

# Introducing career resonance

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5303

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**To cite this article:**

Brown, C. (2024). Introducing career resonance. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, 53(1), 18-23. <https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5303>

## Abstract

Following my presentation 'Introducing career resonance' at the NICEC Conference during 2nd-3rd July, 2024, I was encouraged to write an opinion piece for the NICEC Journal. In this opinion piece, I describe Rosa's theory of resonance. I argue that the concept of resonance has a relevance in a capitalist society. Following this, I explore both losing and having resonance and how this impacts well-being and has an association with psychological burnout. Next, I introduce career resonance and suggest how career professionals may help clients to foster resonance through their work. Finally, I emphasise that career resonance has a part to play in addressing psychological burnout and that career professionals may be called to deepen understanding and form collaborations with well-being professionals. In conclusion, I emphasise that human beings are born resonant and that career resonance has a relevance to everyone.

**Keywords:** Resonance; psychological burnout; career resonance

## Introduction

All humans are resonant beings (Rosa, 2021), with a fundamental need for resonance. Often, we may dream about slowing down, but in fact, we may be intuitively seeking a different relationship with the world; one more resonant with people, things and places.

Science can help us by confirming that we are essentially energetic beings in an energetic world, with differing vibrational rates (Judd, 2020). Such fine, unique energy fields can be captured by the Kirlian camera and seen with the naked eye (Priyadarsini, et al.,

2014). In essence, Kirlian photography involves recording electric fields from an object and converting it into an image on photographic film. Moreover, this sense of vibration is reflected linguistically in the Latin derivative 'resonare', which literally means to return to sound, or to sound and resound, almost like an echo (Vistnes & Vistnes, 2018).

Exploring further, Rosa (2019) helps us by describing a resonant world relationship as a reciprocal and mutual relationship between us and the world that brings about a transformation. In this relationship, Rosa (2021) describes four inherent qualities:

- affection - when something speaks to us, leaving us feeling moved;
- self-efficacy – when on being emotionally-touched, we respond and take action;
- transformative – when in the moment of resonance, something shifts; and
- elusive – with such circumstances being uncontrollable and emergent.

Hubner (2021, p.225) eloquently summarises this, noting that 'the concept of resonance is a comprehensive system program of hope'. We may have such a resonant relationship with hobbies, a location, another person and our work.

## Why is this relevant now?

Within a modern capitalist society, we have a desire to progress, which requires growth, acceleration and innovation to stand still (Rosa, 2021), such time pressures create a reality that accelerates so rapidly that we cannot keep up. Ridgway et al. (2024) argue that this sense of acceleration is a consequence of the societal context in which we live. Needing to deliver more each year with the same resources or cut our resources to deliver the same impact, is so intrinsic to our way of functioning that we may not even notice (Lijster & Celikates, 2019). This can impact us individually in different ways. We may have a fear of being left behind, needing to climb so as to keep up and not lose our place within society or we may have a desire to expand our horizons and increase what is available, attainable and accessible (Rosa, 2021).

Through such shifts, we can often become disconnected energetically from our world. Our relationship with the world can lose its significance, with it being cold and indifferent (Rosa, 2021). These circumstances can be compounded by the desynchronisation of different systems. With this desire for acceleration, pressures are put on different societal systems to move faster. This accelerated pace can jar against slower systems and be too fast for nature's organic rhythms. Such sentiment is encapsulated by Sir David Attenborough's statement that we 'have a finite environment – the planet. Anyone who thinks you can have infinite growth in a finite environment is either a madman or an economist' (cited in Cardwell, 2013). Many of us inherently recognise this pursuit of acceleration as unsustainable, and seek a more connected, balanced relationship with the world. We can find ourselves 'in a world that is moving too quickly, for us to sit with anything' (Chaffee, 2022). With many feeling out of kilter, a longing for resonance is increasing (Zalec, 2021).

## What happens if we lose resonance?

With these increasing demands for acceleration, our psyche may not be able to keep up with the speed of change, leading us to burn out psychologically. Our connections may

become non-resonant, and we may become mute in our relationship with our world. Such a shift can lead to depression, dissatisfaction and a sense of meaninglessness. Our energy and vibrational rate can lower. 'Meaningless [...] can be interpreted as the absence of resonance, as meaning is born when the wire of resonance begins to vibrate' (Rosa, 2019, p.199). A sense of alienation within the world can often emerge from this drive towards growth, time-saving and efficiency (Buhl, 2023).

Such consequences are being witnessed around us. Brian Dow, the CEO of Mental Health UK says that the UK is 'rapidly becoming a burnt-out nation', with 35% of people experiencing high or extreme pressure at work in the past year (Moloney, 2024). Such prevalent burn out from ourselves, our work and our communities, requires us to reflect upon what we can do. As Rosa (2024, p.49) declared in a recent speech 'burnout is the opposite of resonance'. So, finding resonance is part of our solution.

## What is it like being in resonance?

We may experience resonance in different ways. We may find resonance with objects or artefacts, and with people and communities. Also, this may be more broadly with how we experience life, through our connection with nature, art, religion or history (Zalec, 2021). We are in resonance if we are touched, where energy moves back and forth. If we are impacted emotionally, and if we are left altered or shifted in some way. The term 'emotion' is derived from the Latin work 'emotere' (Chin, 2023) which can mean energy in motion (MacKenzie, 2007).

Subconsciously, we may attract energetic connections into our life for the purposes of healing and growth. Often, we can be drawn to someone or something, that has a quality that we need to draw out from ourselves, allowing us to access more of ourselves; as they say, opposites attract. Over time, we can begin to rely on our own intuition to find connections for the expression of our own essence or purpose. When we are in resonance, we can experience joy, meaning and existential hope that in the end everything will be okay. Indeed, 'a resonant relationship with the world [...] allows a person to feel supported and safe' (Zalec, 2021, p.6).

## Introducing career resonance

What happens when we consider resonance within the context of careers? Drawing upon Yates' subjectively-constructed and all-encompassing definition, we can define career as 'if you think that it's a career, then it is a career' (Yates, 2014, p.9). Consequently, I would argue that career resonance is relevant to all of us that work.

On moving Rosa's theory of resonance into the world of careers work, I propose that career resonance is when we have a resonant relationship with our work and it is balanced in the context of our life. Consequently, on experiencing career resonance with our work activities, we are left moved and emotionally-touched (affection), which motivates us to respond (self-efficacy), leading to personal growth (transformative) and the experience of something that is emergent and uncontrollable (elusive) (Rosa, 2021). Exploring this further, career resonance is where we are positively affected, experiencing positive emotion and joy. At the end of the day, we are left with a sense of energy, where we can

find meaning and fulfillment in our work. It has an organic, elusive and individual quality. Consequently, career resonance is not something that can be manufactured, targeted or instructed; instead, it is something to be gently fostered.

So as career professionals how can we help our clients to foster career resonance? As with all our practice, it is important to enter the client's world, and to meet the client where they are. In cases of burn out, resonance can be absent (Rosa, 2024). As well as being separate from our community, we can feel alienated (Buhl, 2023) and disconnected from ourselves. Consequently, we can support our clients in their personal reconnection. Here, we can draw upon psychological research for guidance, for example the mindfulness research led by the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, a joint-collaboration between the Oxford Mindfulness Foundation and the University of Oxford. Such mindfulness research can support the nurturing of our personal well-being, for example drawing upon understanding offered by the three major emotion systems: threat and self-protection; incentive and resource-seeking; and soothing contentment (Gilbert, 2010). A balance across these emotion systems contribute to our well-being and enables us to live a rich and fulfilling life. Such insights help us to see how we can reduce individual stress and nurture a more soothing and peaceful existence. So rather than offering a sticking plaster solution, it can become apparent that mindfulness research can indeed help to get to the heart of the matter.

As well as reconnecting personally, we can support our clients in their reconnection with others. In fact, burn out and depression can be seen as a form of grief, for all the connections we need but do not have (Hari, 2019). Whilst depression may be caused by a chemical imbalance in some cases, it can now be seen for many as 'suffering from a social and spiritual imbalance in how we live' (Hari, 2019, p.313). 'Social prescribing' in which people are connected to community services, groups, and activities to support their improved health and wellbeing offers one that we can help to foster longer-term happiness and resonance (Hari, 2019; Post, 2011).

Focusing in on our career practice with clients, we can continue to foster career resonance by helping our clients to reconnect with their heart. Incisive questions can help to strengthen this, for example: What brings you joy? What makes your heart sing (not sink)? What gives you energy? When do you experience unexpected tears? Reflecting on past experiences of resonance can help us to feel our call from the world and to use it to guide our life (Carosin et al., 2022). During longer client interventions, research-based approaches to support our clients to find purpose and meaning are readily available for us to learn about, embrace and draw upon. Furthermore, there is a role for us in helping people to understand, critique and even change the accelerationist society in which they live.

## Conclusion

Within our capitalist society, with its inherent drive for acceleration, it is not uncommon to lose resonance. We can lose our sense of connection with ourselves, our work and place in the world, impacting negatively our wellbeing. I argue that career resonance is part of our solution to counter such psychological burnout, and that the concept of resonance, particularly as developed by Rosa is worthy of further research, theorization and thinking within the field of career education and guidance.

As career professionals we can play our part in addressing this by drawing upon a career resonance lens in our practice, where clients are feeling burnt out and seeking a more meaningful and fulfilling life. Preparatory ground-work may involve further learning in less familiar areas, deepening our own insight and wisdom on the matter, whilst also unearthing and letting go of any misplaced beliefs. Moreover, we can further serve our clients through extending our own practice whilst forming collaboration with fellow well-being professionals.

Being born resonant, humans have a fundamental need for resonance. Career resonance is for everyone. If we are able to engage with this and bring it into our work Hari (2019, p.245) argues that 'we can infuse our work with greater meaning [...] not just a few privileged individuals, but for the whole society.'

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