
building on what we know
career learning theory
the original article

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The Career-learning CAFÉ

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Bill Law (1992, 2010)
career-learning theory

in A G Watts, Bill Law, John Killeen, Jennifer M Kidd and Ruth Hawthorn
Rethinking Careers Education and Guidance - Theory, Policy and Practice
London: Routledge

now free-on-line at
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an account of critical thinking in career management - thinking-feeling - processing stage-
by-stage - leading to readiness for action

a companion piece with

Bill Law (1981, 2010)
community-interaction theory

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an account of social-emotional influences on career management - how they are
experienced in family, neighbourhood and education - what they mean for careers work

both are meta-analyses, 'community interaction' signposting influences, 'learning theory'
how they are managed

'learning theory' recapitulates scene-setting ideas in the earlier article - describing the
thinking to which these new ideas are introduced - this later account adds diagrams,
organising the ideas and showing how this work extends them

these (skippable) scene-setting ideas are on pages 2-5 - boxed in green

career-learning theory as a distinct set of ideas begins on page 6

There is no shortage of ideas about influences on career. Some are supported by research; many have been incorporated into formal theory. This article takes another look at these ideas, and reconfigures them. The configuration is as a progressively learned sequence of career-development capacities and behaviours. Progression is important for two related reasons:

- 1. it identifies what is 'basic' and what is 'developed' in people's career experience;*
- 2. it indicates how the more basic experiences prepare the ground (or fail to prepare the ground) for later development.*

This is a matter of some practical importance. Career development is increasingly problematic. Anticipating the consequences of one's own actions is ever more troublesome; plans laid today commonly require adjustment - and, possibly, abandonment - later. Notions of career planning based on a once-and-for-all (or even once-in-a-while) review of the options and priorities are weak because both the options and the priorities will change. The requirement is that people need repeatedly to review career choices and transitions, with thought and care. All of this argues for supporting people through a lifelong process of career-related thinking and rethinking, action and new action.

The progression developed in this chapter therefore refers to how people learn to manage their careers. Like all theories, it offers

*descriptions of what happens;
explanations, suggesting why they happen in the way they do; and
predictions, anticipating what can happen in what conditions.*

A strong justification for any career-development theory is its ability, through prediction, to suggest useful models for careers education and guidance.

The chapter will first examine similarities and differences between existing career-development theories. It will next present a new career-learning theory, first as a set of ten propositions, and then as a series of four stages and eight sub-stages. Finally, it will locate this theory in relation to existing theories, and explore implications for practice.

key components in career-development theories

Career-development theory is not unitary. It comprises a range of theories, offering a variety of configurations, each offering foreground significance to different aspects of work, role and self. For our present purposes, it is useful to identify four broadly distinguishable clusters: trait-and-factor theories; self-concept theories; opportunity-structure theories; and community-interaction theories.

trait-and-factor theories: Trait-and-factor theories offer foreground significance to specifically identified features of the self, such as abilities or personal orientations. They suggest matching models for careers education and guidance, assuming the usefulness of making a link between particular people and suitable work, for example through structured interviewing and computer-assisted guidance. Much of Rodger's (1952) 'seven-point plan' - with its use of such descriptors as 'aptitude' and 'personality' - relied upon such thinking. Psychometric testing is also based on such assumptions (Kline, 1975), as were some early attempts at profiling.

At its simplest this is 'pegs-and-holes' thinking, but it is capable of more sophistication. For example, Dawis (1994) explains satisfactory career development in terms of a person-fit match, taking account of four sets of individual differences: (1) ability; (2) reinforcement values - that is, personal needs, settling over time into stable values; (3) satisfaction by the employee; and (4) person-environment fit - that is, 'harmony with the environment'. Match and mismatch between person and position may, therefore, be dynamic and interactive.

self-concept theories: The 'self-concept' connotes a more interactive self, developing through life stages, and - in so doing - experiencing changing motivations and other feelings about work (Super, 1957). Such theories yield more subtle descriptions of an individual, difficult to fit to the ready-made categories of trait-and-factor thinking (Roe, 1951). They emphasise the importance for careers education and guidance of the expression and use of the affective, changing, multi-layered and unique experience of each person (Daws, 1968).

A well-defined use of such highly individualised ideas appears in the application to careers education and guidance of personal-construct theory (Edmonds, 1979; Offer, 1995). It suggests counselling models in guidance, and experiential learning in careers education. Some aspects of recording achievement and individual action planning also call upon self-concept theory (Watts, 1991), as do some aspects of computer-assisted guidance (Law, 1994). All invite helpers to work sensitively, in the learner's own terms, seeking bases for the learner's choices and actions.

Accommodation of interaction between person and position is found in Gottfredson's (1981) work. She argues that children orientate by stages to: (1) size and social power - noticing the differences between *child* and *adult*; (2) sex roles - noticing the differences between *masculine* and *feminine*; (3) social valuation - using more abstract concepts to discriminate levels of *status* and *prestige*; and (4) internal unique valuation - noticing the differences between *me* and *others* in term of interests, abilities and values. These 'selves' are not conceived as growing in a social vacuum.

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opportunity-structure theories: That social position is an important determinant of career-related life chances is a central feature of opportunity-structure theories. These offer foreground significance to the labour economy and its supporting education-and-training and social structures. People are thought of not so much as choosing work as being chosen for it. They do not need to agonise about what they want because, it is argued, they take what is available to them. If they like their work, this is because they have learned to like what they can secure - through 'anticipatory socialisation' (Roberts, 1977). This explains, for example, the willingness with which the sons of working-class families assume - and even celebrate - menial work (Willis, 1977). Willis is, however, more interested than Roberts in the interactive processes through which family, peer and neighbourhood attachments mediate social-class influence. His ethnography identifies significant variations in *individual* responses to social experience.

A more recent ethnography comes from Banks *et al.* (1992), who maintain that social class has a variety of entwined effects on career: educational attainment, participation in post-compulsory education and subsequent labour-market position are the interwoven 'manifestations of inequality'. The conclusion is pessimistic: 'many young people are allowed, if not actively encouraged, to set themselves adrift in the labour market without adequate preparation' (p.188). No model for practice is developed.

Models for gradualist careers education and guidance interventions are not much elaborated by these theories. However, the theories can suggest the value of career-development coaching, which helps learners to identify, practise and refine the competencies needed to secure the opportunities open to them, and to cope and (where possible) thrive in a demanding and competitive working environment.

community-interaction theories: Community-interaction theories offer foreground significance to direct-and-personal encounters between individuals and their community. People act, it is argued, for and in response to other people; encounters with and attachment to individuals and groups are both the cause and the effect of career development. Social exchanges such as interpersonal feedback, modelling and expectation are important in this process (Law, 1981b). Such thinking sets career development in its more immediate community context: emphasising, for example, the importance of both the entrapping and the liberating effects of learners' roles in their own neighbourhoods.

Although presented as a 'social *learning* theory', Krumboltz's (1994) theory is concerned with community interaction. He explains career development in terms of person-environment interactions, distinguishing between *instrumental* interactions where preferences favour activities in which people succeed, and *associative* interactions where preferences favour activities valued in the culture. In both cases, individual *schemata* (beliefs about self and the world) are assembled and modified to take account of the learning from these interactions. Krumboltz specifies feedback, modelling and influence as features of this process.

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Such theories suggest that the wider the range of these contacts, the broader the framework for choice a person can construct. They therefore direct attention to the **uses** of work experience and other strategies which introduce people to a range of perspectives on career (Law, 1981b). The model encourages developing a human-resource network and helping people to make constructive use of it.

a theoretical synopsis

The relationships between these theories is less tidy than analyses and diagrams adequately portray. There are important within-cluster differences, and some permeate the boundaries (Dawis, Gottfredson and Willis being identified as examples, but there are many others). Nonetheless, figure one (following page) suggests how each type of theory tends to identify different foreground-phenomena, offer different explanations, and imply different models.

There are further significant differences between the four broad types of theory (table 1, below). Both trait-and-factor and self-concept theories substantially understand career in *psychological* terms; whereas opportunity-structure and community-interaction theories are more strongly expressed in *sociological* terms.

table one
distinctions between different career-development theories

| | psychological | sociological |
|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| structured | trait-and-factor theories | opportunity-structure theories |
| interactive | self-concept theories | community-interaction theories |

Attention has thus been expanded from what is 'in here' - the person and the self - to include more attention to what is 'out there' - the working world and its positions. Furthermore, trait-and-factor theories and opportunity-structure theories focus on more or less firmly *structured* categories of self (suggesting the possibility of relatively stable relationships between self and work) and of socio-economic phenomena (producing generation-on-generation effects) respectively; whereas self-concept theories and community-interaction theories focus on relatively *interactive* concepts, suggesting that links change within self, and between self and community, and that this may provoke intra- or inter-personal conflict and thus catalyse changes-of-mind.

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figure one
focuses of different career-development theories

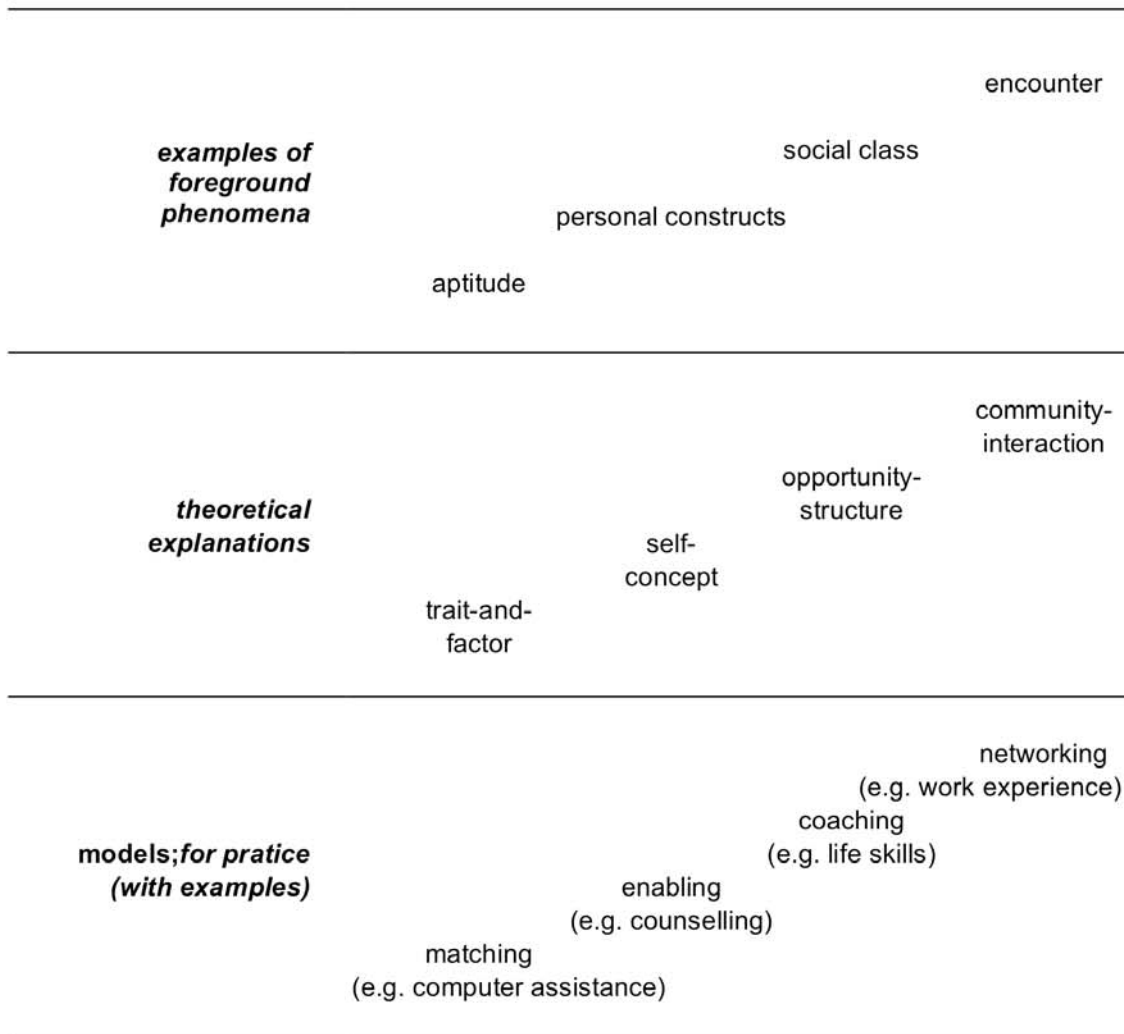


Figure 1 is based on the historical sequence in which these four sets of ideas have emerged in Britain over nearly half a century. Each has responded to social concerns prevalent at the time of its first coinage (Law, 1981a). But each has also proved persistent: none has been discarded; all have provided the basis of a sustained addition to the repertoire of careers thinking (and practice). There may be no central congruence to be found here (cf. Savickas and Lent, 1994). But theory reflects the field's conversation with itself, developing new questions which previous contributors have left unanswered.

a career-learning theory

The question in this chapter is, then, 'what new questions might a career-learning theory seek to answer?'. There are three in particular, ranging from the specific to the general:

- (i) When a person's attention shifts from one of these multifarious influences to another, or when a person decides for the first time to start paying conscious attention to *something* in her or his experience, why does that change come about?
- (ii) How is it that different people attend to different influences: some to some parts of the structures and interactions outlined above, some to others?
- (iii) How do people embark upon the discovery of and response to these influences, how is that voyage developed and extended into adulthood, and what enables and hinders it?

The concept of progression addresses all three questions. As we shall see, it can accommodate extant theoretical material. But it does so in a different fore-ground-and-background configuration, and with different implications for practice. The theory is set out as ten propositions:

1. Some career-development activities depend upon relatively 'basic' capacities, in the sense that these capacities are innate, or are easier to acquire, or can be acquired without the benefit of much prior learning.
2. Other activities depend on more 'developed' capacities, in the sense that they are needed to deal with more complex, dynamic, abstract or emotionally laden experiences.
3. Whether basic or developed, these capacities include both intellectual and behavioural elements, but they also include capacities to acknowledge and manage one's own and others' feelings.
4. The more basic activities require that a person is able to *sense* career-related information and impressions, and to *sift* that material into recognisable patterns that can become the basis for action.
5. The more developed activities require a person to *focus* the material more tightly (for example, by differentiating elements in terms of point of view or ascribed value) and to *understand* it (for example, by being able to identify causes and probable effects in specific scenarios).
6. Some career-development activities require no more than the basic capacities: such activities can be characterised as a 'sense, sift and act' type, used by everyone in more or less routine situations.
7. But everyone will, from time to time, need to engage more developed capacities, where the action is critical or its ramifications are extensive. Here sensing and sifting need to be extended into a 'focus, understand and act' type.
8. The more developed capacities cannot be engaged unless some basic capacities have been successfully developed to support them. In simple terms, a person cannot concentrate upon and properly grasp information she or he has not first sensed and sifted. In more complex terms, the capacity to focus and understand requires a foundation of prior learning.
9. Where prior learning has not been accomplished, or has been accomplished in a form which distorts rather than represents the information, further development may be hindered. Put specifically: a person is likely to misunderstand on the basis of flimsy or misperceived evidence. Put generally: the sifting of knowledge into stereotyped, or other habitually biased frames, will distort further development.
10. Like other learning, career development can be educated. A programme which builds a cycle or cycles of learning, developing from sensing through sifting and focusing to understanding, will equip a person with an educated repertoire of capacities to support career-development actions.

The key elements in the repertoire are set out in figure three, using the four levels indicated in propositions 4 and 5, in ascending order. The assumption is that most people have the potential to develop such a repertoire, but that they may need help to do so - for use and re-use in lifelong career development.

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sensing

The assumption is that people work from information about work, role and self. The acquisition of that information is here called sensing. It is argued to entail *gathering information* and *assembling sequences*.

gathering information: Opportunity-structure theory points to the basic importance of gathering information. Its sole explicit practical concomitant is that people need accurate information to identify opportunities 'actually open to them', and 'where they can be found' (Roberts, 1977). A less rigidly structured conception of information is found in community-interaction theory, which characterises information as impression, feedback and modelling (Law, 1981b). All are a matter of report or encounter, requiring direct and personal contact. They are argued to be an important means through which young people build a picture of how - in career terms - things are.

Assembling such material begins early. From before they go to school, children assemble impressions of work in the family, neighbourhood and community. They learn something of the work of the adults in their home, through sight and sound, and even touch, smell and taste. Biographies are full of such encounters, assembling them into what opportunity structure terms 'anticipatory socialisation'. An example is the recollection of an adult philosopher remembering his childhood in the family library: 'with a creak like a shoe ... pale, dank, slightly blistered pages, covered with small black veins, which drank ink and smelt of mildew... holy objects' (Sartre, 1964, p. 28). Of course, what is thought 'holy' among the *fin de siècle* bourgeoisie may or may not be much revered in turn-of-the-century Basildon. Elsewhere, other encounters, articulated perhaps in the images of television and tabloids, offer different - and perhaps more attenuated - impressions of work.

It may seem fanciful to call such impressionistic material 'careers information'. But early frames-of-mind, into which fragments of child learning are assembled, shape the accommodation for more formal and more urgent learning later in life. A variety of frames-of-mind are used to accommodate and give order to career learning. A natural frame appears to be a map, connoting opportunity-structure concepts of 'where-it-can-be-found'. Maps locate starting-points and directions, as well as barriers and destinations. Terms and phrases such as 'route' ('career' is cognate with 'carriage'), 'cross-roads', 'prospects' and 'coming a long way' occur repeatedly in ordinary conversations about career. This process of map-making is sustained into adulthood. Gowler and Legge (1989) refer to what they call 'patterns of symbolic construction', representing work as 'a race to be won', 'a mountain to be climbed', 'a maze to be run': all locations for the accommodation of aspects of the working world.

Maps can be both topographical and metaphorical. Expanding the boundaries of the map might mean that the child locates work roles undertaken (topographically) *in other places*, but also (metaphorically) *in other ways*. In both cases, proximity and distance are connoted. Proximity is about how different examples of work are close to each other, but also how they are close to me. It therefore locates self on the map. I can visualise myself as at a starting-point, on a journey, negotiating a barrier or arriving at a destination. In Gowler and Legge's uses of the metaphor, the person sees her or his self as a kind of competitor, mountaineer or maze runner. But long before such fraught images are conjured, a child experiences self as 'customer' and 'helper', as well as in roles with close metaphorical ties to work - 'friend', 'team-member', 'brother' or 'sister'. Again, such early learning frames later thinking - not only concerning work, but also concerning role and self (see Law, 1996).

Whether as a map, or - as we shall see - in other ways, fragments can be assembled into forms which will preserve and organise them for future use. Otherwise they remain a confusing muddle of unusable impressions. The cogency of gestalt psychology is that finding order gives pleasure (Storr, 1992).

assembling sequences: But work is not just located in (topographical or metaphorical) space: it is located in time. Some remembered moments survive, unattached except perhaps to some palpable location (such as a grandfather's library). We all carry such minikins: scenes and voices, often aromas, difficult - now - to date or sequence. But where such fragments are located in a narrative - with a beginning, a middle and an end - the impression is put into a more durable form. Hence the importance to progression of assembling sequences.

Narrative is, like a map, a natural accommodation for information about work, role and self. Much career talk is embedded in the 'tales we tell', which narrate 'episodes' calling for new adjustments (Nicholson and West, 1989). Much of what people say about work they say through narrative. Hill (1969) reports 7-9-year-olds speaking of work in what he calls 'story-book' form, developing narratives to say what they know of their parents' work. Narrative contains information, preserves it, and makes it more readily transmittable.

There are, of course, always gaps in any story - posing questions ('what did she do then?', 'why did he do that?'). The value of narrative to childhood thinking is argued to be precisely this: that it conveys 'the given' and - through questioning - suggests 'the new' (Feldman, 1987). Hill notes that younger children will sometimes bridge the gaps in their knowledge by simply inventing new narratives. The capacity of frames-of-thought to assimilate the material they receive is, as we shall see, an important feature of career-learning theory. Questioning the gaps is a good thing; but one must not infer from this that any answer to the question is, *ergo*, also a good thing. We shall return to this issue.

Support for the importance to adults of narrative, in thinking about social situations, comes from Fiske (1993). The best 'story', she concludes, is the one that covers most of the evidence, and is coherent (consistent, plausible and complete). Such stories, she says, help people to make decisions - a claim we shall also examine in more detail later in this article. Career is, then, a narratable story, moving across a mappable terrain, from episode to episode, each with its own decisions and transitions. The usefulness of narrative to career learning is worth analysing. Like maps, narrative both puts impressions into durable form and poses questions which suggest the possibility of new learning. But narrative extends the accommodation offered by maps by

- (1) portraying roles in reciprocating relationships - mother with daughter, player with player, shopkeeper with customer, employer with employee - linking what one person does in her role to what another does in his;
- (2) moving from episode to episode, each with its own decision or transition; and
- (3) presenting sequences, inviting the investigation of causes and effects.

Story-telling is, of course, the prototypical teaching-and-learning method. As we shall see, both mapping and narrative form a foundation for what will become more developed career-development capacities. As Howard (1987, pp. 30ff.) characterises it, such schemas ('scenes, events, actions, persons, and stories') prepare for the formation of concepts ('mental representations of a category which allows a person to sort stimulus into instances and non-instances').

The central narrative is, of course, autobiography - a term not far distant in meaning from the term 'career' itself - accommodating the ever more episodic experience of my work, my roles and my self. If we still have careers, it may now be in the sense that we each try to make of that story.

sifting

Mapping and story-telling assemble sensory information into frames which locate

- > here-and-there,
- > proximate-and-distant,
- > earlier-and-later,
- > then-and-now.

Such maps and stories may be limited or extensive, general or detailed, and more or less complete.

There is more to be done. Career-learning theory suggests that making sense of learning entails a process of sifting: of *making comparisons*, and of *using concepts*.

making comparisons: Useful maps and stories portray different places, different people, different acts. Such variety invites comparisons.

Children learn to make such comparisons:

the postman's job is like the crossing attendant's and not like the shopkeeper's, because...

The comparisons establish role classifications:

'... you wear a uniform', or '... it is done outdoors', or '... it doesn't involve maths'.

'Postman' and 'crossing attendant' can appear alike in all these respects; while 'shopkeeper' may be filed elsewhere. As other cases are encountered, they are appropriately located. The resulting system can be extended to accommodate new cases.

This process is construct-formation. Without such a mental system, the clamour of experience would prove overwhelming and, therefore, unusable (Kelly, 1955). Constructs constitute a multi-dimensional framework for locating information, like-with-like. Their most important feature is that they are internally generated: each person construes her or his experience idiosyncratically. Personal constructs form the basis for much of what is meant by the term 'point of view' (Bannister and Fransella, 1986). Personal construct formation is thus argued to be an important potential contributor to our understanding of how careers develop (Edmonds, 1979).

We forget much of what we learn. Maps, stories and, now, constructs frame the material into more durable form. Indeed, a construct such as 'women's work' can survive the recollection of whatever it was that first suggested it. Constructs can be formed on the basis of very few cases. Stereotyping is the pre-emptive construing of life-roles; and stereotypes, though ill-founded, often prove durable.

The affirmation 'I don't want to do that because it doesn't involve maths' employs a construct as an explanation. While maps locate career in *space*, and stories locate it in *time*, constructs move career thinking towards the issue of *causality*. Maps and narratives may raise questions about what is known and not known; constructs - for good or ill - can suggest answers. Career-learning theory therefore sets construct formation in a progressive sequence, drawing upon awareness, assembling information, leading towards understanding.

using concepts: Some personally developed constructs are similar to shared concepts (Meadows, 1993). The relationship between construct and concept is subtle: at times, the two terms appear interchangeable (Bannister and Fransella, 1986). But while

constructs are internally generated from direct experience, concepts can be learned from others - 'ready-made'. The capacity to learn concepts is as important to career learning as the capacity to develop constructs.

In child-development theory, Piaget (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969) explicitly traces this emerging use - internally organising the material of experience into concepts - to the mature capacity of the young woman or man to think about a career. Hill (1969) finds children engaged in such tasks at 9 years of age, earlier than Piaget would have predicted.

Some such shared classification of data is necessary if communication is to be at all possible. Suppose, as a redundant teacher, that I construe

'teacher', 'comedian' and 'barrister'

as involving

a standing-up-and-talking person engaging the attention of a sitting-down-and-listening audience.

There is no ready-made career concept corresponding to this construct. To engage in public communication, I may need to use other, learned concepts, such as

education and training, arts and entertainment, and the law.

The fact that I do not associate teaching with training, that I do not think the most important thing about humour is entertainment, and that serving the law is not something that has ever occurred to me, means that my linking of the three roles may be missed by the rigid and impatient. Yet it would be unreasonable of me to expect a guidance service to re-organise its library to file all of my three instances in one place. To get any further, we must link my personal construct to the library's public concepts. Communication requires such transpositions - if not on your part, on mine.

Yet in a fast-changing economy it may be of considerable importance that shared concepts are not allowed to crystallise information into unadaptable frames-of-thought. Idiosyncratic constructs may be liberating, in an otherwise constricting experience. Such lateral thinking may be highly functional in a society constantly needing to redraw its career paths. What counts as

'teaching', 'arts and entertainment', 'sunrise industries', 'in the public sector' and 'women's work'

have all changed; and will change again.

The interchange between (shared) concept and (personal) construct is, therefore, critical, connecting the personal-and-individual with the social-and-economic. Such thinking will transform matching processes in careers education and guidance. For example, computer-assisted guidance has not yet solved the problem of linking the user's 'subjective' frame to the 'objective' frames required to access a database. But it will (Law, 1994).

Personal constructs and public concepts represent one analysis of how classifications are developed. There are many others. This chapter develops a macro-analysis of descriptive (sensing), organising (sorting), prioritising (focusing) and explanatory-and-anticipatory (understanding) concepts. A complete career-learning theory would be able to identify more. Such classifications will outline what we need to recognise and communicate about work, role and self. Indeed, the very terms 'work', 'role' and 'self' are themselves generic concepts within each of which are layered ever more detailed ways of describing and locating career-related learning.

An examination of cognitive structure in adult vocational development (Neimeyer *et al.*, 1985) suggests that this degree of detailed differentiation, together with its integration, may be - in varying respects - significant to career choice. While differentiation makes finer discriminations between micro-constructs, integration perceives the linkages between them. These notions are also considered later in this chapter: when talking below about focusing (page 13), as 'wide-angle' and 'close-up' focusing of information; when talking about understanding (page 18), in the building of cause-and-effect links between impressions.

Meanwhile, Howard (1987), more immediately to our present purpose, suggests that concepts may be analysed in the same terms as the eight parts-of-speech: nominal concepts of things, verbal concepts of action, and so on. This is attractive, because it suggests a basic relationship between the way we talk and the way we think. In the same spirit, the categorisation of concepts in table two presents the six core forms of question as a basis for identifying career-related concepts.

table two
identifying career-related concepts

| category | question | classifications |
|------------------|-----------------|---|
| location | where? | 'at home' / 'in the street' / 'in a shop' / 'far away' 'in a laboratory' / 'in the public sector' / 'in employment' |
| activity | 'what?' | talking' / 'using tools' / 'writing with pens & papers' / 'travelling' / thinking' / 'helping people' |
| condition | 'how?' | wearing a uniform' / 'noisy' / 'clean' / 'busy' 'being popular' / 'stressful' / 'unhealthy' 'away from home' |
| time | 'when?' | '9 to 5' / in shifts' / 'at leisure' / 'in spare time' 'not any more' / 'in the present' / 'in the future' |
| people | 'who?' | 'physically strong' / 'my family' / 'other people' the brainy' / the enterprising' / 'black people' |
| cause | why?' | 'runs in my family' / 'well-paid' / 'safe' 'interesting' / 'important' / 'modern' wealth-creating' / 'voluntary' |

But even here, there are cross-analyses: some classifications are relatively concrete, others more abstract. Work that 'runs in my family' is a matter of verifiable observation. But 'safe' is more abstract (in part, because it integrates a variety of more concrete 'safeties'). According to Piaget (1932), we can expect younger children to classify social and moral experience in more specific, operational and concrete terms. Abstract concepts for assigning significance to experience emerge later, he argues. Applied to education, a consequence of such thinking is that teachers might prematurely introduce children to concepts they cannot yet use (cf. Goldman, 1964).

Beginning too early might be a danger; but so is beginning too late. The work of Feuerstein (1977), developed from Piagetian theory, shows how children's and adolescents' general ability to learn is damaged by concepts ill-formed in earlier life. Our consideration of the function of narrative in framing career information warned us of this possibility. Classification errors damage development. Classification can be improved, according to Feuerstein, by targeting remedial help on the way in which people conceptualise their experience.

But as Feuerstein suggests, this cannot be done on the instant. It requires that people are helped to sense and sift a range of material concerning work, role and self; to receive feedback on how they do that; to identify where the matches and mismatches between personal and shared classifications occur; and to see how to bring about a 'useful conversation' between them.

focusing

Such a programme might be undertaken in 'wide-angle' terms - articulated, for example, to general ideas about 'women's work'. But it might also require a 'close-up' focus. That would mean attending to personally pressing instances of what is perceived to be women's work, and identifying how it is that I - and others - see these instances that way. In order to do that, a person would need to build from sensing and sifting, into knowing that point of view is a possibility, and that it alters how the information is perceived. Career-learning theory therefore argues that focusing will entail *dealing with points of view*, and *taking one's own view*.

dealing with points of view: All of this means that career learning cannot occur in a social vacuum. It is a bridge connecting what a person receives from the culture to what he or she is going to do about it. It is signposted both by the social-and-verifiable and by the individual-and-subjective. It therefore entails understanding both what a person can and cannot agree with others. All of this means dealing with points of view.

In child-development theory, Meadows (1993) cites a research-based model for the development of variously conceived senses of self. The model offers parallels to the account given above:

- (1) **categorical** identification refers to some actual or assumed fact;
- (2) **comparative** assessment takes account of another person or of self in other circumstances; and
- (3) **interpersonal** implications of self are often drawn from communication with others - so that the self is set in a social context.

As we shall see, there is more than this; but we must first examine what the third of these levels means to career learning in more general terms.

The earliest settings for the process of agreement and disagreement about career are in homes, and - soon after - among friendship groups. Growing up both extends and adds to these encounters. In adulthood, the different point of view of an employer becomes important.

Bruner and Haste (1987) summarise findings from more recent work on child development, pointing to the importance to learning of community relationships and wider sociological influences. Within this body of thought, developmental psychology characterises the sense of self in early childhood as stemming from an acknowledgement of the existence of others (Donaldson, 1978). Early social behaviour is said to interpret the influence of others as though it is rule-bound - 'out there', ready-made, the-same-for-everybody and unchangeable. But children do not forever accept the imposition of rules. Subsequent appreciation of the variability of points of view is seen as an important milestone in that learning. Seeing the other person as an individual, together with the development of formal and conceptualised thought, allows other people's purposes to be appreciated and their 'rules' to be questioned. 'The consciousness of autonomy dispels the myth of revelation' (Piaget, 1932).

Of course, there are some career 'rules': these include

entry requirements, more or less objective facts about the current labour economy, and reasonably verifiable probabilities concerning health risks in certain roles.

But there are no rules about what constitutes

*'women's work', the necessity of following 'family traditions',
or the 'right to paid employment'.*

Propositions on such matters derive from points of view. There is, therefore, disagreement.

Nonetheless, the childlike persist in the search for certainties, to script what they, and others, do. Arendt (1978) dramatically recognises the child-mind in an adult worker. Reporting the functioning of a senior official, she identifies the way in which, when confronted with situations for which routine procedures did not exist, he was said to be 'helpless', dealing in 'cliches, stock phrases, adherence to convention, standardised codes of expression and conduct' (p. 4). The official was Adolf Eichmann.

This counter-positioning of unproblematic rules-and-right-answers with problematic points of view has two important consequences. One of these has to do with changes-of-mind. Changes-of-mind in biography not uncommonly ensue from encounters with others. One example of community-interaction theory (Law, 1981b) suggests that people are helped by encounters with new points of view on work, role and self. The theory identifies the dynamics of feedback, modelling and expectation as influential in this process. In childhood, such influences are from parent to child; in adolescence, from peer to peer; in later life, the influence might as likely be from child to parent. In all cases, the converse hypothesis is also made: that structural influences, of (say) social class or media images, will be stronger where they are re-transmitted, unchallenged, in a dominant culture (cf. Willis, 1977). Community interaction can therefore confirm the status quo or catalyse a change-of-mind. It has important potential concerning the education of ethnic, gender and social-class stereotypes.

A further consequence follows from this. If career development were signposted wholly by 'facts' and 'rules' which everybody agreed, then we could more readily agree about who should do what in the working world. Outgrowing the acceptance of such certainty brings doubt and conflict. Their occurrence and resolution evoke, in turn, fear and hope, hostility and alliance, apathy and motivation. Career development is always emotionally charged, sometimes painfully so. Withdrawal, into a 'safe' group or away from all groups, might anaesthetise the pain, but it does not help the learning. Failure to move into and through the pain renders me a passive recipient of other people's points of view, or an un-self-critical celebrant of my own. Dealing with other people's points of view, though at times tiresome, is a necessary precursor to taking one's own view, not least because it demonstrates that that point of view is a possibility.

taking one's own view: Having a point of view means that what I learn is more than a compliant reaction to the last thing that happened to me. In the simplest of all learning theories, stimulus evinces an intended response. But children do not appear to see it that way! This chapter has traced the complications for learning of work, role and self. It shows how

*I may have once known: but I have 'forgotten' it
because it has not been incorporated into a schema;*

or

*I have dropped it
when I realised how different it was from what I had always assumed;*

or

I ignore it because it is derided by significant others.

Any 'stimulus' must compete for *my* particular attention, if it is to shape any sustained 'response'.

On the other hand, if new learning can be fitted to what I already know (or think I know) I may use it, shaping and re-configuring it to a form that I can reconcile with prior learning. Early learning will have established the frames for that: mapping identifies what I see as proximate and distant; narrative identifies what I see as significant characters and episodes; and classifications identify what is more or less important. These are all foreground-and-background configurations. They show that I stand 'here' rather than 'there' in relation to what I know, so that what I learn is different for me than for other people.

Child-development theory emphasises the importance to understanding of new configurations brought about by changed points of view (Bruner and Haste, 1987). In careers guidance, the client-centred concept of 'empathy' expresses an appreciation of that personal and unique configuration of experience (Natale, 1972).

There are, however, problems in developing a distinctive point of view. Willis's (1977) work with the wayward but tribal 'lads' is valuable for its documentation of the difficulty experienced by some (those with 'ear-ole' tendencies) in maintaining a minority point of view in a proximate and valued ('laddish') culture. A telling problem for careers education and guidance concerns how to help people to develop and sustain for themselves a distinctive point of view in the face of peer, family and other community pressures.

How do we know that a point of view is developing? The model of developing self-awareness cited by Meadows, outlined earlier, in fact comprises not three but four stages, the fourth being that self can be thought of as

- (4) **a set of systematic beliefs and principles, involving evaluation of past actions and purposes for new actions.**

It is in this sense that point of view begins to become recognisable, and to take on some of the characteristics of what might be called an 'inner life'.

Community-interaction theory suggests that developing a point of view is not an introspective event but a series of selective responses to other people's points of view. Autonomy, then, is not freedom from influence: it is deciding to whom one is going to pay attention (Law, 1981a; 1992). An inner life unfurnished with what other people offer would be a poor one.

Attraction and repulsion concerning other points of view evoke considerations of motivation, concerned with what a person likes, finds interesting, needs or values. This is another respect in which career development evokes feelings, here voiced as valence - seeking 'this' rather than 'that'. That career development is motivated appears to be beyond doubt (Law and Ward, 1981). Roe (1951) imported motivational ideas to career-development theory, linked to Maslow's (1954) theory of *organismic* needs. But motivations also express *cultural* expectations - the values to be found in 'music we play', 'stories we tell', 'people we admire', 'work we think important'. Much of what we value, we *learn* to value from family, neighbourhood, religion or ethnic group. The process becomes more than anticipatory socialisation when I begin to consider 'their' as well as 'our' values.

We are speaking here of a *learning* individual who knows why he or she is doing this rather than that. Expanded cultural attachments do not inevitably lead to choice. If all that happens is the usurping of earlier by later cultural influences, then we are speaking not of choice but of the substitution of an earlier compliance by a later one. This is not

flexibility but malleability. Choice means being able to say 'I know why I no longer want to do that, and why I now want to do this!'. Learning must be subjected to test, whereby *some*, but not just *any*, points of view are accepted.

A condition for learning is, therefore, that two or more points of view are concurrently held in place, while they are examined. Personal-construct thinking offers the metaphor of 'the community of self' (Mair, 1977), developing the meaning of the conversational phrase 'being in two minds', and betokening a readiness to 'open out'. A person voluntarily enters and leaves different points of view by assigning to each other the roles of 'self' and 'other', as bases for construct-building comparisons. Point of view is then, at least for some of the time, not a fixed but a changing perspective. A person may change her or his response to a single repeated stimulus. More than that, a person may perpetuate one of the new responses in a new sense of sustained self. This would be a move from 'in-two-minds' to 'change-of-mind'. The process is described in some detail for adult career development, where it is characterised as 'perspective transformation' (Mezirow, 1977).

The mental processing entailed here is characterised in child-development theory (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969) as twofold: accommodation and assimilation.

- > **accommodation** alters current mental organisation to take account of new experience;
- > **assimilation** filters and modifies new experience so that it fits existing mental organisation.

Piaget and Inhelder characterise the change as a process of forming new concepts from the observation of new cases: as 'the spontaneous development of an *experimental* spirit' (p.145; my italics). The mind is not simply a stimulus-response processor, but is in a creative relationship with its experience - sometimes using experience to support a current point of view, sometimes changing its configuration.

Adult career-development theory appeals at this point (Arnold, 1994) to 'post-formal' thinking, implying a movement beyond Piaget's ascription to adolescents of conceptualised thought. Arnold cites (without approval) a number of models for that continuing career-development processing, each more or less characterising the following beliefs as bases for action:

- (1) that truth is absolute, known to everyone;
- (2) that truth exists, but might remain uncertain and unknown;
- (3) that reality is subjective, any being as good as any other;
- (4) that truth is subjective, so that action upon it must be founded in values; and
- (5) that both reality and the means of ascertaining it are uncertain.

One can only hope that these are not the only choices we have. The statement 'housework is women's work' may not qualify as an 'absolute truth, known to everyone' but it is certainly not a view 'as good as any other'. Must credibility rest upon either the rule-bound 'fundamentalism' of the earlier levels or the 'post-modern' capitulation of the later ones? Piaget's experimenting adolescents seem to be more mature than either!

What, then, is a mature test here? Career-learning theory proposes that the process is, as Piaget and Inhelder suggest, experimental - inductive rather than deductive. For example, on the issue 'housework is women's work', I could ask myself,

'have I enough to go on?'
(on the experimental analogy of sampling);

and I could also ask,

'would somebody with a different point of view agree?'
(on the experimental analogy of replication).

Such credibility testing occurs: one of the 'lads' in the study by Willis (1977) is clearly documented as having checked out his own point of view (concerning the futility of success at school) to the extent where he could see it from the point of view of the 'ear-oles'.

The transitional state is, however, confusion. Piaget calls this 'disequilibrium' - a condition in which I may find myself thinking '

that is not what I have always believed'

or

'that doesn't make any sense'

or '

I just can't get this straight in my head'.

We are talking here, not of a lack of intellectual power, but of a willingness to find room for new ideas - perhaps by changing existing ideas. Learning here is not so much about being bright enough; it is more about being open enough. Disequilibrium is discomfort. It may, therefore, be more comfortable not to think.

In her account of Eichmann's career, Arendt (1978) spectacularly documents the lack of inner life in an unthinking man. She speaks of the 'manifest shallowness' of his functioning, rendering it impossible to trace behaviour to any deeper level of roots or motives, and offering no sign of firm ideological convictions. His actions were, she says, the products 'not of stupidity but *thoughtlessness*' (p. 4).

A bi-polar analysis of relative 'depth' in child learning (Meadows, 1993) similarly treats thoughtfulness as being different from intelligence, and more to do with being prepared to be troubled. She characterises the poles as:

- (1) **surface learning**, instrumentally concerned with getting results for minimal effort, focusing only on the essentials; and
- (2) **deep learning**, with an intrinsic interest in the material, developing and using a personal understanding of it, and more likely to relate facts to one another, with amendment and with reference to underlying principles.

Parallel support for the importance to learning of focused 'thoughtful-ness' comes from social-learning theory. Fiske (1993) cites a four-level analysis (given here with my added characterisations of level).

- > **pre-conscious automaticity** is unaware of both the occasion and the response. This might be called the 'knee-jerk' level.
- > **post-conscious automaticity** is aware of the occasion, but not its effects on judgement or actions. It can be strong where the information is ambiguous and difficult to clearly sort, and is used to explain some stereotyping behaviour. This might be called the 'suggestible' level.
- > **goal-dependent automaticity** is where the response to the occasion might be unaware and unintended, and therefore spontaneous; but where there is sufficient awareness that it might be shaped by one's own purposes. A person may interrupt his or her automatic response to the occasion by suppressing the old thought with new - occurring sometimes in the form of 'rumination', which is argued to be capable of changing behaviour. This might be called the 'awakening' level. Finally,
- > **full intentionality and control** is where attention to the occasion elicits what is required for response. The direction of attention is central to this process, constituting much of what is meant by an act of 'will', a particular feature of which is to attend to the unexpected or unwanted information in the situation. People here are seeking diagnostic rather than confirmatory information, with the intention of shaping their own behaviour. This might be called the 'wide-awake' level. It closely parallels earlier characterisations of point of view as inner life.

Let us return, then, to the question: why is that a person will attend to some influences in developing a point of view, but not others? A summary of this section suggests that focus might be achieved by what is salient, valued or credible:

- (1) It is **salient** if it belongs centrally to my map, narrative or conceptual structure. I will then perceive it as 'recognisable', 'in-tune', 'relevant' or 'of concern to me'.
- (2) It is **valued** if it offers a positive valence - attracting rather than repelling. That may be because it entails action which is in some way 'like us' or 'like me', or something 'I like' or 'we like', or in these and other senses 'interesting', 'welcome', 'comfortable' or 'right'. These descriptors can also include variations on 'like those-that-I-like' and 'like those-who-like-me'.
- (3) It is **credible** if it makes sense and can, therefore, be believed. It might be said to be 'sensible', 'thought-through', leading to 'a wise decision' or - better still - 'a decision made wisely'. Elements in the process of achieving credibility for a point of view are inductive - involving sampling ('I've enough to go on now') and replication ('a sane onlooker would confirm it').

The feeling and thinking elements in this layered processing may be in contention with each other. Yet, if we are to speak of 'a point of view', thoughts and feelings must cohabit. The parallel case is made in rational-emotive counselling theory (Ellis, 1973), which argues that thoughts and feelings are the same thing differently expressed. Career-learning theory has identified three respects in which thought and feeling are integral:

- (i) my career idea is linked to, or separated from, some **organismic** need or cultural value of importance to me.
- (ii) my career idea is applauded or rejected by **significant others**.
- (iii) focusing itself confirms or challenges prior learning - taking me into or out of a '**comfort zone**'.

Like Ellis, career-learning theory assigns arbitrating (yet not exclusive) force to credibility: 'your feelings are important, and nobody is saying that you should not attend to them; but *think* about them too!' This approach does not exclude the acknowledgement that the links between feeling and career occur subliminally (Hood, 1995).

If there is any validity in this analysis, people - in working through their career plans - will experience confusion, discomfort, unfocused unease and (on occasions) anguish. There are important implications. Among them is the consequence that careers guidance cannot offer instant gratification for 'customers' who - in a market-place - might prefer to patronise 'feel-good' vendors. Neither can careers education invariably be quick-and-easy: it is as demanding as any other 'subject' - and more demanding than many (see Law, 1996).

Career-learning theory must assume that people are able to cross the difficulty thresholds and are willing to confront the discomfort zones! Indeed, in this and other ways to be examined below, career-learning theory implies that avoidance of difficulty and discomfort is, itself, living dangerously.

understanding

Moving directly from information to action would not be planning: it would be impulse. Career-learning theory argues that, for at least some of the time, we must all do some serious reflecting: locating, comparing and conceptualising the information; invoking - from others and within ourselves - alternative points of view; so that we can establish for ourselves what is salient, valuable and credible. All of this prepares for understanding. Understanding, it is further argued, then entails *developing explanations* and *anticipating consequences*.

developing explanations: Information, and the points of view which configure it, suggest *action*:

*'having formed that impression, she decided ...',
 'her sense of responsibility was such that she ...',
 'once he realised that, he was bound to...'*

The sequence in such narratives invites a linking of causes to their effects. Howard (1987) argues that it is the function of such *schemas* to provide for such inferences. He offers 'enrolment-study-examination-graduation' as an example.

The interaction of narrative and understanding is not accidental. The themes of behavioural science and literature overlap. It is the open question which offers the greater insight: as Meadows (1993) herself observes,

'I remember seeing a performance of an early play by Chekhov in which he seemed to anticipate twentieth-century psychology with extraordinary specificity, forty or fifty years before these ideas occurred to psychologists' (p. 236).

Indeed, literature — from classical myth to television soap-opera - offers other people's stories as a clue to our own. We may, then, find telling traces of explanation-for-career in literature (table three). Of course, any story has plot and sub-plot; most touch more than one row in the chart. That is the point of this chapter.

table three
literary examples of career-development explanations

| explanation | literary figure | parallel theory |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| a specific characteristic | Achilles | trait-and-factor |
| person as 'self' | Don Quixote | self-concept |
| dealing with obstacles | Odysseus | opportunity-structure |
| social attachment | Romeo | community-interaction |
| point of view | Shylock | career-learning |

All narrative, then, provokes the question 'why?':

*'why couldn't she ...?', '
 why do they . . .?', '
 why did I ...?'*

The answers to such questions are explanatory hypotheses, suggesting 'this came about because ...'.

Forming explanatory hypotheses might suggest an unusual and elite form of thought, but it is commonplace - what we all do when we seek to 'figure it out'. Seeking explanations for specific phenomena is often deductive, reciprocating the earlier inductive classifying process by making cases contingent upon concepts:

*'she couldn't have done that, because...
 she is a woman!;
 'it is not well enough paid';
 'her sense of her own importance wouldn't let her!'*

Deductive credibility depends upon what Piaget (1932) calls 'experimental' thinking. The scientific parallels are not too far-fetched: 'theory building' ('so that's what makes the difference'); 'hypothesis building' ('how can we check that out?'); and 'control groups' ('do other people like her do that?').

This is 'conversational science': street use of refined theory. Concepts are characterised in social learning theory (Fiske, 1993) as tools to locate explanations, which are accepted if they work 'well enough' for most people most of the time - in particular, if they permit people to predict the future from the past. We all do 'science' for some of the time; and, as a breed, we do it comparatively well. We are a theory-building species: it is part of our finger-hold on survival.

The faster the rate of change, the more critical the requirement for such thought. So argues Sparkes (1994), who complains about a contemporary over-reliance on mere competence as a measure of performance in vocational behaviour. He argues for the acknowledgement of understanding, which he defines as 'the capacity to use explanatory concepts'. Furthermore, he argues that understanding is critical for the solution of new problems. The recycling of predefined skills developed from familiar problems cannot deal with a changing world. Learning theory concurs: the essential importance of formal thought (what experimenting adolescents can do) is that it is no longer bounded by what is perceived, but instead 'grasps possible transformation, and assimilates reality in terms of imagined or deduced events' so that the world is 'not bound by the concrete and perceptible, but encompasses many interpersonal and social possibilities' (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969, p. 149).

We have spoken so far in terms of a *personal* narrative - with a 'close-up' focus on particular people confronting particular episodes in their stories. But there are also broader - 'wide-angle' - focuses. They would incorporate such statements as:

*'people like that generally prefer this, because ...',
'the effects of technological change have been....', '
changes in the qualification system have led to ...'and '
work is offered on short-term contracts, because ...'.*

Such statements are explanatory, but at a different level of analysis. They draw as much upon a scientific as upon a literary paradigm. Yet they form a backdrop to any personal narrative, offering a parallel series of generalities, some of which will sometimes touch the particulars of experience. They are a meta-narrative.

The relative usefulness of *personal* narrative and meto-narrative is an issue in career-development theory. Roberts's (1977) case is that career development is best explained in terms of meta-narrative. Willis's (1977) ethnography recounts personal narrative, but the Marxist analysis he imposes upon it is wholly meta-narrative. On the other hand, community-interaction theory (although itself a meta-narrative) argues that career development is best understood as personal narrative - as biography. It contends that where the culture does not re-transmit a meta-narrative into personal narratives, it will be less attended to, and less influential. Conversely, where it is re-transmitted, it will shape behaviour. People do have some idea of what is going on in larger (sociological, psychological, or economic) terms. But generally, those terms are absorbed into biography through a proximate culture.

At a time of large-scale change in society and economy, the practical implications for helping people to understand and explain 'the meta', so that they can act upon it, would be extensive. There is a possible implication here that people should be helped, through reflection upon their own and other people's career biographies, to become their own career-development theoreticians (cf. Munro and Law, 1994) as a basis for their own action.

anticipating consequences: Acting on understanding is where we are headed. Without understanding of how things came to be the way they are, we are at a disadvantage in knowing what to do about them. Career learning accordingly hypothesises a progression from attempting explanation of the past to anticipating future consequences.

Cogent explanation suggests the possibility of action:

'so, if it's this that makes the difference, why don't I ...?'

The process includes the possibility of further experimentation:

'how can I try it out first?'

And further inference:

'if it works -like that for her, maybe I can risk ...'.

Autonomous action must involve some such visualisation (whether rational or not) of

'this is what will probably happen if I do this ...'.

It requires the imagination of possible selves in possible futures.

There are, of course, few sure-fire predictions. Action always entails risk. But risks can be assessed so that probabilities are cogently estimated (Sutherland, 1992). Indeed, not to be able to assess risk is to live in insouciant peril.

An empirical enquiry by Arroba (1977), directly addressing decision-making, reported decisions being made in six distinguishable styles:

- (1) a **logical** decision, 'coldly and objectively appraised';
- (2) a **no-thought** decision, concerning 'a routine matter, frequently encountered';
- (3) a **hesitant** decision, characterised by an 'inability to make the decision', which was therefore postponed;
- (4) an **emotional** decision, based on 'subjective preferences or feeling ... what a person likes or wants';
- (5) a **compliant** decision, made in accordance with 'perceived expectations' of others; and
- (6) an **intuitive** decision, which is 'inner-oriented ... a sense or rightness or inevitability'.

Most people are said to use different styles in different situations.

Table four (following page) suggests that Arroba's findings are by no means inconsistent with career-learning theory's analysis of point of view into considerations of salience, value and credibility (the correspondence is not exact, and queries appear in the table where the parallel is not manifest). Career-learning theory assigns arbitrating but not exclusive significance to credibility in effective career decision-making. The majority of Arroba's sample appear to agree, in so far that they see career as among the 'most important' decisions, which - most report - require a logical style.

table four
relationship between career-learning theory and decision-making styles

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| career-learning theory | salience - having immediacy and recognisability | value - being culturally or personally attractive | credibility - appearing cogent in induction and deduction |
| decision-making styles (Arroba) | > compliant (?) > no-thought | > emotional > intuitive (?) | > logical > hesitant (?) |

A practical implication would be that, if I wanted to defend my untenable position with the assertion...

'I am entitled to my opinion',

...a teacher or counsellor would know that I need help. But it is the *kind* of help that theory most valuably identifies: do I have...

- ... enough information? ...
- ... well-enough remembered? ...
- ... reliably-enough classified? ...
- ... understood to be influenced by others? ...
- ... seen from alternative points of view? ...
- ... tested by cogent thought?

A person does not have to be a genius in order to benefit from such help. Indeed, the importance of such reflection to people with learning difficulties is advocated, because it:

- (1) helps the learner to think about possible demands;
- (2) provides an opportunity for ongoing reflection; and
- (3) enables remembered impressions to be organised into emerging theories (Powell and Makin, 1994).

Reflection takes many forms. There is no single route to cogent rationality. It is to be found through language, through mathematics, in spatial terms, and in kinaesthetic terms (Gardner, 1983; cf., for a more comprehensive account, Vernon, 1961). Most people - if they are open enough to do it - are capable enough to cross the difficulty thresholds, if not by one intellectual route, then by another.

Career-learning theory therefore suggests careers education and guidance models which will take people to a point where they can recognise the difference between evidence and rhetoric, fact and opinion, argument and leverage. Not much is to be gained from actions conceived in loosely-screwed heads.

implications

It was argued at the beginning of this article that career-development theories respond to a receptive cultural ambience. This chapter's propositions are of particular contemporary pertinence. An increasingly problematic career structure demands a more incisively heuristic response - the harder it gets, the more we should think about it.

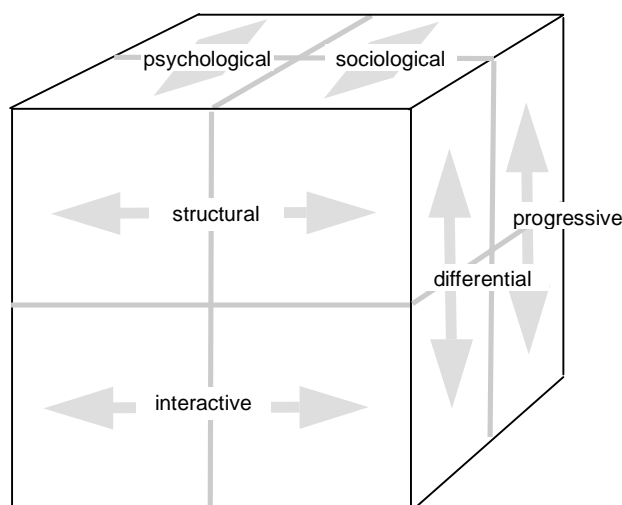
Career-learning theory is re-connected in this section to its provenance in career-development thought. Later in this section, it is also connected to areas in which its models for practice can be developed.

theory and meta-theory: The chapter opened with an analysis of types of theory in terms of their historical and conceptual relationships. As figure 3 (following page) suggests, career-learning theory's fit to the conceptual model now requires a third dimension. The diagram is adapted from an earlier three-dimensional analysis (Law, 1981a).

The third dimension discriminates between

- > **differentialist theories** which assume that the important differences are between people, and
- > **progressive theories** which assume that the important differences are between different stages of learning progression.

figure three
a three-dimensional representation of career-development theories



At one extreme, I may be best understood in terms of being better-than-average with my hands. At the other, I may be best understood in terms of not yet having assembled this information into any understanding of the work roles it opens for me. This opposition is not adequately covered by the two-dimensional model used at the beginning of the chapter.

All of the theories cited at the beginning of this chapter can, then, be sorted on this new dimension - between the front and back of figure three. Career-learning theory appears at the back: perhaps further back than Roberts's version of opportunity-structure theory (with its slightly-developed use of anticipatory socialisation as a 'learning' process); and perhaps rather lower than Rodger's (1952) seven-point version of trait-and-factor theory

(with its self-contained assumptions about the structure of abilities). But most theories fit *along* the dimensions, rather than at particular *points* on them.

For example, Super's (1957) version of self-concept theory has elements of both differential *and* progressive thinking within it. The idea of a self-concept is plainly differential in its effect; its development, on the other hand, is described in progressive terms. But the progressive element is less developed than for career-theory as outlined in this chapter. Super's main developmental stages are not learning-stages, but life-stages. They are defined in terms of the kinds of roles that a person is likely to occupy at different stages in a life-span. Each stage no doubt affords learning opportunities; but each is primarily articulated to requirements-for-help at a particular stage of social positioning (see especially Super, 1981).

The contribution to meta-theory of career-learning theory is, then, to add to the terms in which thinking may be framed. At this stage, however, it is no more than a series of unconfirmed propositions. Confirmation may be a matter for research; but experience with models of careers education and guidance can also validate theory.

practical implications. The chief justification for a theory is its capacity to suggest predictive hypotheses which can be formulated into models for effective action. In this respect, career-learning theory's elaboration of the third dimension in figure 3 is important.

Wholly differentialist theories offer strong support to models where the task is to identify key features in a person's presentation of self, and what she or he wants - here and now - to do about it. Differentialism therefore identifies the client's personal *agenda* as the occasion for help. Guidance interviews (see Kidd, 1996) and small-group work lend themselves well to that formulation; as do some uses of psychometrics and computer-assisted guidance (see Watts, 1996)). Indeed, a pure and highly structured version of differentialism would be an assumption that the innate and unchanging tendencies of the individual are the most powerful determinants of career behaviour, and that the best way to help would be (psychometrically) to determine these tendencies and build career planning upon them.

The implications of progressive formulations are different. They assume that career behaviour is learned and, therefore, can be educated. They identify a *scheme-of-work* as the occasion for help. Careers education, together with open-learning and distance-learning programmes, lend themselves to that formulation (see Law, 1996); as do the formative use of psychometrics, of computer-assisted guidance and of recording-and-planning techniques (see Law 1996b).

Two sets of activities - curriculum and guidance - are, of course mutually dependent (Law 1996). A use of career-learning theory in guidance would, then, be diagnostic. Guidance providers would be able to assess where the strengths and weaknesses are in what people are able to learn of a career. This could be provided as 'feedback': indicating where - among sensing, sifting, focusing and understanding activities - a group needs more curriculum-based help.

More detailed implications of career-learning theory in curriculum terms can be identified within four professional frames (following page; for the detailed content of such programmes, see Law 1996):

Work, role and self cannot be learned in short order. If we do not help people with their career learning earlier, we should not be surprised if, later, help needs more time than we can readily find.

1: foundation learning...

...is comprehensive in the sense that it is for everybody and covers all the stages of learning progression, bringing people into command of the full repertoire of capacities. The implications of the theory are that this should begin (in some form) in primary school, and be aimed at the progressive enrichment, diversification and verification of bases for action. The expectation would be that earlier stages would require higher concentrations of sensing and sifting activity (engaging children in finding out about work, role and self, and in sifting and sorting what they find into useful orders). This would lay an informed and explored basis for later expansion, and more demanding reflection, at later stages in the foundation programme. It might usefully link exploration of specifically 'career' roles to other life-roles; in schools, it might be undertaken in personal and social education programmes. In adulthood, open-learning and IT-based schemes of careers education offer promising prospects for such help.

2: connecting learning...

...ensures that career applications of learning are, from time to time, re-examined in specific contexts. Such work in school could be undertaken on a 'long-block' integrated basis (Law, 1996c). This provides for the re-focusing of career learning, enabling connections between foundation learning and specific learning projects. Programmes would move, with variations, in 'mini-progressions', touching upon sensing, sifting, focusing, understanding and action. The 'whole-curriculum' opportunities are extensive: career-learning theory suggests links to the full range of investigating, mapping, narrative, classifying, experimenting and practising activities within the curriculum.

3: pivotal learning...

...is concerned with the depth as well as the extent of career learning. It provides necessary learning at crucial stages. It *systematically* revisits all levels of sensing, sifting, focusing and understanding, in increasing detail and depth. In sensing, for example, people need to learn how to access official sources of information; but probably not *until* they are 13 or 14 years old, and best *after* they have had an opportunity to set 'public' information into a personal and interpersonal context. Such work requires trained helpers, calling upon understanding and skill that only experts can provide, in particular, it must be able to deal with the affect-laden responses that are embedded in career development.

4: recovery learning...

...is a special form of pivotal learning for people needing to recover lost learning opportunities and to undertake 're-building' work. It will probably be concerned - as much as with anything - with re-examining and re-shaping damaging constructs.

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