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NICEC

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CAREER EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING

NICEC STATEMENT

The Fellows of NICEC agreed the following statement in 2010.

'The National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC) was originally founded as a research institute in 1975. It now plays the role of a learned society for reflective practitioners in the broad field of career education, career guidance/counselling and career development. This includes individuals whose primary role relates to research, policy, consultancy, scholarship, service delivery or management. NICEC seeks to foster dialogue and innovation between these areas through events, networking, publications and projects.

NICEC is distinctive as a boundary-crossing network devoted to career education and counselling in education, in the workplace, and in the wider community. It seeks to integrate theory and practice in career development, stimulate intellectual diversity and encourage transdisciplinary dialogue. Through these activities, NICEC aims to develop research, inform policy and enhance service delivery.

Membership and fellowship are committed to serious thinking and innovation in career development work. Membership is open to all individuals and organisations connected with career education and counselling. Fellowship is an honour conferred by peer election and signals distinctive contribution to the field and commitment to the development of NICEC's work. Members and Fellows receive the NICEC journal and are invited to participate in all NICEC events.

NICEC does not operate as a professional association or commercial research institute, nor is it organisationally aligned with any specific institution. Although based in the UK, there is a strong international dimension to the work of NICEC and it seeks to support reflective practice in career education and counselling globally.'

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TITLE

The official title of the journal for citation purposes is *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling* (Print *ISSN 2046-1348; online* ISSN 2059-4879).

It is widely and informally referred to as 'the NICEC journal'. Its former title was *Career Research and Development: the NICEC Journal*, ISSN 1472-6564, published by CRAC, and the final edition under this title was issue 25. To avoid confusion we have retained the numbering of editions used under the previous title.

AIMS AND SCOPE

The NICEC journal publishes articles on the broad theme of career development in any context including:

- Career development in the workplace: private and public sector, small, medium and large organisations, private practitioners.
- Career development in education: schools, colleges, universities, adult education, public career services.
- Career development in the community: third age, voluntary, charity, social organisations, independent contexts, public career services.

It is designed to be read by individuals who are involved in career development-related work in a wide range of settings including information, advice, counselling, guidance, advocacy, coaching, mentoring, psychotherapy, education, teaching, training, scholarship, research, consultancy, human resources, management or policy. The journal has a national and international readership.

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Manuscripts are welcomed focusing on any form of scholarship that can be related to the NICEC Statement. This could include, but is not confined to, papers focused on policy, theory-building, professional ethics, values, reflexivity, innovative practice, management issues and/or empirical research. Articles for the journal should be accessible and stimulating to an interested and wide readership across all areas of career development work. Innovative, analytical and/or evaluative contributions from both experienced contributors and first-time writers are welcomed. Main articles should normally be 3,000 to 3,500 words in length and should be submitted to one of the co-editors by email. Articles longer than 3,500 words can also be accepted by agreement. Please contact the relevant issue co-editor(s) prior to submission to discuss the appropriateness of the proposed article and to receive a copy of the NICEC style guidelines. Final decisions on inclusion are made following full manuscript submission and a process of peer review.

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Overview of this issue

Welcome to the October 2022 edition of the NICEC Journal and thank you to everyone who contributed to this eclectic collection of engaging and informative articles by both experienced and new writers. Thank you also to you, our reader for your continuing support and constructive feedback as we develop and adapt our career education and counselling work in the post-COVID-19 era.

The journal opens with the winning article of the Bill Law Award 2022: a valuable opportunity for new writers to hone the skills of academic research writing. Winner **Cordelia Wise** explores the nature of retirement in a career context by examining the experiences of people aged over 55 who define themselves as choosing to be 'semi-retired'. The article provides new insight into a life stage phase and the importance of choice, agency and divided emotions in defining career.

In contrast, **Tom Staunton** adopts a critical realist position to investigate the assumption that better use of Labour Market Information (LMI) improves career practice which can in turn better support individuals in their futures. His critique raises some intriguing questions as he explores how we approach and define LMI and its role in the career decision-making process, emphasising the need for a stronger theoretical underpinning to inform our understanding.

Susan Meldrum explores how individual and group work models of career development practice could be adapted and redesigned to be more effective in empowering people to overcome barriers and inequalities. Her inclusion of two illustrations usefully enables us to envisage how her well-regarded conceptual thinking might be applied to develop professional practice.

Holly McLoughlin picks up the issues around group guidance and brings the UK career development practitioner voice to the debate concerning the development of innovative ideas in practice. Her research reveals how practitioners decision-making around innovation involved 'constructing empowerment' - an intentional process of gaining access to necessary resources and 'power with' others to meet institutional targets and act in the best interests of university citizens' – and its centrality in overcoming potential barriers.

Continuing the theme of social justice and emancipation, **Petra Røise**'s article contributes to a further development of Bill Law's Community Interaction Theory by highlighting its emancipatory potential. Building on career education programmes in lower secondary schools in Norway, in particular integrating career learning through work placement activities, Petra explores career education's unique liberating possibilities.

Cristiana Orlando, IES Research Fellow, analyses data from research conducted by the Institute of Employment Studies (IES) to explore the impact of the pandemic on young people's experience of careers support. Her article investigates the experiences of young people across the four UK nations and highlights three key ways in which access to careers support can be improved. While it could be argued there are few surprises among feedback from the young people regarding access to career services during the pandemic, this work is important because it gives young people a voice and opportunity for their first-hand experiences to inform developments in policy and practice.

Similarly, underpinned by a shared belief that it is beholden on leaders, teachers and managers to listen to the voices of minoritized colleagues, students and clients, **Gill Frigerio, Lassie Chen, Marni McArthur and Nishi Mehta** write about their collaborative research project. This article explores the experiences of UKME students on one institution's career development courses and at work, in relation to their race and culture, and outlines the challenges that relate to curriculum and pedagogic practices in professional development programmes.

Nomita Nair draws on the developing concept of 'career crafting' to explore the emergence of new gig working routes in the legal industry. Her work offers a discussion framework for career professionals to help clients reconcile tensions between traditional career paths and their personal sense of self. Highly relevant to flexible ways of work emerging post-COVID-19 is her analysis of research participants de-constructing their traditional mindset and re-constructing attitudes towards a different way of working and the legitimacy of their own roles in a broader social context.

Michelle Stewart, Editor

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I'm old enough and I'm young enough: Semi-retirement and career

Cordelia Wise

This article explores the nature of retirement in a career context by examining the experiences of people aged over 55 who define themselves as choosing to be 'semi-retired'. It provides new insight into a life stage phase and the importance of choice, agency and divided emotions in defining career.

Introduction

Retirement is a relatively new concept in human history. In the UK, as recently as 1951, 31% of people were still working at age 65 (Sargent et al., 2013). Longer life spans have meant that our relationship with retirement is changing (Gratton & Scott, 2016) and at the same time, the capacity for the state to support long retirements is in question, meaning that the age at which you can draw a state pension is on the rise (Hesketh et al., 2011). There has been a doubling of employment in this age group, particularly in part time work (Vickerstaff et al., 2015) which may represent a cultural shift towards post-retirement working (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). It may be that having a retirement at all has been but a short-lived phase in the history of more affluent societies (Sargent et al., 2013).

There is a proliferation of new terminology to describe post-retirement employment: 'encore career' (Luke et al., 2016), 'bridge employment' (Mazumdar et al., 2021), 'silver work' (Maxin & Deller, 2010), 'late career' (Fasbender et al., 2019), 'un-retiring' (Plant et al., 2018), 'active aging' (Simova, 2010), and 'positive aging' (Newman, 2011). There are also few studies connecting this new phenomenon to career theory (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2019) and a lack of qualitative studies in particular (Mazumdar et al., 2021). Research in this area is timely in order to understand the changing needs of this age cohort and the nature of retirement in a career context.

My background in the voluntary sector and in careers work led to an interest in the experience of the many newly retired volunteers I have encountered over the years. Their thinking as they entered this new phase seemed to me to be very much career decision-making. This research examines the experience of people over 55 and not in full time paid employment by choice who would define themselves as choosing to be 'semi-retired', a term chosen because it is colloquially recognisable. The research questions asked whether they saw semi-retirement as a life stage and about their experiences of this phase.

Literature review

The careers literature has tended to be focussed on early careers decision-making and mid-career transitions (Fasbender et al.,3wew 2019). Little was written about retirement until recently, with an assumption that retirement represented the end of career (Duberley et al. 2014). An exception was the developmental approach, which discussed retirement as 'decline' (Wang & Wanberg, 2017).

The last ten years, however, has seen increased interest in issues around retirement in response to changing retirement ages and late career employment (Zacher et al., 2019, Goodman & Anderson, 2012). We are left with a situation where there is no dominant theory of retirement (Beehr, 2014) and changes in life-expectancy and repeated failures to foresee changes to the retirement landscape cannot be ignored (Henkens et al., 2018).

Ideas of the 'third age' recognised a new stage influenced by the Baby Boomers (Gilleard & Higgs, 2007), with ideas such as bridge employment (Lytle et al., 2015) and 'unretiring' emerging in the literature (Maestas, 2010), though they remain underexamined (Beehr, 2014). The sustainable career approach (Newman, 2011) takes into account life stage and working into later life but also allows for careers to be renewable, flexible and integrative in a way reminiscent of the 're-creation periods' in a longer career (Gratton & Scott, 2016).

Super (1980) was one of the first career theorists to take retirement into consideration in his life stage approach, though it has been criticised for having been based on studies of male, white collar populations (Nagy et al., 2019). Super later revised his thinking and introduced the term 'disengagement' to replace 'decline' late in life (Super et al., 1996). This has been developed by more recent writers, rebranding 'disengagement' as 're-engagement' when looking at retirees returning to work for example (Luke et al., 2016).

There is a call for much more research into the transition to retirement (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2019) and for a qualitative approach to looking at post-retirement employment (Mazumdar et al. 2021). Many studies on retirement have not adjusted to changes in policy, technology and the economy (Phillipson, 2019), nor to the changing behaviour of the Baby Boomer generation (Kojola & Moen, 2016). Questions have also been raised about the idea of encore careers and positive ageing (Simpson et al., 2012) and the 'duty to age well' (Rudman, 2006, p.196) as being neoliberal in their approach.

Methodology

The 13 participants were selected via four network contacts and snowball sampling. It was important that they were semi-retired by choice as the research focus was on the participants' choices, rather than on people who had been forced to retire through redundancy or ill health, for example. Thematic analysis, as more of a method than methodology, (Braun & Clarke, 2021) was chosen as the approach for analysis as it could adapt to the themes identified by taking a semi-inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The semi structured interviews were transcribed and participants were referred to by transcript number in the research (T1:T13) deliberately, partly to allow a 'third person' perspective and attention to the data rather than the people involved (Watts, 2014).

Following familiarisation with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), initial codes were applied to themes and these were checked against transcripts using a frequency table. This was useful in refining themes and moving from a descriptive to an interpretive approach (Watts, 2014). While Braun and Clarke (2021) actively discourage this practice, it seemed important to counter check that themes did in fact appear across the majority of transcripts and reflected participants' experience rather than the researcher's interests and predilections as much as possible (Morrow, 2005; Watts, 2014).

Findings

Five themes were identified following analysis.

Age and stage

Participants overwhelmingly stated that age and stage of life were an important consideration in terms of feelings around semi-retirement, frequently using the terms 'age' and 'stage' themselves. There was a sense of being between stages, as T6 said about her decision to turn down the offer of a full-time job in favour of continued semi-retirement, 'I'm gonna crack on. I'm young enough and old enough'.

Also, there were sub themes around life and death as well as being positive regarding semi-retirement, viewing it as a 'bonus' period in their lives. 'Yes, I think it comes a time when your…either your health…or your brain…just can't hack it anymore. I'm not there yet' (T11).

Choice/agency

While the criteria for selection for this group did involve being 'semi-retired by choice', the degree to which exercising that choice came up in interviews was striking. 'I think you get to a stage in life where it's kind of like I should be able to please myself a little bit now, if you're lucky enough to be in a position to be able to do that' (T7).

The ability to choose not to do things was almost as important, resulting in a sub-theme of 'What I don't want to do'. The choice about whether to work and how much was important as was the ability to walk away from work and other activities which no longer suited them.

Work which can be taken or left

Participants talked about the kind of work they took part in as something small and disposable, which they would take up if it came along but didn't necessarily want to seek out: 'just odds and ends' (T1), 'a bit of consultancy' (T2), 'foot-soldier type work' (T3), 'bits and pieces' (T6, T9), 'that little admin job' (T7), 'a small job' (T8). Equally important was that the work is not actively sought but comes along, rather than being part of a plan or career direction: 'Yeah, I mean, I think I'll probably wait for something to wander in my path, rather than go and actively chase it - I think is quite a distinction' (T6).

The question of career

Participants' answers revealed a level of discomfort with the idea of what a career was, whether they had had one and whether this had any bearing on their current situation. What was noticeable was that a career was seen as involving moving in a forward and upwards direction and importantly, was seen as distinct from semi-retirement:

> But I'm not I'm doing other things, but it's not my career. It's - I don't quite know how you describe it. But I think the thing with a career is that you, you generally have a path and, and ah, and ah… you have ambitions, you have plans, you know… It's not a - there's not a plan. There's not a map.
>
> (T3.)

Divided emotions

The final theme which came up comprised a mix of positive and negative emotions around semi-retirement. The majority of people described their enjoyment of this phase of their life; many were excited about the future and described themselves as blessed, fortunate, or content. On the negative side, guilt, depression and boredom were a concern:

> I don't know if other people will say that to you but I feel I'm not earning my crust . Um, doing my bit…I feel a sense of guilt and I also feel like my mother would be disappointed.
>
> (T6.)

Discussion, limitations and implications for practice

Most participants said they would not use the word retirement to describe what they did and neither did they necessarily see it as part of a move to being fully retired. Despite the fact that the interviewees met some aspects of the description of 'bridge employees', very few were moving to a new field or employer as bridge employees are defined (Mazumdar et al., 2021). The idea of 'partial retirement' (Maestas, 2010) would have been recognisable to the participants. While they saw themselves as in a stage of life, it is questionable whether they would have seen themselves as 'disengaging' (Super et al., 1996) where attention moves from work to retirement planning and separation from their occupation. In fact, almost all participants were engaged in work which was an extension of their occupation, albeit in a part time format.

Exercising choice was very important to participants, a preference which is echoed in the literature. The statement 'the third age is a field constituted by agency' (Gilleard & Higgs, 2005, p.153) seems representative of participants' experience. Research into Baby Boomers, where this cohort fits, does suggest that working flexibly in less demanding roles is perhaps a generational attitude (Kojola & Moen, 2016), corroborated by Schlosser et al. (2012) who recognise this as a uniquely privileged cohort. Like Maxin and Dellar's (2010) 'silver workers', the desire for flexible hours and self-determination stood out. The need to be agents in decisions about activity also echoes some of the Protean career ideas in the sustainable career literature (Nagy et al., 2019).

The preoccupation with work which could be taken up or left is not much mentioned in the retirement or career literature. One qualitative study of post-retirement work does echo this research, describing participants as feeling "released from the cage and free to wander'. They could openly express their

ideas, choose to take or not take on an assignment.' (Cunningham et al. 2015, p.193-4) While there were echoes of chaos theory (Peake & McDowall, 2012) 'planned happenstance' (Mitchell et al., 1999) and 'serendipity' (Williams et al., 1998), the best fit was with 'positive uncertainty' (Gelatt, 1989). In line with this idea, participants accepted that circumstances might change, and were open to new possibility and re-evaluating goals as they went along. As Fasbender et al. (2019) noted, older people's idea of late career turns career theory, largely based on research with younger people, on its head.

The willingness of participants to share their polarised emotions was also striking. Emotions are not always well recognised in the career field – either in practitioners or clients (Kidd, 1998, Hartung, 2011). Understanding emotions and their role in career may be particularly helpful in understanding career transitions (Kidd, 2004), which would explain emotions coming to the fore in this research.

The lack of variety in gender and ethnicity within the sample, who were mainly white women, was a limitation of this study. The fact that participants had chosen semi-retirement also begs a comparison to those who had not, though this was beyond the capacity of this research. There is also a tendency to ignore the facts of financial necessity and lack of choice in the individualisation of retirement which certainly merits further study (Vickerstaff & Cox, 2005).

How then can the career practitioner offer support to people who are over 55? This cohort has poor access to career support (Clayton, 2010) despite the fact that there have been calls for attention to be paid to the training of older workers and their extended career options (Phillipson, 2019). Career practitioners will need an understanding of retirement as a complex, often iterative process – as 'multiple choice' rather than a simple dichotomy (Beehr, 2014, p.1093).

Cunningham et al. (2015) suggest that competencies around sustaining motivation, adapting successfully to life span issues and relating to others are those that will help with self-direction through semi-retirement and retirement. It may also be that taking a proactive approach to job crafting would help match the needs of those in the semi-retired age group (Kooij, 2015).

While there is a call for career practitioners to 'help clients navigate retirement as a new phase of vocational development as opposed to the end of their work lives' (Lytle et al., 2015, p.179), this study suggests that framing it in those terms might not resonate with this generation. Instead, one thinks of the adage attributed to Pasteur 'chance favours the prepared mind' (Mitchell et al. 1999, p.121).

While this study reveals a match to thinking about career and retirement in terms of age and stage being an important theme to participants, the almost casual attitude to paid work has been mentioned only glancingly in the literature and may merit further study, as does the diffidence towards career itself and the mixed emotions surrounding this for this generation in their semi-retirement, alongside attitude to work and feelings about career. (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2019).

Conclusion

This study started with the premise that decisions about retirement are career decisions. While this research has shown that people who are semi-retired see themselves in terms of their stage in life and that choice and agency is of great importance them, they also do not see decisions about how they spend their time as career decisions. Sullivan and Al Ariss (2019) call for more research on the dynamic nature of employment post-retirement – something which changes and is re-evaluated over time. The qualitative research undertaken here suggests that there is something about the attitude to post-retirement work of the baby boomer generation, which is worthy of further investigation, and poses interesting questions about the role of the career professional in supporting this.

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Is careers work white? A collaborative research project with minority ethnic students of career development practice

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The diversity of the career development profession plays a critical part in the sector's ability to challenge inequality. At the same time, the awarding gap between the proportions of white students and UK minority ethnic students being awarded a higher degree classification in UK universities (where many career development practitioners train) is well documented. This article reports on a study devised to explore the experiences of UKME students on one institution's career development courses and at work, in relation to their race and culture. It outlines the challenges and findings of the study that relate to the curriculum for trainee career development professionals, as well as pedagogic practices in professional development programmes. The article concludes with considerations for further decolonial practices for career development work.

Introduction

Career development professionals focus on equality of outcome for all and support clients who experience structural disadvantages in their working lives. Whilst such disadvantages are complex and multifaceted, relating to characteristics reflected in current UK legislation and beyond, race and ethnicity are a particular key contemporary concern. Race as a powerful and enduring social construct is under scrutiny as we consider whether the diversity of our profession sees us fit to work with all clients in varied multicultural contexts. Whilst we do not have an accurate picture of the demographics of our profession, research published in 2017 reported on a sample in which 94% were white (Neary et al., 2017). At the same time, practitioners who have been racially minoritized through social processes of power and domination, speak about the way their ethnicity is relevant to their professional practice (Oputa, 2021; Ranavaya, 2022).

Growing awareness of racial injustice in the education sector has led to analysis of outcomes by ethnicity and reveals, amongst other indicators, serious awarding gaps in higher education (NUS/UUK, 2019; Sotiropolou, 2021).

As universities seek to respond to these gaps, staff are encouraged to pay attention to their own pedagogic practices. For staff working on professional career development programmes, these issues intersect for our minoritized students. These students study in a context where awarding gaps prevail as well as practising in predominantly white spaces and working with diverse clients. This article focuses on one small scale study which began to map out these issues and explore their implications in one particular institutional context.

A note on language

Challenges of speaking and writing on issues of race and racism emerge immediately, presenting difficulties of language. Terms which categorises individuals who are not white and defines them by otherness to a white hegemonic majority, ignore differences between ethnic and cultural groups. Clarity, awareness and consensus has evolved considerably over recent years and particularly during the timelines for this project, although the term BAME as an abbreviation for 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' people was the term many participants in research used themselves. However, as

a result of the learning emerging from this project, we endeavour to be more specific and speak appropriately about the range of experiences under discussion. Potential terms that are less problematic would be 'Global Majority Heritages' (GMH), a term that refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and or have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities'; or 'UK Minority Ethnic' (UKME) which covers all ethnic groups except White British. Even then, care needs to be taken to represent distinctions between citizenship and residence and the experiences of students with home or international fee status.

Shaping a research project

This project was designed and funding secured by the University of Warwick Centre for Lifelong Learning, where a number of career development and coaching programmes are run, in partnership with Warwick Medical School and the Centre for Teacher Education. The project design was based on deploying a shared methodology across all three departmental strands combining data analysis, literature review and semi-structured interviews (group and one-to-one) with the aim of informing a consultative round table event. Project plans were derailed in March 2020 by the unfolding Covid-19 pandemic, causing the round table event to be cancelled. This article reports on particular aspects of the career development programmes strand.

The majority of students on the career development courses covered by this strand are part-time and combine their blended learning with some form of professional practice. As such, the experiences and issues for our students on programmes intersect considerably with their experiences of their professional practice and their own career development in the workplace. Whilst these experiences at work will vary considerably according to sector, employer and location, there is a lack of overall data about diversity and progression to draw on. The staff team currently lacks diversity, something that it is hoped to address through upcoming recruitment.

Mindful of the power dynamics inherent to white staff researching students and race, the first stage of the project was to recruit a team of student researchers from UKME backgrounds to work on the project. Approval for fieldwork was secured from the appropriate university research ethics committee. A steering group was also established, chaired by the University's Director of Social Inclusion, ensuring the project plugged into ongoing workstreams on the themes of racial equality. Student researchers across all strands were paid an hourly rate in common use across the institution for projects involving students in co-creation.

Methodologically, the research is framed as practitioner enquiry, following an exploratory and participatory approach consistent with the transformative and generative nature of action research (McNiff, 2013). We stepped into previously unresearched territory unsure what we would learn. We sought not to prove a particular hypothesis or generate findings that could be viewed as fixed across the sector: the numbers of students are too small, categories of ethnicity too troubling and datasets too partial to draw definitive conclusions. Rather we focus on insights found and themes that emerged as well as what we have all learned through the process. To foreground the experiences of students who participated in the study, we devote most space here to the interviews, following a brief consideration of literature and data.

Literature review

A literature review was conducted by one of the student researchers during May 2020 from which some useful literature was identified and can be clustered as follows, with exemplars shown in brackets:

- Anti-racism, including critical race theory and its relevance to educational contexts (e.g. Kishimoto, 2018; Warmington, 2020)
- Race in higher education for students and staff, as a stream of access and equality work (e.g. Dale-Rivas, 2019)
- Attainment and experience gaps in higher education in general (e.g. Stevenson, 2012)
- UKME students experiences in higher education (e.g. Mahony & Weiner, 2019)

Within the scope of the study, literature on race and careers was limited (e.g. Hooley et al., 2019) with

few based on research in the UK context. None was identified that specifically addressed the training of UKME career professionals in a UK context; Ranavaya's significant study (2022) being published beyond the project timeframes. Some career theories consider ethnicity as a relevant influence and equity and social justice in general is a clear theme (e.g. Hooley et al., 2021). Labour market studies also explore the influence of ethnicity on individual's working lives and chart further gaps such as in graduate outcomes and employment rates; as well as significant horizontal and vertical segregation. Lessons for working with ethnically diverse clients can also be gleaned from literature looking at any group traditionally marginalised within labour markets and support services (e.g. Pope, 2011). However, as the study took place prior to the publication of a small scale study on the experiences of female UKME practitioners by Ranavaya (2022), no literature was found specifically looking at the UKME practitioner. Indeed, in some of the multicultural counselling literature, the whiteness of the practitioner seems to be a normative assumption.

Student Award Data

An analysis of award data was conducted for the programmes managed by the curriculum area. With small numbers, no tests for statistical significance were possible but analysis is consistent with other data, for wider consideration of the issues present for black, Asian and diverse heritage students on our programme and possible responses.

Sector wide awarding gap data has focused on degree classification from undergraduate programmes, focusing on proportions awarded a 'good' degree (typically defined as first class or upper second class) (UUK/NUS, 2019). In contrast, to explore the experiences of UKME students on one institution's career development courses, a bespoke strategy for data analysis was generated to provide the most useful insights given the flexible and distinctive nature of these programmes. For example, for our postgraduate programmes, we looked at awards for core modules which all students would complete rather than exit awards at PGCert/PGDip/MA level, as this gave us larger numbers to consider. However, this tailored approach makes detailed comparison with other programmes difficult.

An initial analysis concluded that participation rates by UKME students were variable across the programmes, although consistently lower than the UK population. This seems the best level of comparison as although the UK population data hides large geographical variations, course recruitment does tend to be national rather than local. Initial analysis revealed that there was an awarding gap for UKME students. This was consistent with the University sector as a whole (Sotiropolou, 2021; Wong et al., 2021). As Advance HE report in their detailed analysis:

> 'The white-Black, Asian and minority ethnic awarding gap still exists, calculated at 9.9 percentage points for the academic year 2019/20. Most concerningly the gap remained significantly unexplained even after accounting for a series of individual, course-specific and institutional characteristics.'
>
> (Sotiropolou, 2021)

As level 7 programmes, we focused on achievement of Distinction and Merit grades for UKME and for white students, looking at both course and module data. Overall, we can conclude that awarding gaps persist, despite staff commitment to equality and robust assessment and moderation mechanisms in place. This is an important consideration for staff working at programme level in higher education where it can be easy to feel sensitive to implications that awarding gaps result exclusively from one's own practice. In fact, such inequalities are endemic and systemic. Students join HE with different prior experiences and so gaps persist despite individual commitments to anti-racist practice at programme level.

Breaking down the UKME category and looking at the data for particular ethnic backgrounds tells a story consistent with the wider HE sector: that the gap is greatest for black students. For example, a data breakdown for core modules shows that Asian students' awards are closer to those for white students.

The data shows a mixed picture of awards ratings for different ethnic groups, with small numbers in some categories making it even harder to draw conclusions. For staff committed to fair and transparent marking

with robust systems of anonymity and moderation, it reminds us that staff and students are operating within the same higher education systems and institutional contexts which give rise to troubling gaps at undergraduate level, and there is value in researching the particular experiences of UKME students on specific programmes to consider how anti-racist strategies could be further developed. Indeed it is also worth nesting these considerations within wider studies of social inclusion which look at intersections of gender, class, ethnicity and other factors which impact on equality of outcome.

Student feedback

The interviews were conducted by the three student researchers with no course staff present. During June and July 2020, participants were invited and online meetings arranged but course staff had no access to participant information or data. Interviews with students and alumni of the programmes who identified as from global majority heritages involved 10 participants in total. These broke down further as:

1 man and 9 women,

7 current students and 3 graduates,

3 Black African, 3 British Asian, 3 South East Asian students and 1 mixed race student.

Based on their own experiences and the literature reviewed, the student researchers across all strands had agreed a series of statements to be used as prompts for discussion, as follows:

- Prior to attending the first attendance component of my course, I was worried about my ethnic background being an issue
- Prior to attending the first attendance component of my course I wondered if I might be the only non-white participant
- I felt the learning materials contain a diverse range of authors and sources
- I felt the experiences of BAME learners were adequately explored in the class discussion
- I did not feel able or willing to reference my race or ethnicity as a personal perspective in my assessments
- I feel my ethnic background has been a barrier within my continuing professional development as a student
- I feel my ethnic background has been a barrier within my continuing professional development within the context of my professional practice
- I see the campus environment as multicultural
- I feel my experience differed from that of the white participants on my course
- I felt able to give feedback on my course
- I feel my ethnic background affects the scope I have to integrate my learning from the course into my practice

The student researchers asked participants to consider their respective to responses to these statements, if they were to place themselves as 'I' in the sentence. Reasons for responses were drawn out and discussed to understand why participants answered as they did and thus differences of perspective and personal insights were captured.

Following the interviews, student researchers produced anonymised transcripts which were then shared with the staff member leading the Career Development Programme strand in an online space. In keeping with the transformative and generative nature of action research (McNiff, 2013) all researchers coded transcripts separately and then met online to compare codes, amending analysing and agreeing a series of themes emerging from the data.

Findings and Discussion

From the analysis the emerging themes were:

- Distinct and personal views and attitudes to issues of race and culture as they intersect with other identities and shape course orientation
- A positive, asset based approach to race and culture as learners and as practitioners
- Perspectives on the experience of being a minority in the classroom and the workplace
- Reflections on the white dominance of career development work as reflected in curriculum

Distinct and personal views and attitudes to issues of race and culture as they intersect with other identities and shape course orientation

Whilst all the students shared an identity covered by the umbrella term 'BAME', the unique experience and perspective of each was evident. As well as the diverse ethnic backgrounds they represented, they also spoke of how characteristics such as gender, age, sexual orientation, class, culture or nationality intersect with their ethnic background. Differences of perspective were revealed in terms of intra-personal factors: different personal characteristics, values and levels of experience and comfort with advocacy on race issues emerged during the discussions and were acknowledged by participants.

The complexity of race, culture and nationality was particularly expressed in the group interview where students compared their own cultural backgrounds, especially when those with personal experiences of migration to the UK compared themselves with third or more generation UKME students.

> 'Sometimes there is a bit of confusion between nationalities and ethnicity. Because for me, I'm (nationality), but yet I'm (ethnicity), you know, in relation to, you know, the UK. It's not just simply about white or non-white. It's so much more complicated than that.'

The significance and impact of ethnicity and culture on participants approach to study were noted. For example, being from an ethnic minority was cited as a motivator for entering careers work and gaining a qualification:

> 'For some BAME individuals this is more than just getting a qualification. For me this was really a personal journey I wanted to learn more about because I wanted to help black people progress in their careers…it's just I guess about acknowledging that as a BAME student we are going into this course with a lot more on our minds than just professional development.'

Ethnicity and culture were also cited as providing a distinct perspective on course content in relation to some key concepts. This points towards a collective rather than individualised perspective on professional development, that progressing in careers work as a UKME practitioner has knock-on impacts on others who may be encouraged or attracted to careers work as a result.

A positive, asset-based approach to race and culture

A further theme emerging was examples of participants taking a positive, asset-based approach to race, framing their ethnicity and cultural background as advantages, rather than a focus on the barriers and deficits that can bedevil careers provision. This was referenced in terms of the perspective it gives on practice and rapport with clients from similar backgrounds as well as carving a distinctive niche in practice:

> 'I think my ethnic background has given me a different perspective. And that actually brought to light a lot of my learning as a student, and of course, continuing as a professional in the careers community.'

Participants spoke extensively about the impact on their client work of their ethnicity and how this contributes positively to client engagement from similar ethnic groups as well as rapport and empathy in one-to-one career coaching practice.

Employers were seen to have an opportunity to better engage diverse service users if they recruit diverse staff. For one student, this positive leverage was a new idea, underlining the benefits of the group discussion and the ongoing sense-making underway:

> '[I] could use it as an advantage for us, but I've never thought of doing that in the past. I've always thought of hiding, you know, or trying to fit in. So maybe that's a problem for me that I need to explore.'

Experiences of being a minority in the classroom and the workplace

Most of the students had thought about the racial diversity they might find on the course in advance of their enrolment and described how positive it was to find they were not the only ethnic minority student in the room. This extended to finding someone of the same ethnicity:

> 'So when I met xxx, I was just like, oh my god, you know, Chinese, and Asian. I was, I was so happy.'

Expectations for students who were already in practice were informed by a lack of diversity in those contents. A black male participant noted that his place of work was predominantly white middle-class women.

The homogeneity of the course team was not explicitly raised, but the implications of this were alluded to, seen as inevitably leading to differing experiences and perspectives that may result in a lack of empathy with cultural difference:

> 'I felt like I always had stuff on that was beyond work beyond my own personal life, that kind of people would never understand really…with an Indian family, our extended family is so large, so many things are like people passing away… Because they don't experience that level of family commitment sometimes and the pressures that brings…I didn't really get to discuss a lot of the things that might be relevant to an Asian person that is studying.'

Another student referenced family, financial and caring commitments that might be more common for UKME students as making time for study (alongside full-time work) a challenge. It was not clear whether this dissonance is noticed in relation to individual interactions or institutional policies and procedures. It also reveals the potential for cultural and class-based assumptions to be made on both sides.

Similar dynamics were at play in the workplace. A number of students commented that even though their professional development had been supported through the course, they felt there were barriers to career development, exemplified by the lack of diversity in management positions. Students were aware that in applying for jobs they were often entering predominantly white spaces:

> 'When I applied to XXX, I was very conscious that in the team photo there was not a single person of colour featured that I saw when I was doing my research.'

This was particularly noticed for more senior positions and related to their own potential for career development:

> 'Looking at my progress within careers advice…I don't see people who are black or Asian, mixed or any other variations of non-White, who are in managerial positions.'

Where diversity is visible at senior levels, its positive impact is noted. One participant who does now have a minority ethnic woman manager commented on how inspiring she found this.

Reflections on the white dominance of career development work as reflected in curriculum

Participants had nuanced and considered views about the sense and scale of the problem that resulted from the white, western, middle class dominance of the career development field. As one wondered aloud, 'How do you, you know, teach careers work from a perspective that is not mostly white?' Frustration was expressed with the wider field of study for not addressing race and racism explicitly, making it challenging for students to introduce that perspective.

Two responses to this dominance emerged. One is to seek out other perspectives, diversify reading lists and change the canon, as represented by this comment:

> 'I think we should start thinking about how to incorporate studies from those who are non-whites, not just white, outside the scope of the UK and America because that's where we're all predominantly based.'

The other response proposed is to explicitly critique the canonical work from white authors from an anti-racist perspective. Participants went on to acknowledge that as students the intellectual process of taking generic theories and using them to consider their own racialised context was appropriate to the postgraduate level of study and the reflective practice associated with a career development qualification.

Some students wished there had been more explicit coverage of issues of race in the course materials. The group interview discussed whether this should be a specific module, but in the end advocated for a section on race and culture in each core module. Others felt that the course materials were wide enough for a student to explore a particular dimension from the

point of view of race if they chose to, and that this freedom was consistent with level 7 study.

Beyond the reading of selected published work, students engage with particular resources developed by the course team. Some reported that they did not feel the learning materials always represented the diversity of the student population. Where case studies, speakers and resources have been developed which reflect diversity it was noted and welcomed. However, students felt there was scope for more. This is something course staff have been endeavouring to address over recent years and improvements are already in place.

Moving to the classroom experience and discussion of issues of race and culture, students were very positive about their ability to raise racial diversity issues in workshops, tutorials and assessments and found staff supportive. It was noted that they were encouraged in tutorials to reflect on their own situation and identity. The facilitative approach to workshops was valued as creating an appropriate and supportive environment and a place that race could be raised. Examples were offered where participants had offered their own experiences and were met with empathetic response from tutors who welcomed the contribution and used it to enrich teaching. However, the preference was that issues of race and potential racism would be raised by staff, so students themselves did not need to be the initiators of the discussion.

However, this leaves the challenge of maintaining a balance between inviting students to share their lived experience consensually as opposed to requiring a level of disclosure that an individual UKME student may find uncomfortable.

> 'Sometimes I might want to have conversations that are about culture or about other things and…they don't flow naturally when you're around white participants.'

The challenge for staff is whether this 'making space' approach is sufficient. If teaching staff rely on diverse heritage students to raise issues of race and culture when offered the opportunity, we are student-led but leaving responsibility for this with those already minoritized. However, if staff raise it themselves, there is a risk that a burden of representation is placed on minoritized students who may not wish to discuss their own experiences or have them seen as generalisable in any way.

On balance, participants wanted staff to explicitly create the space, and the research concludes that relying on UKME students to raise issues of race reflects a more passive position, associated with non-racism rather than anti-racism (Kishimoto, 2018). It passes responsibility to UKME students, further emphasizing their difference and normalizing whiteness (Eddo-Lodge, 2017).

Conclusions

The place of race in course design and delivery and thus in students' experiences has implication not just for UKME students. It also impacts all students, including non-UKME, in their professional development and practice (Dale-Rivas, 2019). This in turn affects all students' abilities to work against structural racism in the labour market, to consider the impact of their own ethnicity on their practice and its relevance when working with clients of differing ethnic backgrounds (Oputa, 2021). It is key to both critical reflective practice and an anti-racist, emancipatory understanding of careers work (Hooley et al; 2019).

This research is a small step in a much-needed process for the sector at large: to consider the question posed earlier by one participant: 'How do you teach careers work from a perspective that is not mostly white?' We believe it is beholden on leaders, teachers and managers to initiate this discussion, listening to our minoritized colleagues, students and clients without delegating responsibility to them (Seckinelgin, 2022). Having considered these findings, the wider course team have continued diversification of teaching resources and engage in ongoing discussion of the decolonising processes appropriate to the development of an anti-racist pedagogy of career development. This research also highlights the need for greater anti-racist action across the professional space as a whole, for example with partner and professional organisations, and to collaborate with them to progress this agenda. This should focus both on career progression for UKME practitioners and anti-racist approaches to career development and coaching work by all practitioners.

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How can we do this? An investigation of power constraints and other barriers to career development practitioners' innovation in higher education

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This article investigates the factors influencing career development practitioners' decisions in relation to innovation in a Higher Education context. Drawing on a dissertation research project, it presents an early substantive grounded theory of practitioners 'Constructing Empowerment' to overcome power constraints and other barriers to innovation. The article provides an argument that the sector is at a 'critical juncture' in which radical ideas can rapidly be implemented, and that a decision-making model to discern good, from bad or ambiguous ideas may be beneficial for maintaining quality standards and healthy professional boundaries.

Introduction

Career development in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has traditionally been supported by one-to-one career guidance interventions (Thomsen, 2009; Yates & Hirsh, 2022). As the Career Development Institute (CDI) celebrates its first centenary in 2022 and continues to professionalise the sector (Moore, 2021), this service model has been a constant and a pillar of training for Career Development Practitioners (CDPs). A model which is being scrutinised today, as universities are competing through the lenses of quality (Musselin, 2018), and customers and citizens (Sultana, 2011), with careers services targeting efficiencies to increase engagement (AGCAS, 2022) and scalability for better graduate outcomes.

A 'critical juncture' describes times of rapid change and innovation (Green, 2017). Typically, institutions have long periods of relative stability with brief phases of radical change (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007). It could be said that career development in higher education is at a critical juncture with changes underpinning policies (Sultana, 2011) and emerging from a global pandemic (Hooley, 2022). Additionally, the 'lifelong' career service offer is a relatively new agenda that is stretching limited resources further (Grey, 2022). CDP teams with average careers staff to student ratios of 1:995 (AGCAS, 2021) are becoming further stretched by serving larger client numbers for longer and improving outcomes within existing resources.

As HEI careers services seek to address this changing context, some services are revisiting older ideas of one-to-many interventions and peer support (Moore, 2022) to achieve scale and an assumed cost reduction compared to one-to-one guidance (Meldrum, 2017). Yet the literature on group guidance says these innovations have not translated into practice. They refer to 'resistance and scepticism' among practitioners for guidance outside of the one-to-one model (Meldrum, 2019); practitioner 'risk and anxiety' with reflexive learning (Reid & West, 2016); and how a lack of literature on group work may indicate practitioner reluctance (Westergaard, 2013). The UK career development practitioner voice is missing from the debate.

This practitioner research aimed to investigate decision-making by CDPs in relation to innovation at a Cathedrals Group University. These were church founded universities, forming the only UK higher

education group based on ethical principles informed by faith-based values (Stone et al., 2018). The research considered which factors impact CDPs decision-making around innovation in this careers service and how the practitioner data compared to opinions of CDP resistance to group guidance expressed in literature. This study defined group guidance based on Carl Rogers (1970) approach where groups of 6-12 participants met intensively and took directional responsibility for their time together.

Literature review

Innovation can be unambiguously good, unambiguously bad, or ambiguous (Mulgan, 2016), so what kind of theoretical insight and practice evidence do CDPs need to distinguish them? The research and evidence base for guidance practice draws from a wide range of contexts (Hooley, 2014b), and may not always be easily transferrable to different contexts (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008). According to Kettunen (2021) studies of innovation within the sector are rare. Burke & Christie (2008) argue that some CDPs lean more to the psychological theories which have historically informed the sector and may be less aware of power structures and the sociological theories. They noted (ibid p. 6) that 'A theory that can be sensitive to psychological, sociological and political contexts could have a significant practical application'.

Many of the studies on group guidance have been within international contexts outside of HE. They largely draw on the 'career constructivism' of Savickas (2012) such as in a study by Maree (2019) that measured changes in a national career adaptability score following an intervention. Other studies such as by Westergaard (2013), build on coaching models or integrate coaching with counselling models (Meldrum, 2019). There is therefore inconsistent language and definition for such processes which adds to the difficulty of identifying relevant literature.

Group guidance is rarely discussed as an innovation to practice (Thomsen, 2009), and more often as a cost efficiency, overlooking the benefit that group guidance can develop forms of social action to solve collective challenges (Hooley, 2014a). Geboers et al. (2014) link active participation in social action with committed citizenship, thus, indicating that career guidance in groups has potential to develop active citizenship; a goal of many universities today. Liu & Yu (2019) showed that career adaptability leads to better citizenship outcomes and that this relationship is mediated by the ability to accept organisational values and goals (affective commitment) and the psychological resourcefulness to the stress experienced in working life (emotional exhaustion). This is particularly relevant in a post pandemic environment where stressors may be higher and increase emotional exhaustion, reducing career adaptability.

Group guidance is different from group work, in that it allows participants to use their agency to take directional responsibility for the purpose and actions within the group sessions, in alignment with Rogers (1970) work on 'group encounters'. Although the work of Rogers person-centred model (1961) has hugely influenced the career development sector, little discussion is given in literature to his later work on group encounters which were 'one of the two primary foci of [his] work - the other being the need for greater freedom in our educational institutions' (Rogers, 1970). Nor do studies refer to how Egan wrote of his early struggles with 'group experiences, discussions on theory and a good deal of abortive research' before writing his guide (Egan, 1970, p. 9).

Meta-analysis on guidance innovations by Drobnic (2019) discussed how a career in the whole life course renders former approaches insufficient. Phenomenographic practitioner conceptions of career development (Kettunen, 2021) categorised innovation as initiation of services, demographic targeting, sector professionalisation, and drawing from synergies across sectors. Yates & Hirsh (2022) examine practical approaches and challenges to one-to-one career guidance. This is relevant as it finds three aspects important: the relationship; the conversation structure; and the techniques used. It found that a key challenge for practitioners was not wanting to disappoint their clients, and it could potentially explain resistance to group guidance as innovative work could potentially disappoint clients.

Hasanefendic et al. (2017) examined the characteristics of academics who instigated transformation within HEIs, citing the importance of: motivation to change

institutionalised practices; interest in change; experience in the field; multi embeddedness; authority to act; and the strategic use of social networks. It highlights that these transformative academics did not innovate alone. It took a strong network of people, experience, personal interest and authority to act. Guest and King (2004) found that HR managers lacked the power to solve many of the changes they were facing in approaching the early 80's. Both studies point to the concept of power being necessary to enable innovation.

The researcher developed a definition that 'innovation is the creative process of putting ideas into action' based on Taylor's (2017) table of definitions. Innovation is a form of change. Change does not occur, argued Veneklasen & Miller (2002), unless strategies address power in the public, private, and intimate realms.

The work of CDPs has long been linked with advocating for social justice (Hooley & Sultana, 2016). Veneklasen & Miller (2002) state that such advocacy work often uses alternative sources of power to navigate and change the dynamics of power over time. Power can be visible, hidden or invisible which makes it challenging to confront. They discussed the phrase 'power over' as being linked to control, and the villainous kind of power so many think of when the word power is spoken. They suggested that 'power to' is the power to shape our world and that 'power with' is about collaborating around common causes.

In organisational innovation the same questions occur as in the career development sector, over whether people are economically or socially motivated. Innovation and policy label these concepts as 'public management' and 'democratic' perspectives in policy and leadership (Sultana, 2011). The former being individualistic and economically competitive in nature, the latter being community based and social in nature. Sultana (2011) warns that new public management policies are reframing state failures to manage the labour market as a problem inherent in the individual; particularly with the message that poor job outcomes are due to an individual lack of study; ability to market themselves, be entrepreneurial or committed to lifelong learning; rather than because of issues with labour market opportunities.

Career development interventions that enable active participation in social action could help address such issues (Hooley, 2014a). Solutions based on the individual as a productive element of society can perpetuate structural biases and conditional worth (Feltham and Dryden, 1993), rather than the unconditional positive regard of Rogers' (1961) person-centred counselling. This creates a culture where a person is more acceptable, loved, esteemed if their economic output and productivity is greater. It can perpetuate a single political paradigm that may not be in alignment with the client's concept of their social role in society and cultural representations, potentially affecting their self-worth. This sense of belonging can affect a person's perceived meaningfulness of life (Lambert et al., 2013).

Methodology

A constructivist grounded theory method by Charmaz was selected as it offers understanding of how 'meanings, actions and social structures are constructed' (2006. p. 285). This qualitative approach provides insight into the social process of how decisions related to innovation are made, where no adequate prior theory exists. The richer analysis of the processes, actions and interactions of people, ruled out other qualitative methods such as thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and narrative research (Parcell & Baker, 2017). Grounded theory was necessary to understand how ideas are put into action.

Hour long semi-structured interviews took place with 5 CDPs from a Cathedrals Group University. Due to the limited project scope and timescale, a single institution was selected for ease of access to CDPs, with a view that it would be repeatable by practitioners at other institutions to further develop the theory and would minimise variations due to institutional factors. Participants were interviewed based on availability within the project timescales. The sample varied significantly in seniority, age, experience, and sex. Although sufficient to ensure saturation of the data and achievability of analysis within the timescale, a weakness of the study was the small sample.

According to the promotional site cathedralsgroup.ac.uk (2022), the Group believe a Higher Education experience is worth more than what people earn

after graduating. They contest the Office for Students stance on what students look for in a university degree and how success should be measured, as too narrow. The small CDP team of participants has hybrid working patterns, offers hyflex delivery, and has seen student engagement reduce since the pandemic. Validity is limited to the context of the institution where interviews are conducted, although the description above may help the reader discern the generalisability of the presenting theory to other institutions. The researcher's preconceptions were set aside, participants selected on first availability, and briefed to reduce any bias in their responses.

Collection and analysis of the data took place concurrently as required by the method (Charmaz, 2006; Giles, de Lacey, & Muir-Cochrane, 2016; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The interview guide set out six 'domains of inquiry' (Karp, 2009, p. 40) with additional questions also arising spontaneously in response to the dialogue. Applying the beneficence principle (Beauchamp, 1990) of ensuring participants benefit from the research whilst also promoting their welfare and safety, interviews included reflection on the value of the conversation, and the research paper and a presentation were provided. Questions invited participants to discuss: what innovation meant to them, how they defined guidance practice, what they perceived as barriers and opportunities to innovation and why, what ensured quality delivery and outcomes, plus free space for any further comment.

Memos were made throughout the research interviews and analysis to track changes in thinking over time. This formed a memo bank (Clarke, 2005) that helped fill out the categories later on. My summarising to interviewees of the meanings I was taking from their words during the interviews was also a useful tactic for ensuring theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978) and that the analysis was grounded and meanings interpreted accurately. The interviews were transcribed using line-by-line coding with 'gerunds'. These are verbs that end with 'ing' to name people, places, things and ideas. They are useful for keeping the researcher focused on the process and grounded in the data, as suggested by Charmaz (2006).

In the final two semi-structured interviews, additional questions were asked to build on and develop a deeper insight and understanding of initial findings. These consisted of asking whether actions or processes observed in the first three interviews could explain their experiences. This theoretical sampling brought clarity and as Charmaz (2006. p. 199) says; it is 'strategic, specific, and systematic'. The interviews continued to the point of saturation, where no new codes were being generated. As reflected by Giles et al. (2016) constant comparison creates increasingly more abstract concepts through inductive reasoning, and Charmaz's urging to focus on the process and reasons behind actions led to theory construction with a core category.

Key findings and discussion

The research revealed the core category impacting CDP decision-making around innovation was 'constructing empowerment'. This emerged from the study as an intentional process of gaining access to necessary resources and 'power with' others to meet institutional targets and act in the best interests of university citizens.

The presenting theory is that CDP's are 'constructing empowerment' in order to be effective and meet targets in the HEI sector. Interview data showed CDP decision-making was influenced by their power to effect change, and many decisions are not within the CDP's sphere of influence as their power is largely granted informally. Whilst this is useful, it needs to be complemented with appropriate levels of formal power within the organisation. What CDPs can control is whether they choose to fall into a competitive 'us and them' mindset or work towards establishing and maintaining coalitions around shared interests, in this case usually with academics.

The presenting theory of 'constructing empowerment' is summarised in Table 1. The core category of constructing empowerment constrains the power of the CDP to effect change in the three subcategories. Each subcategory has four domains in which this study found it could operate. Below those are the conditions that others have power over to decide the focus of the CDP (denoted by a uni-directional arrow) and the conditions that the CDP has power over within the organisational structure (denoted by a bi-directional arrow).

Constructing Empowerment		
Influencing the experience	**Solving social justice issues**	**Prioritising achievability**
Purpose Language Price Image	Design measurement Network Information	Personal motivations Value judgements Leadership Policy driven KPIs
Micro ⟶ Macro Confusion ⟷ Clarity	Structure ⟶ Agency Current ⟷ Innovative	Excluded ⟶ Included Conforming ⟷ Agentic
Informal ⟶ Formal Competition ⟷ Coalition		

Table 1: Early substantive theory: 'Constructing Empowerment'

There were three subcategories of additional barriers shaping CDP's decisions around innovation:

- The power to influence the experience - is the capacity to have an effect on the engagement and experience of 'university citizens' using the service that produces a positive impression. It requires clarity of purpose, language, place and image of the role and sector. The career development practitioner tasks may be focused on the micro of interventions, meso of service design or macro of the institution.
- The power to solve social justice issues - is developing ideas and strategies that enable 'university citizens' to play a full, active and responsible part in society, and to restore equity and equality in our own services and institutions. It requires innovative design of solutions, measurement, a network beyond practitioners, and academic research and sources of information, in particular considering the scope to create solutions that engender greater agency in all areas of delivery.
- The power to achieve success in their actions - is prioritising workload based on the ability to successfully bring about a visible effect of some desirable experience within the social and structural power constraints of the institution. This is impacted by CDPs personal motivations such as life-career stage, interests and past experience. The perceived value of the service by stakeholders and clients affects engagement. Leadership influences the power of CDPs to be effective through visible authority in hierarchy, by ensuring practitioners are at key decision-making tables, and by empowering careers teams to work strategically and define the language of the service. In turn, this can impact the targets within the institution. Others such as academics can ensure practitioners' inclusion in strategic decisions, and practitioners can decide how agentic they wish to be.

In respect to the innovation of group guidance - the presenting theory emerged from analysis of the data, revealing that clarity of language and meanings is one factor necessary for innovative ideas to gain traction. The interviews showed there is confusion over the definition of group guidance, it being discussed as group work which doesn't offer students directional responsibility. A shift to group guidance may be beyond the power and authority of individual practitioners to implement as it is a change from the existing service structure, therefore the resistance may be based in structures rather than the CDPs themselves. Since CDPs focus on achievability and not disappointing clients, there are several factors that make group guidance seem a risky innovation. Hence, there were requests for specialist groups where group guidance

can be observed in practice. Data indicated curiosity and interest among CDPs, with resistance based in structural biases, power constraints and unclear definition of what is meant by the term group guidance.

Conclusions

This study found an unexpected story. Rather than practical barriers to innovation that are solvable by CDPs or resistance to change, it found a highly creative and purposeful group who were 'constructing empowerment' to deliver increased engagement and better outcomes in the broadest sense. There was interest in group guidance and desire for innovation that makes a difference, as well as power constraints limiting the achievability of applying group guidance and other forms of innovation in practice.

This is an early substantive theory, and further research would help corroborate the presenting theory. Further interviews with a wider sample and comparisons to other institutions would enable this. This theory in relation to the specific scope is valid, as steps have been taken throughout the process to mitigate researcher bias and reactivity, and respondent bias (Cypress, 2017).

Although this research was developed within a single institution, the role of CDPs can be quite similar between institutions. Therefore, the subcategories and core category may be consistent in other HE careers services. There may be a weaker scope for generalisation in the scaling factors of the theory. Further studies may show what the CDP does and doesn't have power over changes between institutions and it would be possible for additional domains to occur in different institutions.

The recommendations from this study which would need exploration of their viability are:

- CDPs could take a systems view of their work, in order to consider how to gain the leverage necessary for the scale of change that HE targets now require.
- CDPs could note which forms of power they lack in the theory, and which they can use more of to deliver the kinds of services needed, discussing these ideas with colleagues, and considering which unusual collaborators could be helpful.
- Managers could provide strategic thinking time for CDPs to develop improvement plans based on the theory, working through the dimensions of each category and considering what it means at the micro, meso and macro levels of the service experience. It can also be applied to projects within the service.
- Leadership has a significant opportunity to support CDPs in delivering the goals of institutions by increasing the CDPs power to shape solutions. It needs effective strategies to be sought from CDPs rather than assuming or dictating what is necessary. Establishing long term goals as well as quick wins, restructuring, informal coalitions, and ensuring CDPs are at all key decision-making tables (even if this is not in line with hierarchy) may help.
- Professional bodies such as the CDI and AGCAS may benefit from advocating for organisational structures that place CDPs where they can be most effective. This would complement the professionalisation of the sector, and reduce micro aggressions that overstep professional boundaries and hierarchy that diminishes the CDP professional voice and excludes their seat at decision-making tables.
- Campaigns to educate academics about what CDPs roles involve (more than job search, CVs and interviews) and develop mutual goals to collaborate over, may support a shift in social norms and be an enabler of student engagement.
- Researchers could use the presenting theory to determine where to pitch their innovations towards. The more macro the shift in practice, the more likely the idea needs to be pitched not just to practitioners, but to senior and executive leadership teams in HEIs.

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The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people's experiences of careers support: A UK-wide and youth-centred analysis

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Young people have been among the hardest hit groups during the COVID-19 pandemic, experiencing disruptions to their education and facing challenging transitions to the labour market (Wilson & Papoutsaki, 2021). This paper analyses data from research conducted by the Institute of Employment Studies (IES) during the pandemic involving 1,345 young people aged 16-25, both in education, employment and not in education, training or employment across the UK, at different points in time (April-September 2021). The mixed-method research adopted a youth-centred approach to explore the impact of the pandemic on young people's experience of careers support. The analysis gives young people a voice and highlights three key ways in which access to careers support can be improved. These findings have implications for leaders across government and education around the development young people's careers support following the pandemic.

Introduction

Addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people is a pressing issue across policy, research and practice. Young people were among the hardest hit groups: experiencing disruptions to their education, facing challenging transitions to the labour market, and reporting worsened wellbeing and confidence (Learning & Work, 2021). These three elements raise serious concerns about how they could adversely affect young people's health, aspirations and prospects in the longer term (Hicks et al., 2020; Wilson & Papoutsaki, 2021; Youth Employment UK, 2021).

During the pandemic policy efforts concentrated on mitigating these impacts, particularly the provision of employment and educational support to ensure every young person had access to a work or study opportunity of their choice (Plan for Jobs, 2020; YEG, 2020; YEG, 2021). Similarly, research has focused on understanding the impact of recent youth employment measures and how educational institutions, including careers services, have responded to the challenges posed by the pandemic, although predominately from the perspective of policy advisers and service providers.

In contrast, this paper based on the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) research involving 1,345 young people across the four UK nations, regarding the careers support available to them during the pandemic, gives a voice to these young people. It explores how this unique insight from the users' perspective, can be drawn on to inform the development of career services for young people post-pandemic.

Setting the scene: careers support infrastructures in the four nations and the impact of Covid-19

Careers guidance and support provision in the UK differs across the four nations. In England, the

responsibility for providing careers guidance and support rests mainly with education providers and is reflected in a set of eight Gatsby benchmarks (DfE, 2021). The implementation of these benchmarks is driven by statutory guidance (ibid) and supported by the Careers and Enterprise Company (a national agency funded by the Department for Education, which works separately from the National Careers Service).

In contrast to England, careers services in the other UK nations are managed by one or more than one department of their respective devolved governments to provide all-age, multi-platform support, in a range of educational and community spaces.

- In Scotland, careers support for young people is driven by the strategy Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), which has a strong focus on local partnerships and school-employer engagement (Scottish Government, 2014).
- In Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy's (DfE) national Careers Service is responsible for providing career information, advice and guidance on an all-age basis, while the Department of Education (DE) sets the national curriculum and provides guidance on the delivery of careers education in schools.
- Careers Wales is the provider of the national careers service in Wales. Through close collaboration with the Welsh Government, the service provides visible and accessible support both online and in local communities, placing a strong focus on employer engagement and strengthening school-to-business links.

While career support infrastructures vary across the four UK nations, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic was felt heavily across the country. At the onset of the pandemic careers services needed to quickly reinvent their provision. This included adapting to remote provision, introducing or scaling up digital services, delivering virtual events (such as careers fairs) and facilitating virtual work experience. In many instances the transition worked well and sped up innovation. For example, improvements to online job hubs, better use of social media platforms, and increased use of previously under-explored resources (such as podcasts), all featured as welcome innovations. However, careers services also faced notable challenges.

A UK-wide survey led in April 2020 investigated how career professionals found the impact of Covid-19. Responses revealed that a majority (54%, n= 136) experienced access to careers support resulting from closures to educational spaces as either 'highly problematic' or 'problematic' (Hughes, 2020). Another study (Pye Tait Consulting, 2020) conducted with 369 senior leaders of colleges, secondary schools, and special schools in England looked at the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of careers guidance and support. It found that, although careers services' budgets were largely unaltered, 49% of institutions had reduced the time learners were spending on careers guidance activities. The challenges posed by the sudden shift to remote learning and loss of face-to-face contact, combined with limited experience and resources on which educational institutions could draw, all contributed to this reduction.

Methods

This paper critically analyses data collected as part of the IES 'Better Quality Youth Employment' research programme for the Health Foundation Young People's Future Health Inquiry, running over three years from 2020 to 2023. The programme adopted a mixed methods approach (Orlando, 2021a) and the research was conducted through a large-scale online survey of 1,275 young people, and interviews and focus groups (fieldwork) with 70 more young people. Young people were defined as those aged 16-25. The research captured the views of participants across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Participants for both the survey and fieldwork were identified and selected based on a combination of sociodemographic factors (location, age, gender, ethnicity, disability, employment and education status) with the aim of maximising representation and inclusion from across the four nations and particularly of young people from disadvantaged groups (Orlando, 2021a). To achieve this, an external youth panel (YouthSight) was used to recruit participants to the research, and sampling quotas were adopted to ensure inclusion from across the population, particularly from under-represented groups. Consequently, there was a higher representation of minority groups such as disabled young people, young people from minority

ethnic backgrounds, and those not in education or employment compared with the wider population for these groups. The inclusion of a larger sample of under-represented young people is viewed as giving the research added value because including the voice of under-represented young people in a representative way is often a challenge in research given these young people are often harder to reach.

The sociodemographic breakdown for participants in the research is presented in Table 1: Sociodemographic breakdown of research participants.

The survey took place in two waves; the first wave was in April 2021 and the second in September 2021, with two different groups of participants to capture young people's views at two distinct points in time: first as lockdown rules eased and in a second stage as transitions from education to work or further study took place. The interviews and focus groups took place between July and September 2021.

Young people from two youth advocacy organisations engaged in workshops to contribute to the design of the survey questionnaire and of the discussion guides for interviews and focus groups. For example, participants were asked what they viewed as the most useful types of support in helping them fulfil their study and career aspirations. Options included support with accessing an apprenticeship or traineeship, careers advice (e.g. information sharing, signposting, one-to-one consultations with a careers adviser),

Table 1: Sociodemographic breakdown of research participants

Age		Gender		Nation		Ethnicity		Disability	
16-18	21%	Male	50%	England	40%	White ethnic group	78%	No	74%
19-21	39%	Female	48%	Scotland	21%	Minority ethnic group	20%	Yes	26%
22-25	40%	Non-binary	1%	Wales	20%	Other ethnic group	1%		
		Other	1%	N. Ireland	18%				

Employment Status	
College, further education, or training	30%
Higher education	31%
Not working nor studying	20%
Only in employment	19%

informal support (e.g. family and friends), other forms of support from school and college (e.g. mentoring), online information and guidance and a range of employment support interventions. Young people answered using a four-point scale going from 'very useful' to 'not useful at all', with an additional answer option if they did not know about the support type. Data from the survey were analysed using descriptive analysis and data from interviews and focus groups were analysed using thematic analysis (Boudah, 2011).

Research findings

The analysis of data collected as part of the Institute for Employment Studies 'Better Quality Youth Employment' sheds a unique light on the impact of COVID-19 on careers support from the perspective of the young people and their experiences during the pandemic. While the young people who participated in the research were from different nations, and hence experienced different careers support infrastructures, consensus emerged regarding the services and how they might be improved post-pandemic surfaced. A key theme was access to and quality of careers support during the pandemic:

> 'With COVID, I haven't had opportunity to branch out as much to teachers to explore my options for after. Now I'm thinking ok I've done these two subjects, this is what I'll go on to do.'
>
> (GCSE student, England)

All young people who participated in the research experienced some form of careers support, although it is not known whether those who participated in the survey based their answers on experience of the different types of support or an assumption of how useful they be might be. This notwithstanding, the analysis of data from the survey revealed there was no single form of support that the majority (i.e. more than half) of young people found to be very useful. However, over a third said 'support from apprenticeships' (42%) and 'traineeships' (33%) were 'very useful', while support found to be 'a little useful' included: 'online information and guidance' (56%), 'informal support' (55%) and 'careers advice' (54%). Only 24% found careers advice to be 'very useful', placing this option in fifth place after apprenticeships, traineeships, informal support, and other forms of support from school.

Data from the fieldwork with young people, which included both interviews and focus groups, was based on their direct experiences and supported this finding:

> 'They don't tell you much more than you could learn by looking things up yourself. Like applying to post grad studies – they don't tell you more than the application page itself. (...) Sometimes I'm reluctant to access it [university careers service] because I don't want to waste my time.'
>
> (University student, Scotland)

Unlike the survey, where young people were presented with pre-defined categories of support from which they had to choose, during the fieldwork they were asked to discuss freely the support they had accessed. Common themes emerged across participants' accounts. These highlighted that the support young people most often accessed, particularly since the start of the pandemic, was 'family and friends with experience in their sector of interest' (47%), followed by 'autonomous research using online resources', such as Indeed and Prospects (37%).

The reason given for preferring this form of informal support by almost a third of young people (30%) was that peers and family with experience in their preferred sector provided better-tailored and more up-to-date support, as well as networking and connection opportunities, than the support accessed through careers services. This was because they found careers support was less tailored to their individual needs and aspirations. In addition, many felt the disconnect between their needs and the support they received from careers services had increased since the start of the pandemic:

> 'When I discuss careers areas I like with advisers – they are very general and don't know as much as me (…) Why should I take advice from someone who doesn't work in that industry or graduated 15 years ago – they don't know what the standards are.'
>
> (University student, England).

The majority of young people in the consultation (67%) reported that many challenges they encountered when accessing support from careers services pre-pandemic - such as generic advice, feeling pushed

towards pathways which were not their first choice, sessions that felt short and rushed, and having a limited number of advisers for a large number of young people - had been compounded during the pandemic by the additional challenges of remote interaction.

A notable minority of young people in the consultation (37%) reported there had been a poor, or altogether missing, transition to providing careers advice remotely. This ranged from advisers not being easily accessible (either because the remote service was poorly advertised or because it was not present), to an expectation for young people to be proactive about engaging with careers staff without previous knowledge of the support provided.

Some young people (22%) felt that opportunities for work experience and study were limited and not broadcast adequately, which left them unsure about how they could access them:

> 'I don't know the careers person in my school. She sends emails to us and keeps us updated but we cannot speak to her. Not sure whether she's located in my school, didn't know if could get one to one support remotely.'
>
> (GCSE student, Northern Ireland)

Improving access to careers support after the pandemic

Young people participating in the research were asked how they thought access to, and quality of, careers support could be improved following the pandemic. The main solutions they identified included:

- Providing better tailored and more inclusive support, to ensure equality of opportunity (46%). Recommendations included targeted schemes to support early school leavers or those who did not achieve high qualifications, and increased investment to provide a higher number of specialised careers advisors in schools and colleges. They also included complementary resources such as personalised newsletters and access to multiple forms of support in school (e.g. mentors alongside careers advisers).
- Improving access to career-related information (39%), particularly through online platforms and tools, including youth-friendly job search portals, with accessible information and vetted opportunities tailored to young people, supported by youth-friendly modes of communication to share information and guidance, such as social media and chat apps. This was thought to be of key importance, especially following the challenges young people experienced over the course of multiple lockdowns when trying to access information without guidance, and feeling overwhelmed and disoriented as a result.
- Increasing mentoring schemes within educational settings (25%), providing young people with person-centred and one-to-one support beyond the standard support offered by careers services (e.g. information sharing, signposting, brief and high-level consultations). When asked what additional support they might benefit from, young people suggested mentoring could be particularly beneficial to help them improve their confidence and motivation following the pandemic, through the expert help of an experienced person studying or working in their field of choice.

Discussion

Research has revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic may have a lasting detrimental impact on young people's prospects (Wilson & Papoutsaki, 2021). Disruptions to studies have affected young people's confidence and motivation, adversely affecting their ambitions for study and work (Learning & Work, 2021). These findings indicate the key role that enhanced careers support can play in moving forward. Helping young people build back their confidence and change their perceptions of work after lockdown may take time and dedicated and specialised support.

Alongside these challenges, the responses of the young people participating in this research highlight that the majority did not find the career-related support they know of, or to which they have access, to be very useful in helping them meet or take the next step towards their career aspirations. In particular, careers support was viewed by many as under-resourced and out-of-touch with their needs. However, these challenges are not new and research from before the

pandemic highlighted similar issues. Recent research found that many pupils did not know where to turn to for careers advice beyond parents, teachers and friends (Hughes, 2021). Similarly, the 2019 Youth Voice Census, a major UK-wide yearly survey of young people's experiences of education, training, employment and support, found that a mere 25% of all young people aged 16-24 went to careers advisors for employability support, while only 38% cent of all young people felt careers advisors could help them grow their employability skills (Youth Employment UK, 2019).

Findings from this and other recent research (Hughes, 2020) indicate a disconcerting sense among young people of being left to their own devices to navigate an increasingly competitive labour market. A difficulty which is compounded by the lack of professional assistance in making this journey, as evidenced above. These findings resonate with pre-pandemic evidence which shows that in 2019 53% of those aged 16 and 50% of those aged 22 had never had an interview with a careers adviser, with just over a third rating information accessed through careers and employability websites as useful in their careers search (Youth Employment UK, 2019).

Quality support pathways, which use dedicated resources and person-centred approaches, are key to young people's journeys towards good quality training and work opportunities (Orlando, 2021b) but the pandemic has highlighted just how many young people do not have access to such support. Young people in the research have identified key areas for improvement, ranging from tailored and inclusive support, to improved quality of, and access to, career-related information, and the provision of additional resources within educational settings.

Based on these young people's views and experiences, there is a strong case to encourage educational institutions, national careers services, and government to work in collaboration and move beyond the existing requirement to provide more tailored careers information, advice and guidance, and increase investment in the provision of high-quality support.

The findings of this research support the need for improved access to career professionals with clear signposting of how and where to access them. This supports and complements existing calls for an improved careers provision infrastructure, including an entitlement to careers interviews with a qualified career development professionals and a broadening of the National Careers Service to include face-to-face careers support for all young people (Williams et al., 2021; Hughes, 2020).

Conclusion

This paper has investigated young people's own views and experiences of careers support during the COVID-19 pandemic and has given them a voice. It found that young people experienced increasing difficulty in accessing careers support and guidance - a concern that has been highlighted in previous research with young people, and has continued and strengthened during this time. Clearly this is in part due to the added challenges careers services have faced during this unprecedented time, but it also emphasises the exacerbation of limited access to careers provision across the UK nations in recent years.

The findings of the research complement and support earlier research, calling for the provision of better-quality careers support to young people, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic (YEG 2020; YEG 2021; Hughes, 2020; Hughes et al., 2021). High-quality support includes careers provision that is properly tailored to the needs of the young person that can support them in accessing good quality opportunities aligned to their aspirations, as well as the needs of national and local labour markets (Orlando, 2021b). It is about careers provision that ensures that young people from all backgrounds and at all stages of education have equal access to opportunities and are able to develop the right skills for their future. This ranges from sustained investment in improved education-business engagement, to cross-sector collaboration to invest in widened provision of mentoring schemes and employability support interventions.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to further explore and analyse these options, but future research should focus on understanding how to translate youth voices, as conveyed through the insight found in this and like research, into tangible solutions that address the

current challenges young people experience when building their futures.

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Towards a critical realist theory of labour market information

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Despite the importance of Labour Market Information (LMI) to career practice, there is a surprising lack of theory that focuses on LMI and how it supports career guidance. Building on previous work, especially by Staunton and Rogosic (2021), this paper will argue for a move toward a critical realist account of LMI that sees it as historically and politically positioned, rather than objectively verifiable on its own terms. This opens up new possibilities for how career practitioners can make use of LMI and fresh avenues for theory and research.

Introduction

The principle of learning about the world of work can be seen in the careers literature as far back as Parsons' (1909) argument that understanding opportunity is central to career management, alongside understanding self and understanding decision-making. This focus on understanding future opportunities is implicit in a career as a discipline concerned with transition and so understandably, has been picked up as a concern in the careers literature. That said, Milosheva et al. (2021) and Staunton and Rogosic (2021) have argued that opportunity awareness and the linked content of labour market information (LMI) have been paid comparatively little attention in the careers literature. Staunton and Rogosic (2021) go on to argue that LMI has been under-theorised, and that traditional understandings of LMI often link with matching theory and logical positivism, as well as a lack of focus on the links between LMI and social justice (Staunton and Rogosic, 2021; Staunton 2021). This article develops this argument with a particular focus on critical realist theory as a starting point to understand what is LMI. This article is be based on the premise that LMI claims to give a view of the world of work that helps individuals to navigate it successfully for their careers. This in turn is based on ontological claims, that LMI describes what work is like, as well as on epistemological claims, that LMI helps you to access this reality. Therefore, critical realisms' account of ontology and epistemology creates a foundation to explore these issues.

Logical Positivism and LMI

Logical positivism (Passmore, 1943; Schlick and Rynin, 1948; Blumberg and Feigl, 1931) is a broad movement in philosophy and the sciences focused on the confidence that natural phenomena can be reduced to universal laws. These laws can be tested and evaluated. Though the term is not often used in career development, the paradigm helps us to understand some common conceptions of LMI. Mollerup (1995) has argued that LMI needs to adhere to various quality marks such as being comprehensive, free from bias, and accurate. This creates a conception of a practical threshold to enable career development; if you gain sufficient insight from good enough career information you can then effectively manage your career.

Various adjustments have been made to this threshold model through the career literature. Grubb (2002) argues that there are significant challenges to a purely rational decision-making model, particularly that achieving complete information is not possible and that, even if it was, identifying how to integrate this into decision-making is not straightforward. Grubb proposes, by contrast, a social learning approach which is more educative (as opposed to therapeutic in nature) and uses LMI as an aid to stimulating learning about opportunities. Grubb appears to mainly offer a moderation to more traditional theories in

arguing that a clear match is not necessarily possible. However, this really represents a small adjustment and argues for a different level of possible certainty rather than arguing that the task is significantly different.

Two recent articles have made similar points to Grubb (2002) but have made specific additions by arguing for items which can offer further support in this matter. Bimrose (2021) makes similar points about the limits of a pure trait and factor approach and argues that career practitioners should move away from this, particularly its focus on the career practitioner as an expert, and instead consider how they can use LMI to aid development and adopt the role of facilitator. Bimrose goes on to argue that this is strongly supported by the professionalism of career practitioners and especially the ability to give information, use IT and understand the quality of LMI. Milosheva et al. (2021) focus on the place of information science and information literacy (CILIP, 2018) as a theoretical approach which describes how individuals can gain skills to better work with and understand information. This again takes a broader, more developmental approach. Moreover, Milosheva et al. argue for the need to move past merely discussing the amount of information provision and instead focus on information literacy as a concept which covers both the individual's decision-making and the practitioner's competencies.

So how do these pieces relate to logical positivism? As noted above, logical positivism is about reducing complex social situations to universal laws. This can be seen most strongly in our analysis that theorists, such as Mollerup (1995), Holland (1973) and Gati et al. (1996), use a practical threshold; that career decisions can be made when enough information is accessed of sufficient quality. Grubb (2002), Bimrose (2021) and Milosheva et al. (2021) soften this equation arguing there is more complexity to this picture and that more attention needs to be paid to the practical skills of the clients and the career practitioners making use of this information. But there is still ultimately a process in view here; an argument that inputs can be linked to outputs even if the process is more complicated than first considered. For example, Milosheva et al. state 'by focussing exclusively on information provision by service providers, there is a risk that some of the fundamental informational determinants of individuals' career development learning and career decision-making would be overlooked' (p.17).

Here Milosheva et al. state that information is a determinant of an individual's decision-making, implying that better use of information literacy will lead to better decision-making. Importantly they are not arguing that information literacy improves outcomes directly but that there is still a process in view which can be improved upon and optimised. Similarly, Bimrose (2021) argues that it is hard to overlook LMI's 'pivotal importance to effective career practice' (p.293) and that through improving LMI practice we can continue to improve career provision for individuals. This maintains the same logical link: better use of LMI improves career practice which can in turn better support individuals in their futures.

This form of learning can appear common sense in defending the value of career practice but it is worth interrogating the logical links at play. This is still based on Parsons' (1909) original position that 'right knowledge' of opportunity is a vital ingredient in a successful career transition. Though we do not want to reject this wholesale we will explore in this article how a turn away from the logical positivism described here, and specifically towards a critical realist position, will show some of the weaknesses of what we will argue is a narrow understanding of the use of LMI and its relationship to career development.

The Content of LMI

An assumption is often made that LMI is obvious and common sense in its nature. Milosheva et al. (2021) discuss a general understanding of learning about the world of work and make reference to the DOTS model (Law and Watts, 1977) but these are very broad-brush strokes and omit what learning about the world of work actually entails. Bimrose (2021) notes that LMI covers a wide range of material which can come from multiple sources but Bimrose gives no specific commentary on what from these individuals need to know.

Elsewhere, Barnes and Bimrose (2010) have articulated specific content individuals should learn, including employment trends, labour market structure, labour

market function. These items appear to favour quantitative information and focus on labour market transitions. It is not always clear how these items help these transitions, nor is there much theoretical description of what perspectives or theories are being made use of to define LMI. The impression is given that LMI is common sense and obvious to understand.

Alexander et al. (2019) take a different approach to this, recognising the need to combine qualitative and quantitative sources of information (or 'hot' and 'cold' LMI) and to take a broader approach to LMI. These authors also take a purposively wide-ranging definition of LMI arguing that 'LMI is defined as information about any aspect of education and training for, entry into, progression through and experience of the working world.' (p. 23). Alexander et al. (2019) go on to describe a more encompassing approach to information covering everything from salary information, skills requirements, demographics or participants, workplace rites and other items besides. From Alexander et al.'s work what is not clear is why these items are included. It appears that they have attempted to amalgamate various different perspectives without a theoretical or empirical basis on what to include.

These approaches lack the theoretical justification which can set out what to include in LMI or allow us to judge between attempts - such as Barnes and Bimrose (2010) or Alexander at al. (2019) - to consider what should LMI contain. It is far from obvious what difference employment trends, skills gaps or equality and diversity data should make to individuals making decisions. To be clear, this does not mean that they are of no value but the lack of theoretical justification makes their value uncertain. The advantage of more traditional rationalistic approaches, such as Holland (1973), is that through a tighter focus on skills there is a clear logic to how LMI can be used as part of his RIASEC model. This is not to say that Holland is not without problems but it highlights the need for theoretical justification of what is included in LMI.

In the first two sections of this article, two critiques to the existing literature around LMI have surfaced; that it is tied to logical positivism and that there is a lack of theorisation about what to include in LMI. Moving forward we are going to make use of a critical realist approach to reconsider how we approach LMI and define it.

Towards a critical realist view of LMI

As explained in the introduction, LMI claims to give a view of the world of work and in doing so is underpinned by ontological and epistemological claims. Critical realism (Archer, 1982; Bhaskar, 1975; Gorski, 2008) aims to sit between the positions of positivism and constructivism. Critical realists avoid arguing that the social world can be straightforwardly observed as positivists argue, nor that it can only be reduced to personal experience constitutive of nothing but itself, as constructivists and other post-structuralist thinkers would. Bhaskar (2011) argues that, firstly, our experiences are limited and we cannot see reality for itself, but that secondly, we can deduce the underlying causes and structures that form reality by making use of the philosophical tools which have been developed in the social science. On this basis, critical realists look to an ontology of the real social world but one that is formed of overlapping layers of social structures. What follows from this is an epistemology which means we can make observations about the real world but ones which are historically and socially contingent (Reed, 2005).

From a critical realist point of view, we cannot merely collect LMI and expect it to represent the reality of the world of work. As Bhaskar (2011) points out, it is through theoretical tools that we can deduce the underlying causes and meanings of the information that we have gathered. Alexander et al. (2019) draw attention to how this information may come from various sources, whether it be government surveys, job advertisements, sector information or the accounts of individuals experiencing the world of work. These in themselves do not represent the labour market so much as the perspectives of various groups because, as Reed (2005) argues, observations are historically and socially contingent. We need to be prepared to theorise these sources of LMI in a critical manner rather than accepting them on face value. This has the potential to open up the interrogation of LMI to more creative and detailed theoretical analysis (e.g. Staunton, 2021).

A post-neoliberal approach to LMI

To give one example, a theoretical approach based on post-neoliberal thought offers new avenues for exploring LMI. Post-neoliberalism as categorised by authors, such as Peck et al. (2010), makes various attempts to imagine possible futures beyond a neoliberal consensus. These alternatives could draw from resources both to the right and the left of the political spectrum. The work of Hooley et al. (2017) represents efforts to think through how to contest neoliberalism from the perspective of career guidance. A key part of this analysis is to claim that neoliberal markets are not a natural phenomenon but one which represents particular political and social arrangements. Therefore, when governments publish statistics or employers advertise vacancies they are doing so from a particular political position. This does not mean that they are wrong but merely that they represent a particular perspective.

As I have argued elsewhere (Staunton and Rogosic, 2021), using the work of Herman and Chomsky (1988) this information can represent a system supporting function. It encourages individuals to conform themselves to the requirements of the market and to assume that market trends are natural phenomena, so that disciplining yourself to the market through personal effort is as common sense as putting a coat on when it rains. This does not mean that information is inaccurate but that it represents a particular position. By its nature it also excludes, or makes null, particular information. For example, when you apply for a job you often do not hear why the previous incumbent left. Similarly, while job advertisements may tell you what salary to expect, they may not tell you if you could be represented by a union or how whistleblowing claims are handled by the organisation. There has been much work done on the decency of work (Blustein et al., 2016) yet LMI does not routinely make use of these sorts of conceptions to describe the world of work, nor do many governments aim to publish official figures on these concerns.

One could say that LMI as it is frequently presented in the literature is surprisingly uncritical and unengaged in the world of work. The term 'unengaged' is used to mean that official statistics and job advertisement analysis often provide a surface level view removed from the actual working lives of individuals. This is not just saying we need more qualitative or 'soft' information about the world of work but that by focussing on reducing working lives to salaries and skills lists, employment trends and demographic statistics we are in danger of glossing over the hardship and difficulty that people experience in their jobs. This is in part a political decision because the desire from the state is often to motivate individuals to engage in work. LMI is an attempt to study the workplace and represent the complex reality of individuals' working lives so as to help other people develop strategies to approach the world of work. The logic that sits behind various forms of logical positivism is not just epistemic claims but political claims as well; if you conform yourself to the workplace it will go well for you. This can be a logic that carries itself through both career development thought and career guidance practice.

Signposts Towards New Theories

In order to move towards new theories of LMI we are going to use Hooley's five signposts towards social justice. Hooley (2015) argues that to engage with social justice career guidance we could:

> **1)** explore ourselves and the world where we live, learn and work;
> **2)** examine how our experience connects to broader historical, political and social systems;
> **3)** (develop strategies that allow us individually to make the most of our current situation;
> **4)** (develop strategies that allow us collectively to make the most of our current situations; and
> **5)** consider how the current situation and structures should be changed.
>
> (Hooley, 2015 p. 15)

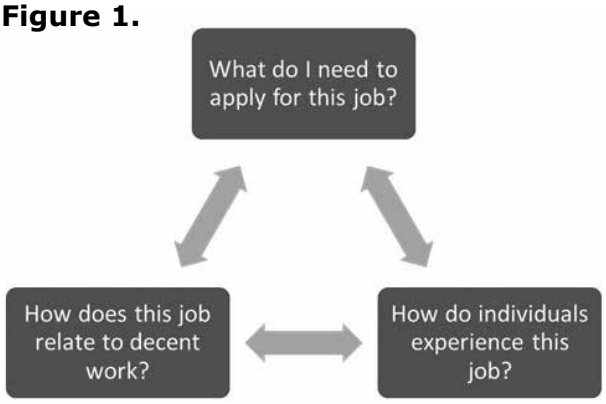
LMI can have a place in all of these signposts but it is particularly important in signposts (1), (2) and (3). The link to understanding decent work and other ways to critique the experiences of neoliberal workplaces can be clearly seen in points (1) and (2) but importantly this does not preclude developing strategies which allow

the individual to make the most of the current situation. This means that (a) considering information which allows individuals to calibrate themselves to the world of work and (b) to understand how various sectors operate and (c) what they would need to demonstrate in the recruitment process for a particular job, is helpful information as part of a 'making the most of the current situation' (Hooley, 2015). But this puts this information into a crucially different context. We are recognising that work has to be 'put up with' but the dealing with the reality as it is, does not consider it to be natural nor unopen to critique.

Hooley's second signpost encourages individuals to consider themselves in the context of their social position. This implies the importance of engaging with how individuals experience work differently on the basis of their social and cultural position. It is important to remember that work is a subjective experience on which people will have different perspectives. What is valuable about work is different between individuals and communities. This especially recognises the 'ethic of hospitality' which Sultana (2013) discusses. Work has differing social and cultural meanings. This means we should maintain a tension between articulating what decent work is and how individuals experience work differently on individual and collective levels. This tension will mean that we are slow to argue that what is decent for one person is true for everyone and we can simply universalise what makes work 'good' or decent', but as a counterpoint we must resist reducing all conversations about decent work to personal experience and personal preference. We should resist saying that wanting to be free from oppression and harassment at work is a matter of preference.

This creates three questions which LMI needs to be able to answer either as an individual source or in combination.

Figure 1.



This can be expanded upon as follows. Firstly, instrumental information aims to answer the question 'what do I need to apply for this job?' This will cover skills requirements, recruitment processes and other information needed to apply for jobs in a particular sector which can both underpin career decisions and enacting these decisions. Secondly, we should look at information that explores whether a job represents decent work and to what extent. This may not be formal information but career practice should aim to work hard to develop avenues to understand this whether that involves tapping into academic research or engaging with unions or other interest groups. Finally, we should be focussed on how individuals experience various jobs. This will help individuals reflect in turn on how they subjectively understand that role and what their own experiences of that role might be in the future. These three items are in turn related to each other, both offering different perspectives but also perspectives that rely on each other to fill out the full picture.

Conclusion

We have set out to argue that currently LMI makes claims about what the world of work is and how it is experienced. This requires us to consider its ontological and epistemological underpinning. We have found that currently discourse around LMI is often underpinned by a confidence that the world of work can be easily quantified and presented. In contrast, we have argued for a critical realist perspective that roots LMI in the context of the neoliberal workplace. This encourages career practice to make use of LMI, that helps individuals cope with the world as it is; that recognises the subjective understandings of how different communities approach work; and that explores the decency of work. This is not the only way that a critical realist approach could be used, various other attempts can be made to understand the world of work from different perspectives such as from a green perspective, a post-secular perspective or a post-colonial perspective. Crucially though, we need to keep theory and social context central to how we attempt to understand and relay the world through LMI.

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Agents for change: Reimagining emancipatory career guidance practices in Scotland

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This article explores how individual and group work models of career development practice could be adapted and redesigned to be more effective at empowering people to overcome barriers and inequalities. It is set in the context of the ongoing major review of career services in Scotland and examines the possible benefits and challenges if such emancipatory practices are embedded into future service delivery.

Introduction

Helping people overcome barriers, escape poverty, achieve educational success and lifelong career fulfilment were some of the emancipatory, social justice inspired aims of the career development field at the beginning of the profession (Irving and Malik, 2004). Pioneers over a hundred years ago, including Frank Parsons, called for practitioners to 'change social ills and work for social reform' (O'Brien, 2001, p. 73) by becoming agents for change.

Social justice has no overarching meaning but in the context of career development it can be justified by considering a few underpinning assumptions. Firstly, careers are built around the experiences, networks and opportunities available and open to individuals and groups; secondly the experiences, networks and opportunities available to different individuals and groups are not equal; and thirdly career guidance has the potential to intervene and to help individuals and groups change the lives of themselves and others (Hooley et al., 2021).

However, over the past thirty years or so, the career development field has been more focused on approaches geared towards career management and employability skills enhancement which are increasingly understood to be limited in terms of tackling social and structural inequalities (Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen, 2017). The narrative around economic globalisation and a complex and precarious working environment has fuelled the need for lifelong learning and a self-managed career (Irving, 2017). However, in this competitive environment, opportunities are not equal, and many individuals face disadvantage or oppression. Those who fail to thrive are helped to move back on the path towards skills acquisition, but this unintentionally perpetuates the inequalities rather than seeking to address the underlying causes (Watts, 1996/2005).

In recent years, a backdrop of international research has offered a convincing push for revisiting emancipatory practices and considerable progress has been made towards building a solid theoretical base (Blustein, McWhirter, and Perry, 2005; Hooley et al., 2017; 2018; Irving and Malik, 2004; McCrory, 2022; Olle, 2018; Sultana, 2020). However, this has not transferred, to the same extent, to practice level. Policy, whether at a national government level or at organisational level, needs to be created first and this does not happen overnight. In addition, as Hooley et al. (2021, p.57) argue, 'it is more challenging to create socially just practices than to build critiques'. In other words, it is easier to debate theory than to suggest changes to day to day working processes and practices.

Hooley et al. (2021; 2018) have attempted to address this gap by suggesting 'five signposts' which practitioners could work towards to embed emancipatory principles into everyday practice. These are - building critical consciousness; naming oppression; questioning what is normal; working with both individuals and groups; and working at a range of levels.

Building critical consciousness (Freire, 1970/2005) is the underpinning signpost and the term relates to an individual's ability to 'read the world'. It involves asking people to look at the 'big picture' through a critical lens and consider the wider social and political factors, or in other words, beyond the personal factors, which could affect life chances and the ability to move forward.

Secondly, helping people name or put a label on the barriers or oppression that they face is seen as important to address change as is the third, helping people question what is normal. This involves critiquing the legitimacy of embedded practices, ways of working and ideologies in their everyday life.

The first three signposts could be challenging to embed if practitioners focus the majority of their practice on individuals or work in isolation. The last two address this by calling for practitioners to firstly seek opportunities to work with groups as well as individuals, and secondly to work at a range of levels through networking, referral and advocacy. This, in turn, could lead to the more effective sharing of common experiences and to empowerment through collective group action.

This article draws on the five signposts of socially just practice and reimagines how service delivery could be adapted and redesigned to be more effective at empowering people to overcome barriers and inequalities. It examines models at the individual and group work level and illustrates how practitioners could incorporate the five signposts into everyday practice. It is set in the context of the career service in Scotland, which is in the process of undergoing a major review at present. This offers the opportunity to consider the challenges services in Scotland and elsewhere could face when attempting to incorporate socially just practices over the coming years.

The landscape in Scotland

In Scotland, although there are a wide range of third sector and private providers of career guidance and university career services, a substantial proportion of career services available to young people and adults are offered by the national skills body, Skills Development Scotland (SDS). SDS is an executive non-departmental public body of the Scottish Government which was set up in 2008 and offers an all-age career guidance service in their public centres across the country, in every local authority school, many colleges and via a national telephone helpline and a web-based service.

There is much to be applauded about the career services provided by SDS. Career guidance offered in centres and schools is delivered by teams of professionally qualified Careers Advisers who have gained a post graduate qualification in career development and the Qualification in Career Development (or equivalent) from the Career Development Institute. Staff undertake ongoing training and follow a coaching model of delivery (Hambly and Bomford, 2019) and utilise the career management skills (CMS) framework (SDS, 2012). CMS is a competency-based career learning model, built around the themes of self, strengths, horizons and networks and underpins all individual, group and web-based services. In short, the combination of the consistent nationwide service offer, the professional training and development of staff and the delivery of practice using an embedded and universal approach has helped SDS become a flagship careers service with international recognition.

Nevertheless, the present service framework is not without its flaws, and it could be argued that the competency-based nature of the CMS model promotes more of a focus on the skills needed for the status quo and therefore does little to address the inequalities that that disadvantaged groups face. The service framework has been in place since 2012 and a major career service review, Careers by Design (SDS, 2022) has recently taken place, following on from an initial review of careers services by the Scottish Government (Scottish Government, 2020). The review hopes to contribute to making 'Scotland a better and fairer place to live and work' (SDS, 2022, p. 2.) and outlines

a 'reimagining of the service' with a greater focus on individuals discovering their values and purpose rather than simply acquiring skills. It promises the delivery of more equitable services which are designed from the outset to 'truly support social mobility rather than be bolt on' (p. 36).

There are five design principles which underpin ten recommendations, a number of which have bearings on social justice and fair work. There is insufficient space to discuss each here but of particular relevance is the new career development model (p. 14) which looks set to replace the CMS model. The new model, which is a prototype, is still to be completed as part of the re-design of services but promisingly was developed in consultation with young people and SDS are keen to ensure that it is easy to understand and be used by all. It mirrors CMS in considering career development as a lifelong and continuous process, but places more emphasis on reflecting on barriers, empowerment and change.

The following individual and group work models offer an insight into how the reimagined services could look if practitioners are able to embed emancipatory practices into future service delivery.

Adapting practice with individuals

It could be argued that models of practice used by career practitioners at present are effective at empowering people to overcome barriers and inequalities and there is, therefore, little need to adapt practice. Indeed, in the U.K., the person-centred approach (Rogers, 1951; 1961; 1980) with its focus on building up a trusting, helping relationship to move towards personal growth underpins individual practice. This is coupled with the integration of a goal orientated 'stage' model, for instance, Ali and Graham (1996), Egan (1980; 2014), GROW (Yates, 2014) or Hambly and Bomford (2019) which follow the broad stages of 1 - establishing needs; 2 - exploring story/ options and; 3- agreeing and committing to a plan of action. Such models have more similarities than differences and serve to strengthen the focus and outcomes of interventions, as well as challenge perceptions and limited horizons. In addition, the Career Thinking Sessions model (Kline, 1999), which has been adapted for career guidance purposes by Bassot and Reid (2013) and has many similarities to the above stage models but places a greater emphasis on deep reflection to challenge limited assumptions more effectively.

Most of the above models are taught to students during initial training and career practitioners become highly proficient in their use through daily practice. Additionally, practitioners based in SDS are trained in the use of the SDS Coaching Approach (based on the Hambly and Bomford model) and the Career Management Skills (CMS) framework is weaved through the process.

However, according to Hooley (2015) the non-directive stance of the individual models, explored above, fall short of meeting emancipatory aims. The approaches are able to offer practitioners ample opportunity to challenge and convey empathy towards the barriers and inequality faced by individuals, but they do not sufficiently confront the wider issues which could lead to social change. There is arguably a need for adapted models which take a critical rather than non-directive stance and therefore offer a greater opportunity to challenge the structural influences that influence or limit progression.

Hooley (2022) has attempted to progress this in a recent article which restructures Ali and Graham's (1996) career counselling model to bring it closer to an emancipatory form of career guidance. The adapted model (which incorporates concepts taken from the ideas of the political economists Laclau and Mouffee and Hardt and Neri) is able to build up a strong theory base to support the development of emancipatory models. The approach involves building critical consciousness levels by helping people understand and critique the opportunity structure and then develop strategies to challenge it. Without further guidance, it not easy to imagine how the model could be applied to everyday practice but, as Hooley states, this is not the article's intent. It instead serves an important starting point to open up a debate and discussion for the future development of such emancipatory models of practice.

Building on Hooley's approach, the model illustrated in figure 1 adapts the SDS Coaching Approach (Hambly

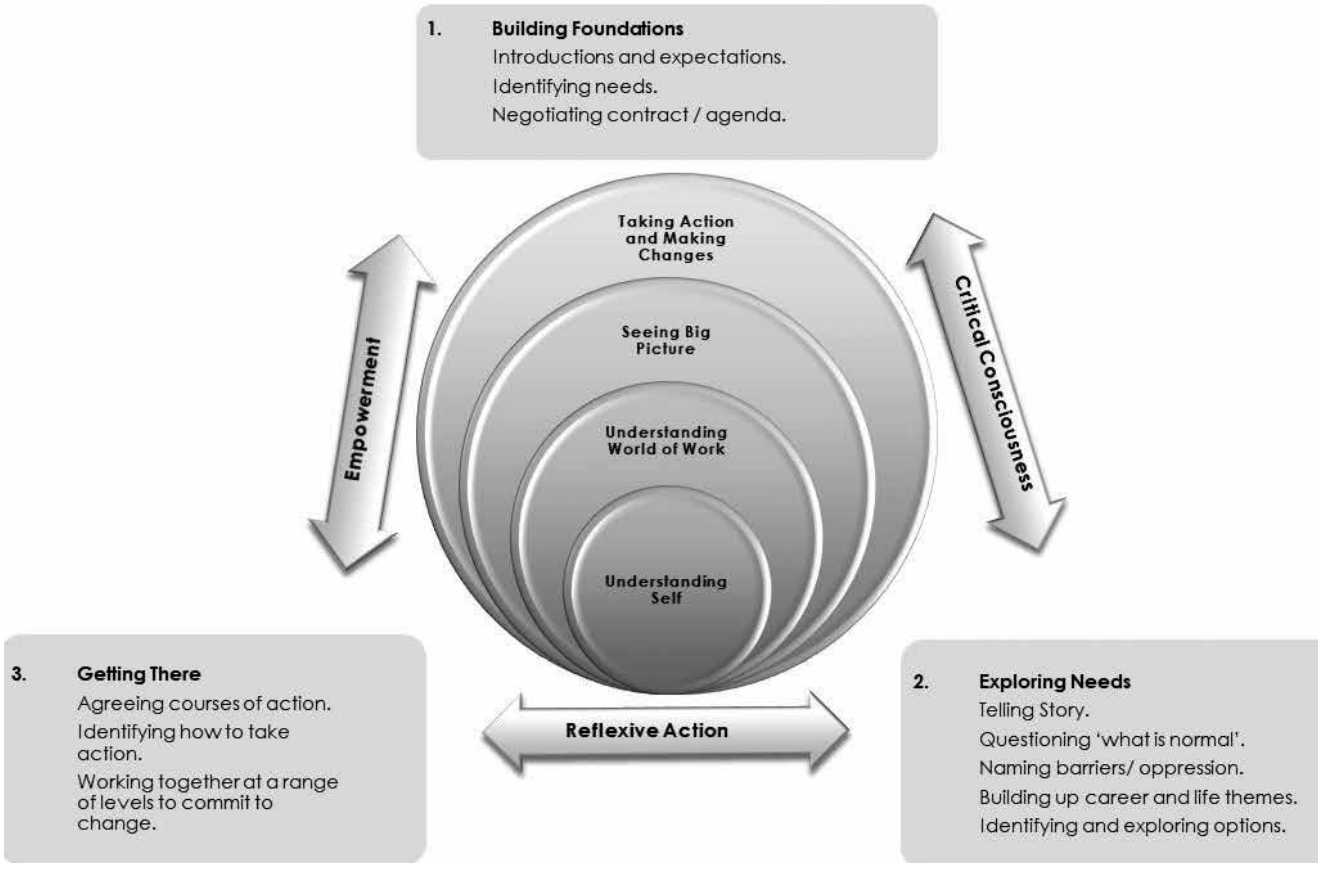
and Bomford, 2019) as the three-stage process rather than the Ali and Graham model. This has been chosen as it is able to mirror the model currently utilised by SDS more effectively. It should again be noted that the approach should not be used prescriptively or to the exclusion of all others. Rather it could act as an initial illustration of what could be developed further.

At each of the three stages in the model - 1- building foundations; 2- exploring needs; 3-getting there, - it incorporates additional dialogue, reflection and action to enable the five signposts of emancipatory practice to be embedded into the process. This is enabled by the approach being underpinned by a critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2005) theory base. Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of education and praxis which focuses on helping individuals (or learners) understand and critique the structural influences, power relations, political drivers, and the players that influence or limit progression and to take action to make changes possible. In this context it involves engaging individuals in cycles of dialogue, reflection and action, illustrated by the arrows in figure 1 (critical consciousness, reflection and empowerment) and explored in the case study below.

An adapted version of the career development prototype model (SDS, 2022) is in the centre of the model. The new career development framework moves away from a focus on the building up of skills and competencies towards a focus on values, purpose and change and therefore has the potential to be more effective than the current CMS model at enhancing emancipatory practices. However, a shift in focus from skills development has the drawback of, for example, limiting opportunities for people to meaningfully engage with the labour market, so a balance should be sought when applying the approach.

Although not in the original prototype, helping individuals see the 'big picture', as illustrated, could be a worthwhile addition to the final model developed by SDS. This would enable individuals to work towards some of the signposts and in particular, building up critical consciousness in a straightforward and accessible way. What follows is an illustration of how the model could be applied to practice:

Figure 1: Adapted Hambly and Bomford model, 2019, p.63



L works as a Careers Adviser in a secondary school in the east of Scotland and sees J, age 15, for career coaching. L spends time building up a relationship and establishing needs. J discloses that he has recently been diagnosed with dyslexia but is keen to work on gaining two or three Scottish Highers grade qualifications. L establishes that J has a passion for drawing and painting and after working together to draw on his options, J reflects that he would like to work in the field of art and design, possibly as an art teacher. L also spends time building up J's awareness of critical consciousness to reflect on the barriers which stop him moving forward. J communicates that he has little support from his family, most of his friends outperform him at school, he labels himself 'lazy and stupid' and blames himself for falling behind. He has a support plan but feels singled out when offered individualised support such as broken-down steps or extra time for assessments. He needs to constantly ask for support in certain classes and he feels that the support is an afterthought or a burden for some teachers.

L helps him put this into the wider perspective of issues faced by other neurodiverse young people and schools, agencies and employers lack of awareness or lack of flexibility to accommodate or modify their provision or services to these needs, without a struggle. L works with J to help him move towards his goals by reviewing the existing support on offer. She gains J's consent to speak to his guidance teacher about him improving his support plan and help offered by individual teachers. On speaking to J's guidance teacher, she also learns that the school are improving a range of existing inclusive classroom practices, such as ensuring clearer written instructions being given to all students, rather than a few. The school is also interested in bringing a group of neurodiverse learners together to gain a clearer picture of their needs in the classroom and J intends to take part in this group.

It is clear that emancipatory models could be effective at helping practitioners work with individuals to overcome equalities and barriers, particularly if practitioners are able to advocate on behalf of individuals to help take steps towards actioning any changes. However, practitioners could face a number of challenges when applying such models.

Staff resourcing could present an issue if practitioners are required to spend a greater amount of time both working with individuals and later advocating on their behalf. Most practitioners are bound by organisational targets which often creates a need for practitioners to move individuals into a positive destination as quickly as possible. It could also be difficult for a practitioner to empathise with certain instances of oppression, for example racism in the workplace, if the practitioner has not faced this issue themself. Similarly, asking an individual to rally to promote, for example, gender equality in school or question unfair working practices at their place of work, could be ineffectual or harmful on their own.

Robertson (2021) also argues that practitioners could been seen to be unduly influencing an individual's views and this could present an ethical issue. This limitation can, to some extent, be mitigated if practitioners ground the model in a non-directive person centred approach to ensure that any ideas and actions come from the individual. Nevertheless, this could lead to the approach being diluted and therefore working in a group context where any ideas generated are by the group and participants are able to pull together towards common aims and actions, should be considered to complement practice.

Adapting group work practice

As explored above, there is a range of individual models of practice which career practitioners can draw on to develop their practice and the models can be adapted to incorporate emancipatory practices. In contrast, there has been a lack of models to support career development group work practice and, despite group work being a regular part of the role of most career practitioners, group work in the field has been neglected and its effectiveness is often inconsistent (McMahon and Watson, 2021; Meldrum, 2021; 2022; Westergaard, 2009; 2013). In Scotland, inspection reports from various local authority areas undertaken by Education Scotland, including Edinburgh, have recommended group work should be developed due to inconsistent quality levels (Education Scotland, 2018).

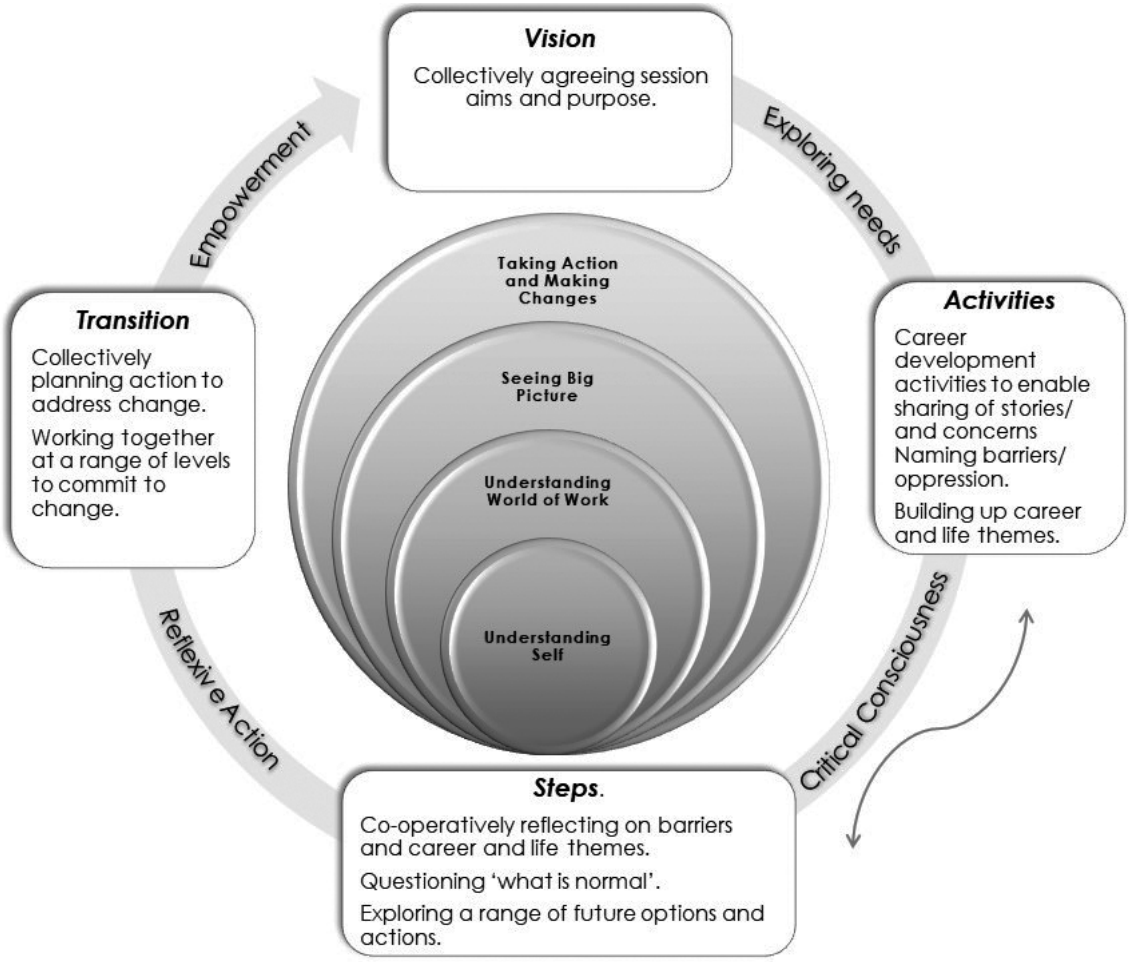


Figure 2: Adapted from the Collective Career Coaching Approach (Meldrum, 2021, p.217)

However, pockets of literature have resulted in an emergent theory base, including the FAAST model developed by Westergaard (2013) which sets out a process for the entire planning, design, delivery and evaluation of group work. Approaches such as the FAAST model are being taught during initial education, including in QCD centres in Scotland and elsewhere. In addition, SDS have invested in new and existing members of staff undertaking bespoke group work training to improve the effectiveness of group work.

The collective career coaching approach (Meldrum, 2021) illustrated in figure 2, is an emancipatory model of group work which has been developed in recent years and is being taught to students in some of the QCD centres in the UK. It has similarities to the emancipatory model in figure 1, in that it made up of the same three main parts: firstly, critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) is the underpinning theoretical approach and involves practitioners engaging groups in cycles of dialogue, reflection and action; secondly, the structure, follows a four-stage process and brings in additional dialogue, reflection and action to enable the five signposts of emancipatory practice to be implemented; and thirdly, an adapted version of the career development prototype model (SDS, 2022) is at the heart of the model.

The model differs from the individual approach in that it involves a greater amount of planning. This would usually take the form of a session plan which sets out learning objectives and one or more activity for the group to work on to move towards meeting the objectives. There is some learning content in the form of activities to develop career learning and critical consciousness, but the focus is on building up peer interaction and empowerment rather than direct instructional direction from the practitioner. The example below outlines how the model could be applied to practice:

> H has been working in the same secondary school for four years and she has observed a

reoccurring theme affecting senior students, particularly girls, who are interested in a career in science or engineering. A substantial number of such students are unable access university or apprenticeships easily as they are missing key subjects, particularly physics, maths or technology subjects at Scottish Higher level. Research leads H to find out that in 2020, despite 47% taking maths, only 27% of females took physics, 17% took computer science and only 11% took engineering science (Scottish Qualification Authority, 2021). H approaches guidance staff in school with the aim of offering group workshops to S2 students choosing subjects to promote gender equality in STEM subjects.

H prepares a session plan and offers a group session to fifteen S2 students. The group agree that they would like to discuss how to access STEM careers and reflect on the barriers relating to STEM subjects. They explore factors such as lack of interest in the subjects, lack of girls in classes, not knowing enough about the subjects or where they could lead, too 'hands on', too difficult etc. H moves on to a quiz which asks the group to match a range of subjects as 'blue' or 'pink' according to how many boys/ girls take the subjects at Higher level. This is followed by revealing the percentage uptake from the Scottish Qualification Authority and a group discussion and reflection discussing firstly, how they feel about the statistics and secondly, what could be done about it. H and the group reflect on next steps and the group agree to promote STEM subjects by social media to other S2 students. H later raises awareness of the benefits of the sessions during her team reflective practice session and her manager asks her to speak to national staff to develop the group work further.

Group work has many benefits, including the potential for collective group learning, the sharing of common experiences and concerns and utilising each other as a resource (Meldrum, 2017; Thomsen, 2012; Westergaard, 2013), all of which would be challenging in an individual context. An emancipatory group work approach additionally has the potential to empower the group to deal with challenges as a collective and work towards transformative group action (Meldrum, 2021). The ethical challenge of practitioners unduly influencing the actions of people, discussed with the individual approach, is lessened as any ideas and actions are generated by the group.

However, there could be a number of limitations to group work, for instance some group participants may feel uncomfortable working in a group environment, and some could gain less from a group experience than others (Westergaard, 2013). There are usually a few dominant members in any group, and this could lessen the experience for those who do not feel able to speak. It could also be difficult to address some group participants individual needs, and some may feel that they are being persuaded or overly influenced by other group participants. This could embed some attitudes and misconceptions as individuals may not want to challenge the perceived 'truths' at the risk of ridicule. These limitations can be mitigated, to an extent, through the careful planning and facilitation of group sessions.

Career organisations should continue to offer group work training to practitioners so that they feel confident to deliver group work and improve group work outcomes. Nevertheless, group work should always complement rather than replace individual career interventions. It is also important to note that group work and individual guidance should both play an important role in the delivery of career services, and one should not be pitted against the other as more important.

Conclusion

The redesign of services as part of the career review in Scotland offers the prospect of future service delivery involving a wider range of collaborative opportunities for practitioners to engage with individuals and groups in different contexts such as schools, workplaces, in the community and digitally. This article has examined how individual and group work models could be adapted, as part of this redesign to be more effective at empowering people to overcome barriers and inequalities. It has argued that such approaches could play an important role in contributing towards the service, and in turn other career services, being fairer and more equitable for all. This needs to be balanced against some of the

challenges that such approaches could bring such as resourcing issues, training gaps and ethical breaches.

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The emancipatory potential of community interaction in career education

Petra Røise

This article contributes to a further development of Bill Law's Community Interaction Theory (1981, 2009), by highlighting its emancipatory potential. Through an action research project with teachers, career counsellors and the article's author, collective knowledge was developed on career education in lower secondary schools in Norway, with particular focus on integrating career learning through work placement activities. Analysis show challenges in contributing to career education's liberating potential without sufficient insight into how to facilitate a reflective career learning process. The paper concludes that, to strengthen a focus on emancipation, career education needs to build on Community Interaction Theory by emphasising the collective, contextual, complex, and critical dimensions of career learning.

Introduction

For many decades, career learning activities have been facilitated between school and working life contexts as a part of career education. Bill Law's Community Interaction Theory draws attention to the importance of reflecting on interactions between contacts, cultures, and contexts, as a source of complexity in career education. As Law states 'because it is complexity which offers options, identifies causes and effects, and enables autonomy' (Law, 2004, p. 53). Hereby foreground significance is given to the emancipatory purpose of career education.

Such career learning activities between contexts are common practice in lower secondary schools in Norway, where career education is organised through an obligatory curricular subject called Educational Choice [Utdanningsvalg], serving students aged 13 to 16. This article explores how qualitative research into career education in Norway can inform a further development of Community Interaction Theory. In line with Guichard (2001), I describe career education as facilitating career learning in collective processes in schools (Røise, 2020). These collective career learning processes need to be systematised through pedagogical facilitation, as stated by Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2009).

Whereas an earlier edition of the Norwegian curriculum has been identified embedded in a neoliberal rationale (Røise, 2020), such responsibilisation of the individual regarding their own education and employability, is still prominent in the current curriculum for Educational Choice. Here emphasis is placed on strengthening students' competence to deal with choices and transitions between educational trajectories and work contexts (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). Such trends towards responsibilisation and individualisation are also identified in a European context (Sultana, 2012).

Regarding the provision of Educational Choice, it turns out to be challenging to create meaningful activities in the subject (Mjaavatn & Frostad, 2018). Earlier research shows students prefer experienced-based approaches to career learning (Buland et al., 2014), but such activities are logistically demanding to organise as a part of a school day (Andreassen, 2011; Lødding & Holen, 2012). At the same time, international research from the students' perspective points out that authentic experiences with different work tasks and environments are important for the students' further choice of education and profession (Klindt Poulsen, 2020; Messer, 2017).

To deal with these challenges, drawing on critical emancipatory perspectives, this article elucidates how qualitative research in Norwegian career education can contribute to the further development of Bill Law's Community Interaction Theory. I will argue, that to counteract a neoliberal approach, and to strengthen a focus on emancipation and reflection, career education needs to build on a Community Interaction Theory that emphasises collective, contextual, complex, and critical career learning.

Community interaction as a source for emancipation

A main purpose for career education is to give students access to other parts of society than those accessible through their own upbringing. Since its introduction in 1981, Law's Community Interaction Theory has promoted the importance of career learning through engagement in and reflection on encounters between individuals and their communities. 'Community interaction is a 'mid-range' account of career management - it does not ignore big-picture social structures, neither does it dismiss inner-life, but it focuses on how the two interact' (Law, 1981, p. 6). When differentiating between career guidance and career curriculum, it is mainly curriculum that provides opportunity to engage in community interaction, i.e. through experience-based educational programmes such as work experience (Law, 1999). Tensions that arise in these interactions between school and the world of work, should, according to Law, not be ignored. Moreover, such tensions emphasise that a greater degree of complexity in career education is the key to more freedom - it opens more doors to a possible future (Law, 2004).

This emancipatory purpose of education can be elaborated through the work of the Brazilian liberation pedagogue Paolo Freire (1970b). Freire promoted liberating dialogue about social contexts to help people develop their subjectivity and critical consciousness (Freire, 1970a). '(…) my never accepting, yesterday or today, that educational practice should be restricted to a "reading of the word," a "reading of text", but rather believing that is should also include a "reading of context", a "reading of the world".' (Freire, 1997, p. 12), Central in Freires work is the connection between developing skills in school that are relevant in encounters with the outside world. Furthermore, applying Freire's critical approach to the context of career education would be to not accept a perception of students role as solely to adapt to society, and not to present the social world and the world of work as unchangeable (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2008, p.p 32-33).

Freire's work contributes to raising awareness of emancipatory potential of career education, and the students' potential liberating actions and reflections related to career learning activities. To achieve such emancipation, a key task in career education is to give students a greater complexity of experiences and impressions to relate to, as a means to orient themselves towards future education, work, and life in general.

The current relevance of viewing Community Interaction Theory through an emancipatory lens can be seen in a movement in the field of career guidance and education, away from a technocratic view, towards a more dialogical, mutual relationship that can support critical awareness (Hooley et al., 2018, p. 20). From this movement arise collective approaches to developing meaningful career learning through involvement in the local community (Thomsen, 2017). This gives actualisation to putting Community Interaction Theory at the core of the research that is the background for this paper.

Methodology

The empirical studies which are the basis for this paper formed part of my PhD research into career education in lower secondary education in Norway. In Norway, compulsory education starts at age 6 and ends after 10th grade (age 16). Students can then apply to either vocational or upper-secondary education. The subject of Educational Choice is taught by teachers or career guidance counsellors at the schools, though no special competences are required to teach the subject. The subject has its own curriculum and consists of 110 hours, divided over the three years of lower secondary school.

The empirical study was conducted as an action research project at one school, entailing collaboration between five teachers and two career counsellors and the article's author, during the course of one school year. The aim of the project was to develop collective knowledge on the subject Educational Choice, with focus on career education related to work visits that lasted a week, and one-day work visits. Empirical data consisted of transcribed recordings from dialogue in the project meetings, thematic notes from the participants and researcher's logs (Røise & Bjerkholt, 2020). Moreover, in this article, transcribed data is added from the recording of a follow-up meeting with the participants in the action research project, which took place 15 months after finishing the project.

The voices of 24 students were included in the research through 4 focus groups. Focus groups were led by the author of this article, and teachers and career counsellors in the research project participated in the focus groups as observers. Data consisted of transcribed recordings of the focus groups (Røise, 2022 in press).

Applying an abductive analysis approach (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018), interpretation of the empirical research moved between levels of handling the empirically based knowledge from these studies, critical interpretation and reflections on a theoretically grounded knowledge of Community Interaction Theory and emancipation. This process of filtering and interpreting made visible a theoretical metaperspective, which was indirectly imprinted in the material (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).

Findings

Here are presented, four perspectives of theoretical development that became visible as a part of the abductive analysis. Attention was given to the interplay between community interactions, the empirical data, and the emancipatory purpose of career education.

Critical awareness

The students' experiences provided insight into how their opportunities to reflect on their experience of placement are limited when placement activities are linked to academic school assignments and assessment. Throughout the action research project, teachers had developed school tasks as a part of the work week. The students would answer questions, take pictures and with that bring school tasks to their workplace visits. After the work week, time was allocated at school for the students to make presentations on their experiences and share them with the rest of their class. These presentations were graded as a part of the subject Norwegian. However, most time in the classroom was allocated to all students sharing their presentations, therefore little time was left for questions or reflections.

> I also sometimes think when I sit and have these presentations that "oh, now there were like twenty presentations, and then there are some who are about the same". (…) And then you go through all of them, and it takes a lot of time. And then you know that you are going to move on to something else afterwards, and then that presentation stands on its own.
>
> (Teacher, female, transcript follow-up meeting, my translation.)

It became apparent that this prioritisation leaves little room for the explorations of students' complementary or contradictory experiences. This indicates a pedagogical practice that does not interrupt students' taken-for-granted truths (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2008). Therefore, if critical thinking and dialogue are absent, the subject is in danger of emphasising an adaptive, instead of an emancipatory dimension (Freire, 1970a). This finding sheds light on the purpose of career education, which is not about reducing students' role to social adaptation, but to free students, through critical thinking, from fixed perceptions about future education and work.

Complexity

As stated, to expand students' opportunity awareness, an emancipatory perspective presumes a complexity in career education. Through experienced-based learning across contexts, students can access parts of society that formerly where not accessible for them. The empirical material shows that even though students do not solely experience placements activities as positive, they are clear about wanting more experiences with

the purpose of orientating themselves. As a student in a focus group expresses:

> '[…] It would have been nice to try more [things]. I still do not know exactly what I want to be, because I think everything is just as fun.'
>
> (Student, transcript focus group, male, my translation.).

This points towards the central task for education to provide students with a richer complexity of experiences and impressions to relate to, regarding exploration of future education, work and life in general.

Contextualisation

In the data material attention is given to considerations related to relevance in career learning processes, in describing contextualisation as a source of complexity in career learning. According to Law (2004), relevance in career teaching is created through a link between students' lives as part of education, and education as part of students' lives (Law, 2004). International research emphasises the importance of connecting students' knowledge and skills to the context in which they are used (Guile & Griffiths, 2001). Students who participated in this research project expressed seeking a connection between work in school that seems relevant in encounters outside school, while in the process of interacting.

On the one hand, my findings confirm earlier research, where students experience placement as useful and meaningful on an individual level (Messer, 2017), and expand students' perspectives on education and working life (Klindt Poulsen, 2020), through experiential learning (Buland et al., 2014). On the other hand, my findings highlight that students experience challenges in understanding the connection between lower secondary education and competence requirements in working life. As one of the students describes work week:

> Yes, there are many who drive and bother that at school you only learn math and such, and not what you have to do later in life. While here you actually learn what to do next, how it is.
>
> (Student, transcript, focus group 2, my translation.)

From a political point of view, career education must contribute to an increased understanding of working life's requirements for knowledge and competence (OECD, 2014). However, when school is not perceived as relevant for education and profession, it affects further educational choices (Sandal, 2014).

If the aim for placement is to give students insight into working life, it can be criticised that some placement activities only give students limited insight. For some students in the data material, their routine work tasks did not necessarily reflect the competence requirements in specific professions, nor did it promote an understanding of the relevance of schooling. Here, a tension emerges in the research related to contextualisation. While placement activities give the student the opportunity to gain insight into realities other than school., these activities also contribute to the students returning to school with new insights, which provide new perspectives on the learning that takes place in school.

A pitfall would be to reduce teaching practices to the transfer of information to students, who do not need to understand coherence between school and the world of work in order to learn it. Teaching should not be reduced to 'reading of the word' or 'reading of the text', but should promote coherence with 'reading of the world' and 'reading of the context' (Freire, 1997). This point towards a clear communication of the purpose of work experience-based programs in career education.

In this analysis, attention is drawn to school and work as different contexts for career learning, where career education is not intended to make school and working life similar contexts, but to regard tensions and contradictions across contexts as sources of reflection. This finding is a contribution to the development of career learning theory and emphasises the importance of contextualization in learning processes.

Collective reflection

The findings also show the potential for collective reflection after placement activities. Where the classroom activities left little time for discussions and reflection, the focus groups turned out to be an arena for collective reflection on the individual experiences

related to placement. Furthermore, students expressed the need for support and guidance related to the placements, to experience coherence (Skovhus & Poulsen, 2021). As one student describes the questions she was asked in the focus group:

> Yes, it is easier when someone asks direct questions. When you talk about it with parents, it's a bit like, 'I did this, and I did this.' While now, you ask more, like, "What did you learn, actually?"
>
> (Student, transcript focus group, female).

Collective reflection can be considered a valuable source to increase complexity and raise critical awareness in career education and anchors a liberating dialogue at the core of career education.

Development of Community Interaction Theory

Together, the four findings give foreground significance to values and qualities already embedded in Community Interaction Theory. This model illustrates the correlation between Community Interaction Theory and the values forwarded through abductive analysis in this article, as a metatheory.

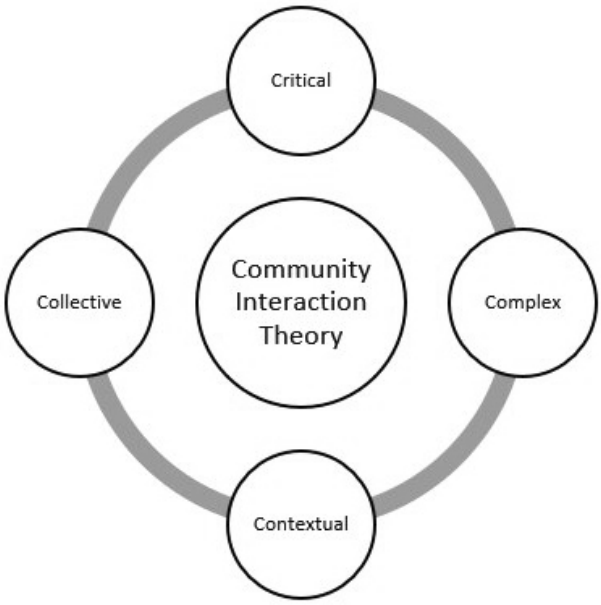

Figure 1. Model of development of Community Interaction Theory

By forwarding these values, my intention is to contribute to actualisation and further development and discussion of Bill Law's Community Interaction Theory. In the context of career education both in Norway and globally, these dimensions can contribute to a political and educational development of career perspectives by highlighting the emancipatory purpose of career education.

Questions can be raised about how such emancipation through career education can be understood. In Law's Community Interaction Theory attention is given to the social space that lies between the individual and the structural world of work (1999). Can emancipation take place in education and working life, as these contexts are constructed and reconstructed through political, social, cultural, and economic influences (Irving, 2011)? I argue that emancipation through career education relates to adaptation; a perspective not highlighted in Law's Community Interaction Theory.

Emancipation and adaptation relate to one another as outer points on a continuum, where emancipation functions as a remedy for noncritical adaptation. Developing critical awareness is a part of education, and therefore a part of the educational structure in society. Emancipation is not about distancing oneself from society but is about actively participating in society by being critically aware of its influences, limitations and possibilities.

Critical awareness can be expressed in career education by shedding light on various working conditions in working life or contribute to freeing students from fixed perceptions of future education and work. It is through a discussion on consequences of critical awareness that dimensions of adaptation become visible.

Students in lower secondary school may not yet be able to foresee the consequences that follow sociocultural and economic structures in society (such as gender, ethnicity, sociocultural background), but career education should contribute to awareness, where emancipation and adaptation are related concepts.

Conclusion

This paper elucidates how the relationship between action research, Norwegian career education, and emancipatory theoretical perspectives can contribute

to further development of Bill Law's Community Interaction Theory (1981, 2009). By providing ample experiences for students to experience different aspects of work life and reflect on them, an argument is made to actualise and further develop Community Interaction Theory, giving foreground significance to critical, complex, contextual and collective dimensions of career learning from a metaperspective.

What would career education be reduced to if critical thinking and dialogue are absent? Career learning should be expressed through the dimension of emancipation and adaptation, where critical thinking is at the core of disrupting taken-for-granted truths on education and work. I argue that Community Interaction Theory should not be diminished to a response to labour marked needs but should be considered a response to students need for identity and community exploration, which involves dealing with both emancipation and adaptation regarding their roles in society.

This theoretical development has implications for professional practice, and the provision of career education with a renewed focus on the emancipatory potential of work-based learning. Furthermore, it needs to raise awareness amongst policy makers on the meaning of schooling and career education and facilitating the logistic and economic means to make create relevance in basic education through connecting school and work contexts. Finally, a development of career learning theory can inspire more research from the perspective of the students, teachers and school-based career counsellors on the possibilities and challenges when forwarding the emancipatory purpose of career education.

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GigLawyer and/or BigLawyer? A grounded theory study of lawyer career craft

Nomita Nair

This qualitative study explores the emergence of new gig working routes in the legal industry. Drawing on the nascent concept of 'career crafting', I crafted a constructivist grounded theory of 'Craft My Own Way' from the experiences of 15 lawyers. Participants' experiences reflect agentic and emergent perspectives as part of inter-connected transition processes. A main finding of this study is that, whilst seeking change, participants experienced a paradoxically conflicting and synergistic relationship with their pasts. The findings offer a discussion framework for career professionals to help clients reconcile tensions by considering 'craft' as a theoretical lens to frame career transitions.

Introduction

In the legal industry, a contemporary vocational trend is the emergence of new independent working routes. This contrasts sharply with the dominant route for lawyers in large professional partnerships (Aulakh and Kilpatrick, 2016), known as 'BigLaw' (Chin, 2016). A lawyer working in BigLaw (referred to as a 'BigLawyer') is assumed to embark on an institutionalised, normative, linear career model (Leiper, 1997), featuring 'movement up a pay scale, promotion, increasing authority and apparent security' (Gold and Fraser, 2002) and 'up-or-out' tournament promotion practices (Malhotra et al., 2010). Although BigLawyers represent a large proportion of the legal profession (SRA, 2020), it is estimated the number of lawyers working independently is increasing (Hazlewoods, 2018). Notwithstanding, leading law graduate careers resources still describe 'career prospects' within the legal sector in predominantly normative, hierarchical, organisational and linear terms (Prospects, 2021).

As a lawyer and career coach, I have met lawyers working independently. However, I was always struck by how many appeared isolated and little empirically-based practical guidance was available. Contemporary careers research and theory has assumed a 'new career era' (De Vos et al., 2019; Ashford et al., 2018), in which individuals may experience multiple work transitions across a life span (Baruch, 2004). Concepts such as boundaryless and protean careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Gubler et al., 2014) feature the expectation of mobility, uncertainty (Bright & Pryor, 2011) and the necessity for individual agency (Ibarra and Obodaru, 2016). Although careers literature has studied precarious independent work (e.g. Petriglieri et al. 2019; Broughton et al. 2018), less is known about professionals working independently.

Extant career transition (CT) literature lends some insight (Cohen and Mallon, 1999), but critical gaps exist to understand how the more nuanced process of transition unfolds at the individual level (Sullivan & Al Arris, 2019; 2021). I was curious to undertake original empirical research to investigate this emerging vocational phenomenon. Also, as COVID-19 disrupted many traditional working lives, I saw this as an opportunity to explore different career experiences, which could inform contemporary career coaching practice in a potentially fundamentally altered career landscape.

Constructed definitions

Building on recent literature (e.g. Petriglieri et al., 2018), I refer to independent working as 'gig' working. Within the context of my research, to differentiate with 'BigLaw' and 'BigLawyer', I construct the terms 'GigLaw' and 'GigLawyer' to refer to lawyers who practice law independently.

Literature review

Unlike other research paradigms that position the literature review prior to data analysis (Dunne, 2011), my choice of constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2006) (discussed below) meant that my literature review was more iterative (El Hussein et al., 2017). In CGT, the researcher should be familiar with the literature prior to data collection to start formulating a set of 'sensitising concepts' (Gordon-Finlayson, 2019) and in uncovering gaps in extant knowledge (Charmaz, 2006) while remaining critically 'theoretically agnostic' (Henwood and Pidgeon, 2003). To balance the needs of approaching data with an open mind, without a priori concepts or aims to test theories, but not an empty head (Dey, 1999), I conducted a multiple-stage, iterative, nonlinear literature review (El Hussein et al., 2017).

For the initial stage, my guiding empirical interests (Charmaz, 2006) were CTs, gig-working and the legal sector. I conducted the subsequent stages of relevant literature review after the commencement of data collection, analysis and the construction of categories and codes to keep theory development grounded in the data. Based perhaps on my own career experiences, I perceived subsequent relevant theoretical concepts as craft and fit.

Career transitions

A transition can be conceptualised as the internal psychological process individuals experience in adapting to an external anticipated or unanticipated change that could be an event or non-event (Schlossberg, 1981). In response to transitions, individuals change their assumptions and perceptions of themselves and the world, as well as their behaviour (Goodman et al., 2011). Research suggests that while fundamental change may occur in one part of life, other aspects may be preserved (Wise & Millward, 2005).

CT models include Louis' (1980) sense-making and typology, life stage (Super, 1980; Barclay et al., 2011), managerial job change (Nicholson, 1984), decision-making (Rhodes & Doering, 1983), self-regulatory perspective (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2008) and identity change (Ibarra, 2004). These are predicated on a psychological and possibly physical movement between roles, referring to a position in a social structure (Ashforth, 2000).

Research suggests individuals experience being liminal (Ibarra, 2005) during CTs before gaining clarity about a new role (Ashforth, 2000; Ebaugh, 1988). A trend in the literature is the emergence of nonlinear theories and research reflecting the complexity and unpredictability of events and individuals' behaviours and attitudes towards CTs (chaos theory of careers (Pryor and Bright, 2011); the systems theory framework (McMahon & Patton, 2018)). However, most empirical studies are quantitative, studying transitions by measuring turnover (De Vos et al., 2021) and unable to capture the more nuanced experience of a socially constructed process of transition.

Career transitions and gig-working

Studies have cast light on the contradictory experiences (Kunda et al., 2002) of even highly-skilled, seemingly self-directed (Marler et al., 2002) gig-workers, such as job insecurity (McAlpine, 2010), uncertainty (Trevor-Roberts et al., 2019) and social isolation (Clinton et al., 2006).

Cohen and Mallon's (1999) leading study on the transition of NHS managers to self-employment focussed on participants' expectations of their new employment context and its realities, with reference to the changing nature of careers and the concept of boundaryless careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). One major finding that resonated strongly with me, was the experience of participants being less about breaking free from organisational boundaries and more about reconstructing the boundaries. The majority of participants were still attached to their organisational careers, feeling the pull of both change and continuity. This perhaps echoes psychotherapeutic concepts of individuals experiencing unfinished business with unresolved pasts (Greenberg & Malcolm, 2002). Another related study of self-employed women explored the nuances around the push/pull factors influencing participants decisions to leave organisation life including the (im)balance between personal and professional life (Duberley et al., 2006). Using Barley's (1989) model of career structuration, they found

that individuals draw on existing scripts embedded in institutional forms but also developed new scripts such as portfolio working.

Gold and Fraser's (2002) study of portfolio translators found choices can only be made when people have resources to support them, and portfolio careers may be limited to those with perseverance and marketable skills to sustain the transition.

Career transitions and gig-working in the legal sector

Research has identified perceived barriers and structural inequalities in UK law firms, especially for women and ethnic minorities (Tomlinson et al., 2013; Sommerland, 2016). Whilst mobility within the legal profession has been researched (Tomlinson et al., 2019; Garth & Sterling, 2018), little research has explored lawyers working outside professional partnerships (Rab, 2019). A possible explanation for the lack of empirical research could be the relatively recent emergence of this trend and researchers have focused more on those who perceive themselves as disenfranchised (Sommerland, 2016) or as sideliners (Carroll & Vaughan, 2019). However, research has shown that even in elite professional careers, individuals can experience difficulties in adapting to new roles (Gustafsson & Swart, 2020).

Career transitions and craft

The concept of craft has been used in various ways by career academics. Inkson's (2004) use of craft, drawing on career construction theory (Savickas, 2002), is a metaphor to emphasise the role of the individual in constructing their own career, balancing behavioural and psychological considerations of functionality and creativity.

Akkermans and Tims (2017) argue for individuals to achieve dynamic person–career fit over time and within their relevant contexts through the process of career crafting to ensure long-term sustainability of their career development. They build on job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Tims & Bakker, 2010) literature which focuses on the proactive behaviours an individual can undertake to change elements of their specific job and extend this concept to apply to career. Separate research independently formulates a model of career crafting that explores the linkages between contextual factors and past, present and future career pathways (Vidwans, 2016; Vidwans & Du Plessis, 2020), consisting of an interconnected triad of relational, task and cognitive crafting.

Career transitions and fit

The concept of fit is elusive (Judge & Ferris, 1992) and has been studied extensively and usually from a quantitative managerialist perspective to assess organisational outcomes (Kristof, 1996). A lack of fit is conceptualised as misfit and rare qualitative research suggests that a perception of misfit can be a painful experience, stemming from growing discomfort or sudden changes, and can sometimes be signalled from others (Follmer et al., 2018).

Without linking specifically to concepts of fit, Inkson (2004) suggests that to craft a career enables individuals to solve life-problems in a practical way, and to implement their personal sense of self. Both adjustment (Schlossberg, 1981) and identity (Ibarra, 2005) perspectives of CT discuss a concept of disengagement or disequilibrium as antecedents of CT though not linked explicitly to fit literature. CT research on mid-careerists using the lens of chaos theory (Bright & Pryor, 2011), found that their CTs were often precipitated by a trigger event such as disillusionment as part of a finding a fit process (Peake and McDowall, 2012). Key to their findings was happenstance and chance rather than a systematic planned process were integral to find a fit.

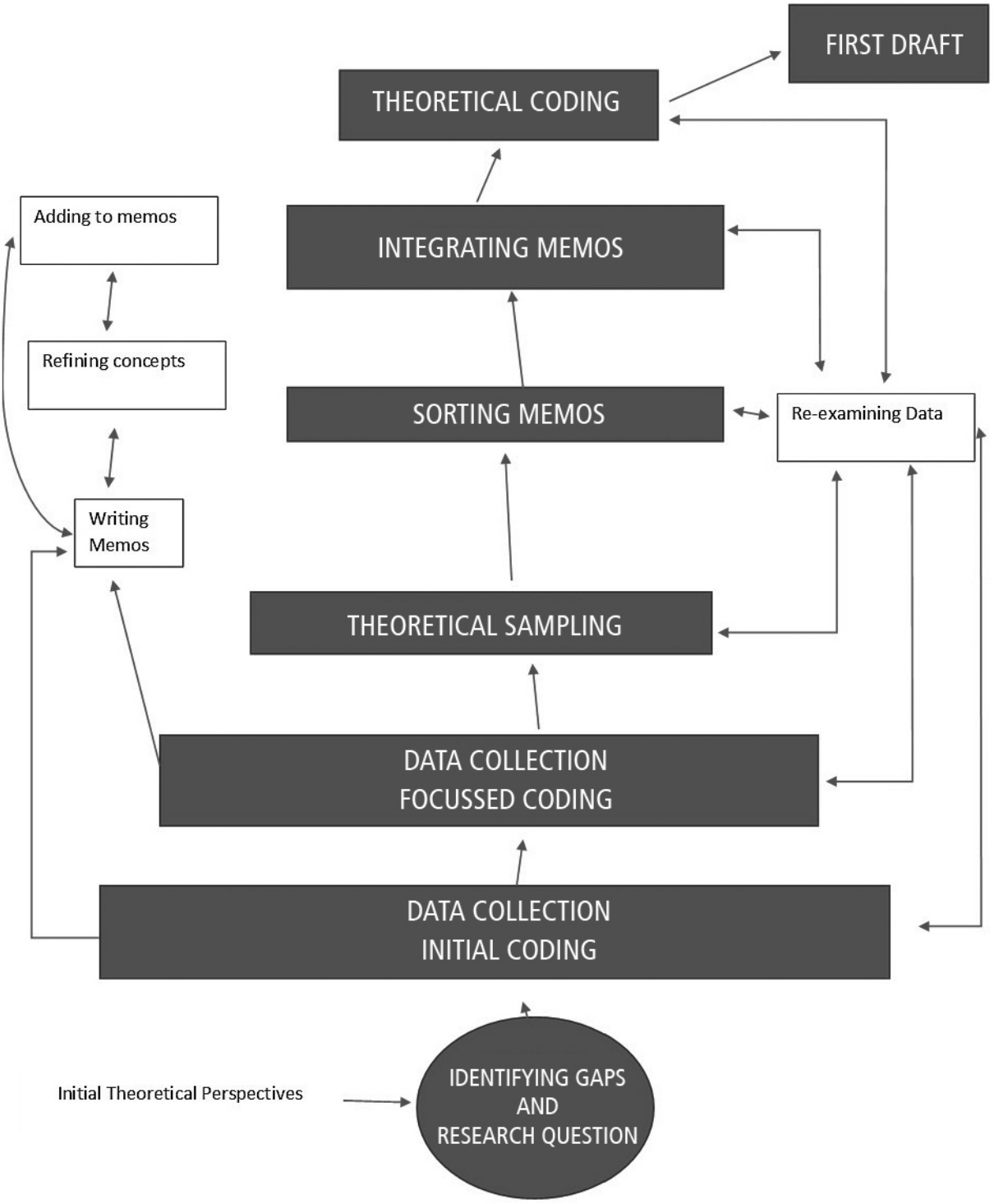
Research methodology

I was drawn to CGT as a transparent process to actively engage in researcher-reflexivity (Charmaz, 2017), especially how my own experiences and assumptions as a lawyer and career coach interact with participants and our co-constructed data. I have worked in BigLaw and have worked independently making me an insider-outsider (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Reflexivity is a defining feature of constructivist research (Charmaz, 2017) requiring me to continually engage reflexively in my research.

CGT differs from earlier iterations of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) by proposing that neither data nor theory is discovered;

it is co-constructed by researchers and participants (Charmaz, 2006). CGT is appropriate when literature may have models, but these were developed on populations other than those of interest to the researcher, and no theory is available to illuminate that process (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Figure 1: Research Process
(Source: Researcher's own and adapted from Charmaz (1990)



Employing CGT's constant comparison, I analysed the data with reference to relevant literature concurrently with data collection. CGT involves a cyclical, abductive (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007) process of data collection, analysis, theoretical coding, constant comparison, memo-writing and theoretical sampling (Gordon-Finlayson, 2019), emphasising thick description (Ponterotto, 2006) to provide for rich data.

Participants

I started gathering data by purposefully recruiting participants, through my own professional networks, who experienced the research phenomenon (Goulding, 2002) aligned with CGT (Birks & Mills, 2011). I ended up with 15 participants, 9 women and 6 men, most in their 40s.

Findings and grounded theory constructed from data

My analysis of data, grounded in the events, processes and accounts of the participants, constructed a grounded theory illustrated by Figure 2. I constructed 'Craft My Own Way' from the data as the core category or theoretical fit (ironic, given another key category was fit); one that I perceived reflected the complexity of participants' journeys.

I chose the word 'Craft' to link to participants' in vivo codes such as shaping and carving and to extant literature. Linking the concept of gig-working with the concept of shaping a role around a person, one participant shared:

> 'The nature of self-employment is that it is so individual…you shape the role or your work… around the person, rather than the other way around, where this is the job description, do you fit into that.'

This formed the seeds of the concept of craft, which became the backbone of theory-building, and shaped the research focusing on the process of craft- how did participants do that? From the accounts of participants, craft in this context was less about reaching a static destination, but more a process of shifting mindset to a constantly evolving way of working.

Through the CGT constant comparison method, 'Craft' was constructed as a psychosocial process through which participants de-constructed and re-constructed their 'BigLawyer' and 'GigLawyer' Worlds. This involved the connected processes of: (a) feeling lack of fit and being stuck on a traditional path; (b) breaking free from a traditional mindset; and (c) engaging in inter-related planned and emergent behavioural and cognitive crafting processes and adjusting to their own way of working, whilst connected to their BigLawyer World. Though many participants remained uncertain about the future, most constructed gig-working to be prepared for the unknown and craft their own role in society. As another participant reflected:

> 'I've learned…that it's okay to not do what you're socially conditioned to believe that you're supposed to be doing. So you're supposed to be on the step ladder continuously for the rest of your life to retire. I think that it's okay…to do things in your own framework and not be a sheep and follow what other people believe you should be doing. And create your own path'.

Discussion

Research has found feeling locked-in a non-preferred workplace inhibiting individuals moving roles, though this has been associated with perceptions of low employability (Stengard et al., 2016). Contrastingly, the high status and being on an institutionalised 'traditional' route from school to law firm, exacerbated by high organisational career-management (Dries & Pepermans, 2008) and specialisation rigidity, enacted the cost of golden handcuffs (Falcao, 2015) for participants to feel stuck in the law firm environment. Despite participants having what can be conceptualised as elite status in the legal industry (Dinovitzer, 2011), they experienced being stuck on a traditional path.

Juxtaposed against this feeling of being stuck, the findings suggest participants' change processes are triggered by feeling a lack of fit in the law firm environment. My findings echo Peake and McDowall's (2012) study in finding fit is experienced as a key construct by individuals in their CTs. Individuals may perceive misfit over a gradual period of time, feeling

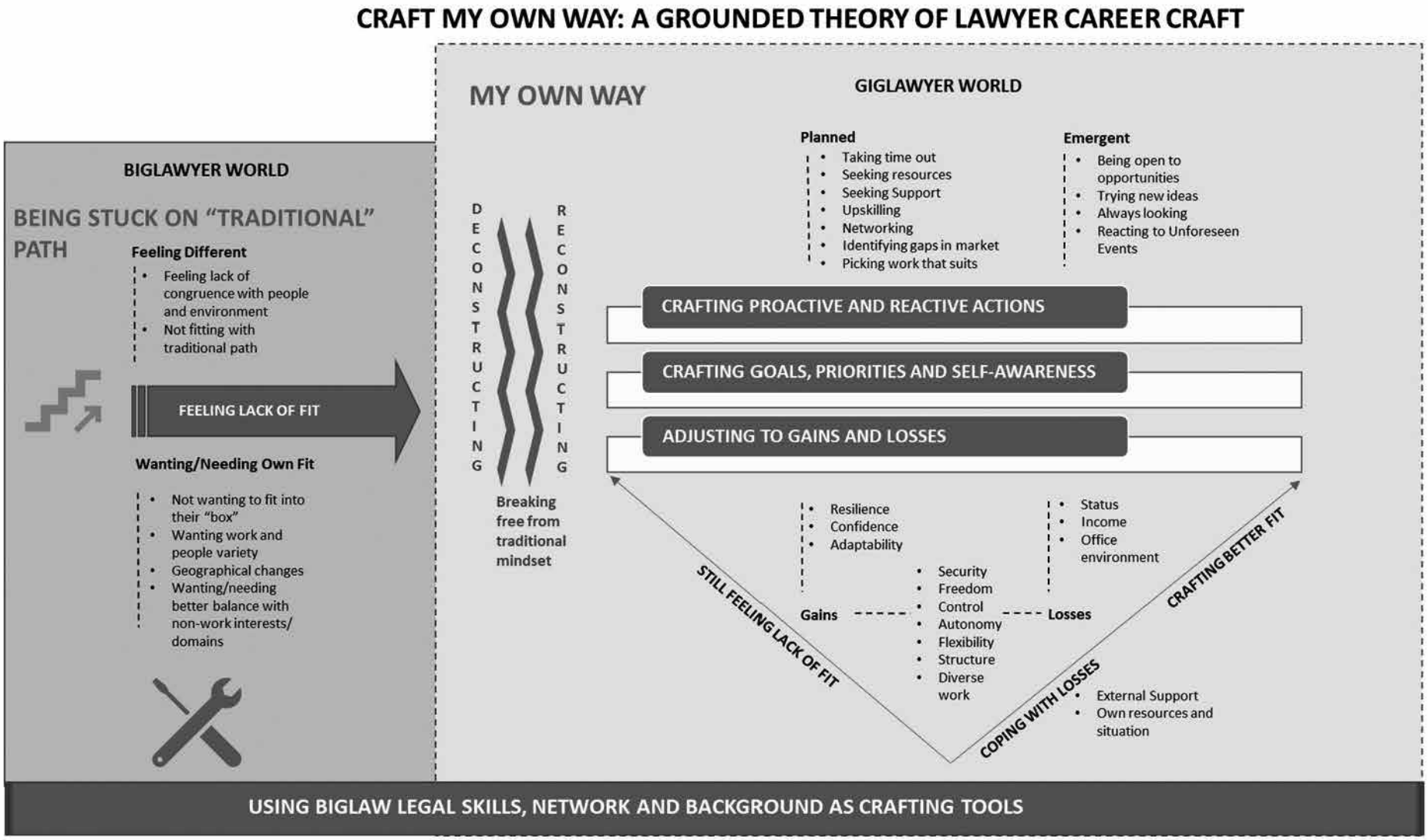


Figure 2: Grounded theory constructed from data

different compared to others in their current working environments and when their needs and wants in life appear different to what they believe can be offered by their employer.

Gig-working studies have explored push/pull factors associated with decisions to undertake gig-work (Mallon, 1998). Cohen and Mallon's (1999) study found one of the triggers for individuals to seek self-employment was a perception that the organisation was no longer a good match. This resonates with the findings of this study about participants wanting to align their work with their non-work interests. All participants described an experience of reaching some type of turning point (Ebaugh, 1988) following which they exhibited an external expression to leave BigLaw. Unlike the concept of disengagement (Ashforth, 2000), my findings suggest that the experience meant to participants 'breaking free' from constraining workplace structures (Fenwick, 1998) as well as a traditional socially-constructed attitude to work.

Participants' mixed emotional experiences of being physically or psychologically outside of a law firm environment resonated with conceptualisations of under-institutionalised liminality (Ibarra and Obodaru, 2016), being ambivalent about their situation and simultaneously anxious and excited, disoriented and liberated, frightened and elated. Contrasting with most CT models (e.g. Schlossberg, 1981) characterised by a finite period of liminality, Ibarra and Obodaru (2016) found that endings are more ambiguous, resonating with the constructions of my participants.

Whilst much literature has explored boundaryless and protean career attitudes (Kundi et al., 2021), there appears little in the literature exploring the process of individuals changing attitudes. My findings seem to suggest that participants constructed a shift in their attitudes or mindsets. They appeared to engage in a process of de-constructing their traditional mindset and re-constructing attitudes towards a different way of working and the legitimacy (Stokes, 2021) of their own roles in a broader social context. This is an integral process in constructivist career counselling approaches (Brott, 2001), and using this theoretical lens to interpret these findings may represent my bias as a coach.

The processes enacted by the participants in the wider CT process appear similar to aspects of career crafting processes conceptualised by both Vidwans (2016) and Akkermans and Tims (2017). However, contrasting with purely agentic theoretical perspectives, participants' accounts do not suggest that agency alone is at play. The role of emergence, serendipity and chance, such as reflected in chaos theory of careers (Bright & Pryor, 2011) and systems frameworks (McMahon & Patton, 2018), appear to have influenced participants' experiences in their GigLawyer worlds.

Participants constructed responses to changes in terms of gains and losses requiring coping and adjustment, resonating with qualitative conceptualisations of career adaptability in facilitating CTs (McMahon et al., 2012; Ebberwein et al., 2004). Most of their constructed gains and losses were more nuanced and contradictory, echoing extant gig literature (eg. Cohen & Mallon 1999; Barley & Kunda, 2006; Fenwick, 2006). Gold and Fraser (2002) raised the critical insight that gig-working was only available to those who had the resources to support them, reflecting Schlossberg's (1981) position that an individual's ability to cope with a transition is context-dependent. This extends extant research that even in the case of gig-workers associated with an established profession, coping mechanisms are useful (Petriglieri et al., 2019).

The adjusting process was constructed as a recursive cycle in connection with the other craft processes to craft better fit with changing circumstances, resonating with Nicholson's (1990) CT cycle of learning and extant findings that gig-work is episodic (Koch et al., 2019; Mallon, 1999) and may serve different purposes at different times (Burton et al., 2016; Marshall, 2016).

A notable paradox constructed in this change process is the tension between continuity and change. Participants may have left BigLaw, but BigLaw may not have left them. Echoing Duberley et al.'s (2006) study of CT to gig-working, this study found that transition represented more than a clean break, but also a shading from one context to the other with ongoing links. In the process of crafting a different way of working, participants drew heavily on their BigLawyer narratives and routines (Petriglieri et al., 2019), which remained an integral part of their GigLawyer present

and possible futures, resonating with constructivist assumptions of career as a sense-making narrative (Wise & Millward, 2005).

However, many participants in my study constructed this sense of continuity as a tension between holding on and letting go (Osherton, 1980). They experienced BigLawyer narratives as sometimes empowering, sometimes disempowering, symbolising power dynamics in socially constructed professional roles. Participants are insiders in the sense they may use BigLaw narratives as crafting tools but are outsiders no longer part of the system that creates those tools.

The challenge of CT for these participants appeared less about dualisms of continuity or change but more about continuity in change (Duberley et al., 2014; Duberley et al., 2006). I agree with Pringle and Mallon (2003) who questioned the merit of pitting traditional against boundaryless/ protean career attitudes. It may be that too rigid constructions of BigLawyer and GigLawyer are false dichotomies that fail to recognise the porous boundaries between these worlds, as participants weaved coherent sense of their careers.

Conclusions and implications for practice

CTs are central to understanding how individuals' construct their career experiences (Bimrose et al., 2013). In most transition theories, ending is one of equilibrium (Ng et al., 2007) or relative stability (Schlossberg, 1981). In contrast, the construction of 'My Own Way' is generated from engaging in crafting processes through which participants craft their own role in society, albeit within a constantly evolving paradox of dynamic equilibrium (Smith and Lewis, 2011). This study also extends gig-working literature and craft as a useful metaphor to explore CT processes as an ongoing process of constructing coherence involving constantly looking inside oneself, outside oneself and ahead in time. The findings illuminate how feelings of misfit can precipitate role changes which may be less explicit in existing CT models.

COVID-19 may have shifted the world of work significantly, particularly for many knowledge professionals. As workers seek more flexibility and shift away from more traditional hierarchical structures and explore gig working routes, there will be a process of transition and adjustment. Whilst this study has been deliberately focussed on a narrow segment of knowledge workers and the findings are not intended to be generalisable, this grounded theory could offer a career coaching discussion framework. By considering craft to frame CTs for those professionals seeking an alternative to traditional linear careers, career professionals could seek to understand better the possible tensions individuals experience as they construct their career narratives. Despite tensions, the past remains integral for those who are in the process of a CT to career craft their own role in society. The model could help address possible challenges clients face of creating false dichotomies in the context of CTs that fail to recognise the salience of continuity in the change process. In a constantly evolving world of work, it is easy to feel powerless and a victim of circumstances. In this regard, career craft could be a life skill that harnesses agency and emergence, continually honed over time to help create better fit between one's changing needs and one's dynamic environment.

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NICEC - Seeking new Fellows

The National Institute for Career Education and Counselling invites applications from UK residents to become a NICEC Fellow.

NICEC is owned, led and run by its Fellows who are appointed on the basis of their ability to support NICEC to achieve its aims. In legal terms, NICEC is a company and its Fellows are shareholders. Fellows meet at least six times a year to discuss the running of NICEC and share experiences and expertise. Fellows make an annual financial contribution to NICEC (currently £80 each). NICEC Members also pay annual membership fees.

Fellows should be able to provide evidence of:

- a significant impact in the field of career development that may be evidenced by experience in the domains of practice, development, policy or research;
- a willingness to facilitate or stimulate constructive dialogue across domains of policy, practice, development and research;
- a commitment to continued learning in this field; and
- an interest in joining the NICEC and actively working to develop its activities.

We anticipate appointing four new Fellows at the start of 2023.

We are interested in representing as many types of career development work as possible and having Fellows from diverse backgrounds and communities within the UK. At present we would especially welcome applications from people whose work focuses on primary schools, further education or with employers and also from those who are in current practice or who are involved in managing careers services.

Deadline for applications: 9th January 2023.

For further information about how to apply visit the NICEC website at **www.nicec.org**

Forthcoming events | NICEC

Call for Papers: NICEC Journal - April 2023

Journal of the
National Institute for Career Education and Counselling

In order to enable a wide and varied spectrum of contributions, papers are invited on any aspect of career development.

Submissions are now accepted via the Journal's online platform: www.nicecjournal.co.uk
Select 'Make a submission' and read the author guidelines before uploading your draft article.

For enquiries, please contact the editor:

Pete Robertson: p.robertson@napier.ac.uk

NICEC Events

NICEC offer a series of early evening seminars and longer network meetings during the year, normally in January, March, May, July, September and November. These are likely to continue to take place via Zoom for the foreseeable future.

Topics for 2023 will be finalised in the autumn and details of the events will be broadcast from the website. Please register your interest when the events are promoted to receive the login details.

Details for the NICEC events calendar are kept up-to-date on the website: www.nicec.org
Please send any queries to Claire.m.nix@gmail.com

Topics	Event & presenter	Date and time
Career guidance theories	*Free CPD Event for NICEC and CDI Members:* NICEC/CDI – At the Cutting Edge	Monday 14th November 1.30-4.30pm
Career education in US higher education	*Seminar* Contributors: Tristram Hooley, Melanie Buford and Michael Stebleton	Tuesday 29 November 2022 5-6.30pm

Seminars and Network Meetings:

- Included in membership fees for NICEC Fellows and members.
- For non-members: £25 for seminars and £35 for network meetings
- For students: £4 for seminars and £7 for network meetings

Cutting-Edge Events:

NICEC also run Cutting-Edge events that are free to CDI members and NICEC Fellows and members. The next Cutting-Edge event, which will focus on career guidance theories, will be on **Monday 14th November** at 1.30pm until 4.30 pm.

Forthcoming events | CDI

After a two-year hiatus due to COVID, we hope to be able to meet everyone from the career development sector again, in-person, for informative and enjoyable events.

For the full training and events programme, including expert training sessions, conferences, webinars, CDI Academy courses and more, please visit thecdi.net/Skills-training-events

If you have any queries, please contact the events team by emailing events@thecdi.net

Assuring Quality

The CDI has a critical role to play in setting standards and articulating what quality looks like for the sector. Importantly we are an awarding body, managing the Qualification in Career Development (previously the QCG/D) and the UK Register for Career Development Professionals, which is pivotal to our ongoing quality agenda and is fast becoming recognised as the sector's equivalent to chartered status.

We are delighted to be working in partnership with NICEC on the Journal and the NICEC/CDI research-focused events which take place twice a year across the UK.

The next 'cutting edge' event will be on 14 November 2022.

ABOUT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The Career Development Institute (CDI) is the UK-wide professional body for the career development sector. We have a growing membership of 4500 individual members and affiliate organisations and speak with one voice for a lively and diverse sector.

We have a key role to play in influencing UK skills policy as it affects those with whom career development practitioners work and a clear purpose to improve and assure the quality and availability of career development services for all throughout the UK.

All CDI members subscribe to a Code of Ethics, which is supported by a strong disciplinary process, and subscribe to the principles of CPD.

Importantly the CDI is responsible for the UK Register of Career Development Professionals; the National Occupational Standards (NOS: CD); the first Career Progression Pathway for the sector; UK Career Development Awards; QCD and QCG/D qualifications; the CDI Academy; the Careers Framework and a UK-wide CPD programme.

Below are a few of our major achievements:

- A powerful brand supported by an evolving website **www.thecdi.net**; social media (Twitter and LinkedIn) presence; and quarterly magazine *Career Matters*;
- A schedule of CPD, skills training, webinars and conferences based on market analysis and members' training needs;
- A growing media and lobbying presence with the CDI recognised as the *expert voice* in the field; advising politicians, speaking at conferences and commenting on policy;
- The establishment of the UK Career Development Awards – ten sponsored awards including *Careers Adviser/Coach of the Year* and *Careers Leader of the Year and Lifetime Achievement Award*;
- Clear focus on professional identity and increasing the professionalism of the sector through our influence, ownership and development of the QCD and QCG/D and the CDI Academy including the new *CDI Certificate in Careers Leadership*.

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The Journal is made available to all CDI members via our website.

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