, the many factors that shape careers are discussed, not least an ardent sense of purpose and the yearning to achieve it.

Careers are always unfinished business regardless of a person's career stage, from novice, either a new graduate, a first timer in a role or field, through to retirement. What is important is that a person gains fulfilment from their careers; it requires a meaningful determination (Tafarodi et al., 2011). Aristotle called this meaningful determination, *eudaimonia*—a profound and challenging life force (see Foisneau, 2014). Meaningful determination fits well with the call for organisations to be more socially thoughtful and responsible in terms of both the cultural and physical milieu in which they operate. For many organisations today, this means that they operate across national and cultural borders. This in itself affords new opportunities for people as employers are charged by their governing bodies to attract suitable talent to support a broader vision than they will have had in the past.

One change that has occurred over the past two decades or so is the equalising of power balance between employers and employees. In order to remain competitive, organisations have had to become more agile which means ridding themselves of outmoded, inflexible structures and processes so they can respond quickly to diverse markets. This trend has resulted in the erosion of managerial hierarchies and pushing decision-making further down the management line. This trend accords with the rise of the expert (both specialist and generalist) according to the Edelman Trust Index (2018).

With the advent of each generation entering the workforce, it gives rise to novel and sometimes, old challenges as well as improved opportunities. Each generation witnesses a new wave of social and technological change. It is both intriguing and puzzling to consider that the generations still working or about to commence

working today are facing a future where the lines between the technological, ecological, cultural, employment and artistic are becoming more and more blurred. The speed at which this is occurring is swift and unprecedented. Consequently, the type of work that people will perform and how they perform it, is continuously transforming. As fresh work prospects open up, these provide new directions. Not everyone is able to take advantage of these as it depends on their career readiness and skill development and this depends on the equitable distribution of resources. Within this flurry of new opportunities, it is increasingly difficult to prepare people for a specific career engagement or indeed, transition; or at least, that is the concern of many.

The concern about uncertainty has outweighed action for understanding what this means for the next generation of workers and beyond. Uncertainty arises from 'unique events which can only be subjectively estimated' (Wu & Knott, 2006, p. 1316). The changing aspects of 'future work' are continuous and unstoppable and this trend results in challenges for both public policy as well as for the individual, regardless of career stage whether they are a novice, an expert or someone contemplating retirement (Eichhorst, 2015). The focus of this book is not on public policy per se, urgently needed though that is; rather the quest for strong public policy is an important topic for another time.

The aim of this book is to investigate how people think and subsequently encounter, experience and shape their careers. Thinking about careers requires the attitudinal flexibility of individuals as well as significant shifts in schools' and universities' curricula, learning experiences, as well as new or revised strategies and methods. In the same way, employers need to support people plan, develop and manage their careers, especially at points of transition from formal education to work, promotion, changing roles and industries and so on.

The concept of career is complicated and becomes less straightforward with every new generation leaving school. Changes in cognitive computing and artificial intelligence, for example are transforming human life in most industries including transportation, health, science, finance, and education and training. Global market economies are reshaping and reorganising work, with a significant impact on people's careers.

Due to these complexities brought about by rapid change, both educational institutions and employers cannot depend on past models of competency and skill, and yet many still do. While schools, universities and training institutions aim to prepare students with the knowledge, information and abilities to ensure their employability, it is increasingly difficult for them to do so. This need for career preparation is particularly apparent in the case of emerging careers where new entrants are required to participate actively from the inception of their career. Career planning and the provision for the development of 21st century skills is a right that every young person has so as to gain access to employment and in so doing assure their future career and livelihood.

What Is a Career?

A career is a notion, a reaction and a reality. The experience is a series and assortment of work roles, paid and voluntary, continuing, short term, transient and virtual, that a person embarks on throughout their lifetime. This definition of career includes any role where knowledge, skill and personal attributes are learnt and utilised such as in the case of unpaid roles in the home and the community, leisure activities, at school as well as work. In short, the total of a person's roles from school to end of life forms their career. The learning from each experience folds into the next and so on. A career is best understood in hindsight when a person casts their mind back over the years and assesses their decisions and outcomes. A person looking back on their career sees it as a series of "improvised work experiences which rise prospectively into fragments and fall retrospectively into patterns" (Weick in Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 40).

As working is usually lifelong, people will, given the momentous changes, need prescribed career support throughout their lives as they experience the changes in the world of work and adjusting careers as a result. This fact is increasingly evident today given the rapid change in global markets and technological change. What is required now is a new take on the nature and processes of career support; an issue explored in depth in this book.

Let's face it: working and engaging in a career is intensely personal for most people because it not only potentially provides them with a living but also and more importantly, it carves out a meaningful life for them. Giving meaning to what an individual's career is a purely personal issue. With that in mind, this book attempts to provoke a critical approach including questions such as: what is the meaning and value of what a person performs in their career life? Are people able to use their working lives in a way they would like to do so? Are they investing time, effort and skill in something that they see as worthwhile? Or are they just following a career pathway that is either expected of them or because they perceive limited options elsewhere—subjective as well as objective ones; internal and external?

The purpose of a career, apart from the provision of livelihood, is to support the person in the production and dissemination of knowledge and skill as well as developing their attributes, congregating and grounding their intentions and actions. It assists them to strengthen their resilience as well as contribute to society, no matter how large or small in which they live and work. The myriad of options raises several fundamental questions to consider including:

1. What does career mean today?
2. What are the implications of economic, social and technological change for the upcoming generations?
3. Has the focus moved from career to employability?
4. Who owns a 'career'? Has the balance of career control moved from the employer to the individual?

5. What are the implications for career adjustment/adaptability?
6. What are the effects of career development, coaching, transitions, choosing or changing careers, a portfolio career or indeed not having a career at all?
7. What are the implications of economic, social and technological change for the upcoming generations?
8. What are the implications for organisational and educational psychology, career guidance and counselling? Are there new careers in the making for psychologists?

The world is facing two co-related trends: the diminution of a career for life initiated some decades ago as well as a greater emphasis on a portfolio career. In today's labour market, a well-maintained, a career portfolio is vital to a person's career success (De Vos et al., 2011). As an individual investor in their career, people will need to know how to decide on when, where and how to capitalise on their talents and experience and shape their career portfolio to best fit in with their professional and personal goals and strategies. In other words, a career portfolio needs to meet desired professional and personal needs in the future. How to design and develop a career portfolio will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

In a changing world, the difference between struggling with work, being work ready or navigating around work obstacles, is a person's ability to capitalise on the opportunities available, exploit possibilities which will assist them to some extent in overcoming the uncertainties and challenges they encounter. Despite the increasing need for a thorough rethinking about the nature of a career, most people are still relying on past notions and experience of careers. In so doing, the status quo is reinforced and even more regrettably, current educational practices. Reconceptualising career and the skills required for those in career education is long overdue.

How people think about their career and career choices, regardless of their generation, is well ingrained, since childhood. Children envision their possible future selves, and over time they develop varying aspirations, ambitions and perceptions about their 'career' success, now and in the future (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2008). One of the most significant changes is that people will have multiple and diverse roles as well as an extended life and career lifespan, due to improved health measures in most nations. Consequently, people and as a result will most likely continue to work past what has been conventionally accepted as retirement in their mid-60s. Retirement, like career, will be redefined as this change occurs.

Second, in Western societies, most children are educated and trained with the expectation that they will enter the workforce following school or post-school education or training. Increasingly, the pressure is on how well they perform so that they access the best opportunities available to them. Every generation experiences this pressure and has to manage the expectations internally as well as externally from others. However, with changes in the global economy and labour markets, opportunities that were once available will no longer exist. Moreover, change has intensified and assuring employable skills is something that schools, colleges and universities are finding it difficult to keep pace with.

Against this background, a person develops varying aspirations, ambitions and perceptions about ‘career’ and envisages career success for themselves (Otto et al., 2017). People’s experiences especially initially do not always equate with their career vision. Throughout their lives, people will encounter progress, failure, disruption and blockage. They will also experience fluctuating intensities of work satisfaction, disappointment, anxiety and regret. These experiences will require a greater emphasis on career development, coaching, supporting people through career transitions, how to choose and change careers, rethink careers, build a career portfolio, or indeed, not have a career at all. This book aims to investigate how people encounter, experience and shape their career experiences. Amidst this change, the notion of a career will continue to transform based on the evidence presented by people surveyed and interviewed for this book. The most important transformation is that people will take charge of their careers and in so doing invent new ones.

Today’s workforce consists of individuals from different backgrounds and five generations, each bringing diverse viewpoints, perceptions and values to the workplace. Their career experience and expectations are varied. In particular, what are the lessons that people derive from understanding how they lived—experience contributes to their career choices, capability, mobility and development, particularly regarding transitions of working? How do family and other background factors influence a person’s career choice? What is the experience of career setbacks and how do people learn to overcome them? What is useful in supporting skill acquisition, work interests, knowledge sharing and learning/unlearning?

Throughout their lives, people will encounter career progress, failure, disruption and blockage in varying degrees. People will also experience fluctuating intensities of career control, satisfaction, disappointment, anxiety and regret. How people develop from these encounters will not only shape their careers but ultimately, themselves.

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