ARTICLES

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Mary McMahon, Nancy Arthur and Sandra Collins

★ Factors that influence career decision-making among elite athletes
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★ Accuracy in self-assessment: The role of ability, feedback, self-efficacy and goal orientation
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★ Shiftwork: A Chaos Theory of Careers agenda for change in career counselling
Jim E. H. Bright and Robert. G. L. Pryor
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James A Athanasou, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Technology, Sydney, is the editor of the Australian Journal of Career Development (ACER).

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EDITORIAL

Vocational Psychology: Realising its True Potential
For almost 50 years from 1926 to 1976, applied psychology provided the cornerstone of career services in this country. Psychology was a key component of career guidance services and it spawned a range of activities including career counselling, vocational assessment, vocational rehabilitation, career education, occupational information, occupational research and computerised guidance. Yet in the last 30 years, the influence of vocational psychology has waned and faded officially from the scene in Australia.

Homeless in Australia
At one time, career guidance through the Institute of Industrial Psychology, the historic Vocational Guidance Bureau in New South Wales or the former Commonwealth Employment Service was offered mainly by those with a background in psychology. They were trained to understand occupations, to explore individual differences and provide the desired ‘true reasoning’—albeit in a directive and stereotyped fashion.

This changed somewhat with the move away from standardised testing and with the adoption of a counselling approach in career services. It was diluted further by the introduction of full-time career advisers into schools, colleges and universities. This moved career development away from psychology and closer to education.

The development of private practice in career counselling services brought a range of new faces—mainly education, welfare and human resource practitioners—into the field. The problems of high unemployment in the 1980s also posed new challenges for the community and altered the focus of the dwindling government services, which were restructured and eventually closed. As a result, vocational psychologists were largely homeless in Australia.

Professional refugees
Moreover, the Australian Psychological Society seemed to have lost interest in vocational psychology as a field. Possibly this is because vocational guidance was dominated at that time by three-year trained graduates in psychology rather than the desired four-year trained honours graduates. Indeed, in one report on the employment of psychologists in Australia, vocational guidance was considered a last resort. This is despite the fact that it was an excellent training ground for any practitioner.

Alongside this development, the College of Occupational Psychology was renamed Organisational Psychology to reflect the interest of industrial and organisational psychologists. This is understandable but as a consequence, it estranged vocational psychology from its original academic home.

Ostensibly, there is still a place for vocational psychology within the profession. Nowadays you will find formal references to career guidance scattered throughout the publicity of the Australian Psychological Society. It is mentioned as career development in the Society’s College of Counselling Psychologists, as career guidance in the College of Educational and Developmental Psychologists, or as career development and coaching by the College of Organisational Psychologists. This fragmentation is not helpful.

The Australian Psychological Society could resolve this fragmentation by locating vocational psychology within one of the Colleges. For instance, the Society for Vocational Psychology is located within Division 17 (Counselling Psychology) of the American Psychological Society.
Psychological Association. It is of strategic importance to the Australian community that vocational psychology is more than an interest group and is located within a specific College, given the importance of employment, education and training in people’s lives.

On the one hand, the Australian Psychological Society endorses vocational guidance as a psychological activity, but on the other hand, it has not been involved with significant developments in the field. A practical measure of the extent to which vocational psychology has achieved endangered status is that the Australian Psychological Society is not even represented on the Commonwealth Government sponsored Career Industry Council of Australia.6

This state of affairs is a pity because (to the best of my knowledge) all the leading Australian researchers with an international reputation in career development had a background in psychology: Bright, Creed, Earl, Fogarty, Hesketh, Lokan, McMahon, Naylor, Patton, Power, Pyor, Sweet, Taylor, Trang (to name but a few, and my apologies to any colleagues that I might have missed). Coincidentally most of these vocational psychologists—both in Australia and overseas—are now located in faculties of education.

More likely than not, the few remaining vocational psychologists in Australia are also refugees seeking political asylum in other disciplines such as faculties of business, human resource management or education. As a consequence, career guidance is moving away from its behavioural science origins.

Theoretical input
For most of its early history, career guidance was dependent upon vocational psychology for its content, research and practice. For instance, the Dictionary of Occupational Titles and its successor O*NET are psychologically inspired. Psychological testing in Australia was closely related to vocational psychology. In my field, vocational interest assessment far exceeds the uses of any clinical psychology tests in terms of quantity. The numbers are astounding. Just a few examples may suffice. As far back as 1974 more than 50 million copies of the Kuder Preference Record had been used; in 1998, the publisher of the Self-Directed Search announced that more than 21 million copies had been used; and the Strong Interest Inventory which in its various forms is more widely used than most intelligence tests, is around 80 years old. In Australia, vocational self-assessment is used extensively. In 2006 the Career Interest Test on the Federal Government’s www.myfuture.edu.au had been used by over 350,000 people. All these instruments have a psychological pedigree.

The major theories of career development (person–environment fit, social learning, developmental theory) have a solid background in the behavioural sciences. Some, such as the Theory of Work Adjustment, bridge the chasm between vocational and occupational psychology. Newer approaches, such as the Systems Theory Framework, Gottfredson’s Theory of Circumscriptive and Compromise, Critical Theory, Chaos Theory, Constructivist or Narrative approaches share a broader but still social science orientation. Vocational counselling, assessment and work behaviour are inherently psychological in nature and scope.

Call for reflection
Accordingly, this article calls for a reflection of the status of vocational psychology within the profession of psychology and within career guidance. This is because the set of dynamics described above has altered the historical position of vocational psychology.

Notwithstanding that: (a) career development is now a broader field with many new faces; (b) the earlier psychological theories of career development are being challenged as static, outdated, positivist or reductionist; and (c) psychology no longer has a monopoly of influence, there is still a role for vocational psychology to provide the academic and professional research engine that drives career development in Australia.

Indeed, failure to provide a substantive academic and research basis for career development will mean that career guidance could return to a time of so-called commonsense, do-gooder myth, or superstition. It is not proposed that vocational psychologists should have exclusive rights over career guidance, but my emphasis is that they have a unique scientific contribution to make to this field. It may well be an opportune moment for the leadership of the Career Industry Council of Australia to reflect on the potential contribution of vocational psychology within the fields of employment, education and training and for the Australian Psychological Society to be encouraged to participate.

In particular, I am concerned that we will not produce the next generation of career researchers and vocational psychologists in Australia. Despite the fact that there are now endorsed national competencies
for career practitioners, there is a very real danger that newcomers to the field of career development will not have the professional training and research background in the social and behavioural sciences to equip them in their jobs or to advance the field. From the literature on expertise it is estimated that it would take around 5000 hours to be minimally competent just as a practitioner in the careers field and definitely longer still to achieve research expertise.

As a further point, those remaining vocational psychologists might now reflect upon issues related to greater recognition for psychology within the field of career development. At the same time, they might wish to increase their own contribution as psychologists to the career industry as a whole. We do not have the right to abrogate that historic role and responsibility through apathy or neglect.

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NOTES
4 http://www.psychology.org.au/community/specialist/organisational/
5 http://www.div17.org/vocpsych/
6 http://www.cica.org.au
7 James Athanasou declares an editorial interest as a member of the Australian Psychological Society, the American Psychological Association, the Society for Vocational Psychology and as a Fellow of the Career Development Association of Australia. An earlier version of this editorial appeared in InPsych.
Career practitioners helping the talent manage their talent

Talent management started out as the province of Hollywood celebrity agents or sports stars, and the results of their negotiations are still regularly highlighted in the headlines. Multi-million dollar transfer fees are paid for soccer stars and new records are regularly set for the latest sensation to appear in a movie. The value of these stars is intrinsically tied to their brand.

Curiously, talent management is now part of the High Street. Log on to seek.com.au and you may be surprised at the number of talent management roles being advertised. Mostly these roles are a kind of talent management in reverse. The position descriptions talk of the creation of talent pipelines as if they were scenes from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

Undoubtedly, accessing and retaining staff is now a critical focus for human resource teams everywhere. Yet, managing the talent is not particularly well understood by much of corporate Australia. Over many years I have helped some of that talent to move on from companies that behave badly. The insights gleaned from these private consultations are potentially a blueprint for effective talent management.

Career practitioners have a great deal to offer in this space.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Career Development

A few months ago CICA President Mike Geeves and I met with Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard to discuss improving access to career services in Australia. Julia Gillard was receptive, interested and had been briefed well. CICA proposed an all-ages approach to career development. It proposed that DEEWR bring together responsibility for all career development policies and programs under a single group, and that responsibility for the management of this be at the Group Manager level. CICA also proposed a single Careers Australia brand. Four other elements for reform were put forward:

• a telephone helpline connected to myfuture.edu.au;
• embedding a common framework of career development principles and outcomes in all K–12 curricula;
• a national focal point for career development research; and
• a national focal point for stakeholder involvement.

New Zealand skills strategy focuses on career development

Like most developed countries, New Zealand is developing strategies to manage its skills requirements to drive economic transformation. In doing so,
New Zealand has recognised the role that career development services will play in this transformation. In April 2008, a discussion paper was released. A key action for the national skills strategy is 'to improve access to careers and labour market information and advice for adults in the workforce, including enabling pathways within and between industries'. The paper states, 'putting increased effort into career development of people in employment helps both people and businesses to realise their full potential and enables them to manage change more effectively. Career and labour market information and advice are central to this process'. (New Zealand Skills Strategy 2008 Discussion Paper)

Coaching the coaches
For some time now, the National Coach and Athlete Career Education program has been one of the most successful and innovative career programs in Australia. It is underpinned by an evidence base and it is highly valued by coaches and athletes. The National CACE program is managed through the Australian Sports Commission and delivered nationally by Coach Career Management Consultants (CCMC). The Coach Career Management Program is the latest initiative within the National Coach and Athlete Career Education (CACE) Program.

The philosophy behind the National CACE program is to promote a balanced approach to sporting excellence through a process of individual assessment, self-exploration, informed decision-making and short and long term planning. The process was designed to support coaches to proactively participate in and effectively manage their own careers, education and personal development needs.

The process involves a comprehensive individual coach assessment and development of a coach career action plan. Other services provided include personal and professional development training, career planning and management, and employment support.

Over the past few months I have had some involvement in the Coach Career Management program in Tasmania. It has been an eye-opening experience. The commitment and sacrifice of our leading coaches is not dissimilar to a CEO of an organisation (but without the pay and share options). The work often means weeks away from family and friends and weekends are rarely free time.

In a full coaching schedule, Coach Career Management is one of the few moments in a coach’s life that is about them. It concentrates on exploring their life, their next steps, their development, their life balance and their future. It is an oasis and one that in my experience no coach wants to give up.

Research shows that coaches and athletes with an integrated lifestyle are more likely to achieve their sporting goals, cope better with stresses such as injury and retirement, and have more confidence in what the future will hold after sport.

Critically, this program also involves round table discussions of key stakeholders within their sport. These discussions strengthen the support network of coaches and stakeholder commitment to their work–life balance and career development.

Career development learning at the centre of work-integrated learning
The National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (NAGCAS) is taking a leading role in the development of career development learning in Australian universities, through its project Career Development Learning: Maximising the contribution of work-integrated learning (WIL) to the student experience. The project is funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

A recent national Symposium attended by academicians, careers practitioners, employers, policy makers and students from across Australia, examined how career development learning could maximise the contribution of WIL programs to the student experience.

Visiting UK Symposium Leader, Professor Tony Watts said ‘There is great potential for expanding Work-Integrated Learning and other forms of experience based learning across Australian universities. Career Development Learning significantly enhances its quality, helping students to be career ready as well as work ready. It places the student more actively at the heart of such programs’.

A key driver for strengthening career development learning in WIL is the importance of well prepared and flexible graduates with capacity to manage their employability by learning effective career management skills. Career Development Learning is a key vehicle for achieving these outcomes.

More information is available at: http://www.usq.edu.au/nagcascarrickproject/symposium/prereading.htm
National Career Development Week

Congratulations to CICA and the NCDW team on organising the most successful careers week yet, with 564 events and around 500,000 in attendance. It’s a magnificent effort.

The history of the AACC

The Career Development Association of Australia (formerly AACC) is writing the history of AACC 1989–2008. Alison Browne has been appointed to undertake this task and the final paper will be presented at the 2009 CDAA conference which will celebrate 20 years of service to the career development profession by CDAA/AACC.

Changes at the Career Education Association of Victoria

Not only does the CEA V have a new Director in the always hardworking Bernadette Gigliotti (congratulations CEA V on an excellent choice) it is also restructuring to support the successful roll out of the National Standards for Career Practitioners. New subcommittees have been formed and the CEAV-CPD will be used to inform all professional learning activities for the association.

The CEAV is also exploring ways to provide career development professional learning to primary schools through out Victoria. In 2009 the CEAV will look at a number of new initiatives to bring professional learning to our rural and remote members. This could include using video conferencing and online learning options. The CEAV will continue to work closely with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to provide access to quality programs in career development to all members. For more information on the new professional learning programs under development at the CEAV contact Bernadette on 03 9349 1900.

Careers services as a tax deduction

Peter Carey (CDAA President) is lobbying the tax office to allow a ‘career check-up’ as a tax deduction. At present, if a client sees a career practitioner to better his/her position that is an allowable deduction, however if a client sees a practitioner to assist them to change employment or help manage their career it is not an allowable tax deduction. This is an odd situation given the need for a more flexible labour market. Keep up the lobbying, Peter.

Forthcoming Conferences

Reinvent Your Career Expo
Sydney: 25–26 October 2008
Brisbane: 7–8 March 2009
http://www.reinventyourcareer.com.au

Centre on Education and Work Careers Conference: From Inspiration to Application, Wisconsin, 26–28 January 2009
The Careers Conference is hosted by the Center on Education and Work, part of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It is one of the largest and most comprehensive events of its kind, featuring top quality professional development.
http://www.cew.wisc.edu/careers/

CDAA National Conference, Melbourne, 15–17 April 2009
Get Smart: Career Development value adds for people and business! is the central theme for the conference. This conference is about the positive value-adding outcomes of career development for our students, clients, for working people at all stages of the lifespan, and for the nation’s businesses and industry.
www.abcon.biz/cdaa2009.htm

EDUCAUSE Australasia Conference, Perth, 3–6 May 2009
With the theme Innovate, Collaborate & Sustain, this conference will explore the challenges in areas such as how to innovate in the knowledge economy, collaboration with virtual teams and the ever present green agenda and action.

Contact Peter Tatham with news entries for this section by January 16 for the Autumn issue at Peter.Tatham@utas.edu.au. Entries should be no longer than 100 words, and may be edited for space reasons.
INTERVIEW WITH MARIJKE WRIGHT

Marijke Wright has been a Career Counsellor in secondary education, private practice and tertiary education for nearly 20 years. She has worked with diverse clients and trained career practitioners. Her current work at the University of Technology, Sydney includes developing and facilitating workshops with students, liaising with faculties to provide discipline-specific career development and she has more recently focused on locating career development learning across the curriculum. Marijke has been a long term Executive member of the Career Development Association of Australia (CDAA), a member of the National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (NAGCAS) and a founding member of the Career Industry Council of Australia where she has been Chair of its Professional Standards Committee. She has a Bachelor of Education (Environmental Science) and a Master of Career Development (ECU).

Marijke, how did you come into careers work?
That question reminds me of John Krumboltz and his story of joining a shorter queue when he was enrolling at university only to find that he was enrolling in Psychology! I thought I would be teaching Environmental Science but also by happenstance, ended up in careers work.

Initially I worked for the then Commonwealth Immigration Department in Melbourne, assisting migrants who were coming to Australia by ship (was it really that long ago!) and plane to make their way to their initial accommodation—helping them on their journey to a new life as it were (no prizes for the analogy with careers work!). This was a family career as my father and sister also worked in Immigration and my brother continues the tradition.

After having my children, however, I was looking for part-time work and found myself applying for a school lab assistant role, as you do when you are a completely unqualified humanities student. Fortunately they were more interested in my interpersonal skills and so I was offered the position. As a result I quickly developed an interest in science and studied a teaching degree in Environmental Science at Deakin University. By the time I had completed, I was already working with the school counsellor/careers adviser running the work experience program. After my degree, as well as teaching science and personal development, I took on the careers adviser role and subsequently continued my Careers studies with a Graduate Diploma and then a Masters.

I left Science teaching when I came to Sydney and worked in private practice for a time until I joined the Careers Service at the University of Technology, Sydney in the mid-90s.

Would you like to say something about your work at the University of Technology, Sydney?
My time at the Careers Service at UTS has been very interesting and fulfilling. It was a new service when
I started there with Malcolm McKenzie, the manager of the Careers Service, and so the growth and change in the service has reflected the growth and change both in the career development field in Australia and developments in technology.

This has been most evident in the way career information and services are delivered to students via the internet using web resources such as jobs databases, search tools to access faculty-specific career information, interactive tools and podcasting, etc. The internet allows so much better access for students. It has made us really think about how to best provide web services and how they might support face-to-face options such as one-on-one career consultation, general workshops on strategies, tailored workshops for particular faculties or schools, supporting work integrated learning within faculties and embedding career development learning in curriculum.

Initially, much of my role involved one-on-one consultations and gradually more and more workshops. Because UTS has always been known for its work integrated learning programs, we increasingly supported those programs with relevant workshops.

However, career development learning is probably most effective when embedded but explicit in curriculum so that students learn discipline-related skills, generic professional skills and skills to manage their life, learning and work at the same time. This is a challenging task but one that is engaging many universities currently. Driven partly by skills shortages and the need expressed by employers and government for ‘work ready’ graduates, the development of professional graduate attributes is certainly more in focus.

Many would argue that university education must also educate for life, and not just for work. As I see it, the challenge for university careers services is to promote the importance of career development learning as a process whereby students can in fact become more aware of their skills and attributes in a range of contexts, including work and learning and life in general. When well integrated, career development learning allows students to make the links between personal and professional goals and how they might use their learning and skills to move towards achieving career and life goals. My own strategy here has been to write some short modules that can be tailored to a discipline and form an assignment in a subject. The first of these has been trialled in a number of faculties and the modular approach has been picked up in another project across a number of faculties. This approach has the benefit of being delivered in a developmental way across a degree. So this is exciting work, as I find myself more involved in curriculum again. Last year I was fortunate to be able to attend the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance conference in Padua to present a poster on research using the first module. It examined the development of competencies using the Australian Blueprint for Career Development framework.

I know that over the years you have contributed to the profession in many ways. May I ask you to say something about this involvement?

When I arrived in Sydney, I joined the New South Wales Division of the CDAA (previously the Australian Association of Career Counsellors). Little did I know what I was letting myself in for! Initially I took on the role of Secretary and then was President of the Division for five years.

Division Presidents were also part of the National Executive at that time. When I stood down as Division President, I managed to find other things to do on the Executive, such as chairing the Standards and Professional Development Committees, being a member of the Ethics and Registration Committees and representing CDAA on the Career Industry Council of Australia. While I have been actively involved in the CDAA, I am also a member of NAGCAS. I have always felt that my work as a member of the Career Industry Council of Australia has been for the profession in general not just as a representative of one association.

Because I was a member of both national associations it was evident to me and to others on both executives that we had much in common and that we should be working together as associations. Martin Smith, then President of NAGCAS, and I as the CDAA representative planned an initial meeting, by phone, of all career associations in Australia interested in working together in some way. Our first meetings were at the UTS Careers Service where we collaboratively worked out the vision and mission for what would become the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA).

CICA was able to continue a process that had been started almost a decade earlier by Col McCowan AM and Dr Anna Lichtenberg and others. It has been a
great privilege to participate in the establishment of CICA and to work with such a group of committed and talented people who have included: Judith Leeson AM, founding President and passionate spokesperson for career development who did so much to gain support particularly from government; Dr Mary McMahon, whose research and writing underpinned the development of the Professional Standards for Career Development Practitioners; Peter Tatham, past President, who has represented CICA nationally and internationally; and current President, Mike Geeves, who is managing the relationships with a new government and overseeing the establishment of National Career Development Week. I would of course like to name all the members past and present, because it was the collaborative effort and goodwill of all those representatives that has enabled CICA to achieve the success that it has.

My role in chairing the CICA Standards Committee was to support the development and implementation of the Standards. The work that CICA has done to date has been foundational for the work that has to be done in the future. With the major changes that are impacting global economies through climate change and rapidly changing demographics, it is clear that workplaces will continue to change. Career development learning can inform and support individuals to manage those changes; however, in globally complex systems there are many competing priorities. I am hopeful that CICA will become part of a broader institute that represents commerce and industry, education, researchers as well as other stakeholder groups. Such a body is needed to provide leadership in directing appropriate research and subsequent strategies to address the life/work complexities that lie ahead.

Who has been influential in your thinking about careers?

During my studies, Krumboltz’ Social Learning Theory made a lot of sense to me. I have always seen the individual as a dynamic of intrinsic and extrinsic influences so the Patton and McMahon Systems Theory Framework features strongly in my work using a largely narrative approach. The ecological perspective of the Systems Theory Framework also reflects my interest in Environmental Science. I also admire and respect Professor Mark Watson who confronts us with what it really means to acknowledge and respect diversity.

What is your view of the developments in the careers field? Do you see them as less scientific?

This is an interesting question. It relates in part to my previous answer. I think the scientific approach will always be necessary and it is important that both quantitative and qualitative approaches are used to research the complex systems that involve human beings. I also see the career development field as similar to environmental science in that it benefits from research derived from a number of fields including psychology, biology and sociology as well as specific career development research. We are evolutionary beings adapting to our changing environment so systems thinking rather than silo thinking is needed. The challenge in this field as it is in others is making sense of complexity.

And finally, can we say something about Marijke Wright outside her formal role as a career counsellor?

Having travelled to Europe in the last couple of years and taken time to play in Greece and Italy as well as visit my relatives in Germany and the Netherlands, I can see myself doing more of that! I also commute north to the Sunshine Coast, Queensland to visit my two creative children and south to my siblings in Melbourne, so maintaining the global and local family connections is important for me. Other than that I most enjoy taking in the wonderful scenery of Sydney on bush walks with friends, going to the beach in the summer or having dinner parties and good conversation. And a glass of red of course!
How did you come into careers work?
Everything I’ve ever done has been the result of serendipity or happenstance. Not all doors, however, were the right ones to walk through. This door begged to be opened.

I know that over the years you have contributed to the profession in many ways including editing the *Australian Career Counsellor*—may I ask you to say something about this involvement?
I have my own business as a writer, editor, qualitative career counsellor, and adult trainer—John L. Drake Consultancy—although the training has disappeared from view (occasionally it resurfaces, and I am a member of a facilitator’s network). It was a natural merging of areas of interest to become the editor of *Australian Career Counsellor*. For five years I played that role until many other interests and misfortunes including divorce and the Family Court intervened, and it was time to move on.

The position changed my views on career counselling; I changed from a quantitative to a qualitative career counsellor because of the influence of the stories I was editing. Perhaps it was the other way around, that is, my choice of stories for the magazine may have reflected me to an extent. I tried to avoid that as much as I could but it was not completely possible.

If my memory serves me correctly you were involved in the Commonwealth Employment Service for a number of years. Would you like to say something about that service? Many readers would not have an idea of its historical importance.

The Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) existed for 50 years. It did not reach the new millennium. Its conception was part of the rebuilding following World War II. Its demise was part of the economic philosophy which incorporates the concept that privatisation is good. That’s a few steps past the theories of J. S. Mills. I have my own views but that discourse would take a while. The replacement is the Job Network with which your readers would be familiar; it functions more or less in the same way as the CES did, but not so well or comprehensively in my opinion.

From a career point of view, in the CES I was using my transferable analytical skills—I have been both a Biochemist and a Physical Biologist in some of my past...
lives. My position in the organisation was as a trainer and project officer, and involved career counselling although that was not part of my job description. As a student I was a national student delegate, and as a public servant I was a national union delegate. These roles focus on the needs of people in a similar way to career counselling.

My role in the public service also involved assisting in the writing of legislation in plain English, training middle management in administrative law and, on secondment, being part of a Commonwealth Tribunal. This has led to other changes in my career as time has gone on—the happenstance principle.

I know that you have also been directly involved with the CDAA at a state level. How do you see this organisation developing?

In recent years, I have moved away from my involvement at the state or national levels. For many years I was very active especially in professional development event organisation.

My view about the future of the CDAA can only be speculative because of my current lack of involvement directly in the organisation. In recent times, however, I have noted that communication directly with members has been limited. Is there a need to review the effects of the digital age on communication?

What type of work are you now engaged in on a daily-to-day basis?

My writing and editing predominates over career counselling in my business, however I also have a legal orientation. That again has been due to happenstance. My interest in the law has evolved from a number of experiences, including my legal work in the CES; several years in the Land and Environment Court and Supreme Court dealing with environmental matters on behalf of the community; in the Industrial Relations Commission on behalf of clients; in the Family Court from 2004 until today as a self-represented respondent to my ex-wife's application (my youngest son is 10); in the Family Court and Federal Magistrates Court assisting other men and women through their family difficulties; and finally, in the Local Court, District Court and Supreme Court assisting people with literacy and cognitive issues (the system ignores such people). I am now, of course, a law student and enjoying it very much.

Who has been influential in your thinking about careers?

My life focus has always been on social issues. It will not be surprising therefore, that the greatest influence on my thinking about careers has been the people whom I serve. To understand their issues I have gone out of my way to experience what they experience. I have, for example, appeared in feature films and a mini-series to properly understand that industry, although blinking may mean that you miss me.

Do you have a particular philosophy or orientation that characterised your work as a practitioner?

I have taken an incremental approach to my practice as a qualitative career counsellor. Each client’s experience and issues provide either a novel problem or more usually a problem that I have come across before. Over time career principles are established.

What is your view of the developments in the careers field?

I’m not sure there have been developments. Goethe once said that everything has been thought of before, that is, there is really nothing new.

John, if I am correct you were involved in a historic court case, which you conducted against a major corporation. I recall that the judge not only found in your favour but also praised the quality and standard of your defence and this was widely reported. Would you like to say something about this aspect of your life?

As I’ve indicated, my life focus has been on social issues and community. The public meetings and rallies, protests, meeting state ministers, and the case itself took several years. Perhaps to answer your question I could quote what the judge said about my friend and me in his judgment:

Both Applicants presented as highly intelligent and well-informed persons who had prepared their case with considerable dedication and zeal. They demonstrated a quite extraordinary mastery, as essentially lay persons, of the complex issues raised by the proposal in all of its dimensions (i.e., scientific, technical, social, environmental and political).

The judge has since retired. In his departure that case was brought up as one of his very significant judgments. He was also compared with Lord Denning,
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a very famous British judge, and I agree. Following his leaving the bench, I wrote to him on behalf of my friend and myself, and he wrote a very pleasant handwritten reply.

And finally, can we say something about John Drake outside his formal role as a career practitioner?
I will continue studying law. Hopefully my time in the Family Court will finish this year. My time with my youngest children, 10 and 13, is very important to me, and the case outcome is relevant to that issue. They have always been involved in most of my activities, including environmental, such as at meetings at the Nature Conservation Council. This perhaps sets the tone of who I am. My focus is very much on my children and community. Currently at my children’s school I assist in the supervision of inter- and intra-school chess championships with children from Year 3 to Year 8 (including my sons). My eldest son who has just finished his Education Masters at the University of Sydney was completely home-schooled. He lives with me. My family is divided after divorce. The next chapter is rather unknown. I am a sole parent with a strong social focus who very much loves his children; those elements will dictate what happens next, as they do now.
SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT: VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF AUSTRALIAN CAREER DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS

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Career development practice had its origins in social justice reform over 100 years ago. A social justice perspective requires practitioners to examine the environmental context of their work, including the social, economic and political systems that influence people's career development. Achieving socially just outcomes for clients may necessitate intervention in these systems. While social justice is receiving a resurgence of interest in the literature, little is known about career development practitioners' attitudes towards and knowledge of socially just practice. The present paper examines the views and experiences of Australian career development practitioners on social justice. Data was collected by means of an online survey. Participants offered descriptions of their understanding of social justice and also examples of critical incidents in which they had attempted social justice interventions. Findings related to how Australian career development practitioners describe and operationalise social justice in their work are presented, as well as recommendations for future research.
Several authors have contended that career development could develop a vision for the future by returning to its foundational roots in social justice (Arthur, 2005; Arthur, 2008; Hartung & Blustein, 2002; Toporek & Chope, 2006). Emanating out of the social reform movements of the early 1900s, career development, or vocational guidance as it was then known, was viewed as a means of assisting individuals to reach their potential. However, despite its fundamental place in career development, social justice has not always been visible or explicit in theory or in practice (Gummere, 1988), and it has been suggested that attending to social justice issues poses the next challenge for theory and for practice (Hartung & Blustein, 2002). While social justice has been variously described, socially just practice may be considered as ‘actions that contribute to the advancement of society and advocate for equal access to resources for the marginalized or less fortunate individuals in society’ (O’Brien, 2001, p. 66).

The present paper examines the views and experiences of Australian career development practitioners on social justice. Specifically, it discusses how Australian career development practitioners describe and operationalise social justice in their work. Findings from the Australian sample of a comparative cross-national study of career development practitioners from Canada and Australia will be presented. Data was collected by means of an online survey that invited participants to offer their own definitions of social justice and also critical incident scenarios in which they had attempted social justice interventions. The perspectives of Australian career development practitioners regarding social justice, their current practices, and perceived barriers for implementing social justice interventions will be discussed.

**Focusing on Social Justice in Career Development**

For much of its history, career development’s predominant focus has been on individuals and providing remedial interventions. More recently however, there has been greater political awareness of the value of career development to society and its position as an interface between individual needs and political and societal needs (e.g., OECD, 2003). While this growing awareness could potentially strengthen career development’s position in society, several authors have cautioned about the socio-political location of career development and the need to balance the support of individuals and its wider social responsibilities (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Irving & Malik, 2005; Nicholas, Naidoo, & Pretorius, 2006; Richardson, 2000). For example, some authors (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Richardson, 1993, 2000) have advocated for a refocusing of career theory on work of all kinds rather than the notion of career.

Social justice interventions require career development practitioners to look beyond presenting issues, symptoms and concerns and examine how they may be understood in a broader context (e.g., Patton & McMahon, 2006; Strong, 2007). Such understanding requires career development practitioners to critically reflect on the theories and socio-political systems influencing their work. Assuming a greater emphasis on social justice does not imply that career development’s traditional focus on individuals should be neglected; rather it implies that career development look towards a wider range of interventions that may involve working with broader systems such as schools, universities, and work environments (Hartung & Blustein, 2002).

Ivey and Collins (2003) suggested that such systemic interventions may include prevention, community service and outreach. In relation to systemic interventions, Arthur and McMahon (2005) and Toporek and Williams (2006) suggested that such interventions may necessitate career development practitioners assuming a broader range of roles, such as that of advocate, social activist, or consultant. However, while most career development practitioners hold social justice as a value at a personal level and understand the influence of systemic factors on the lives of their clients, they often lack the training and resources to implement systemic interventions. Thus operationalising the value of social justice into career development practice through an expanded scope of practices requires concerted efforts in training and in practise (Arthur, 2005; Arthur, 2008; Toporek & Williams, 2006).

In order to develop career development practitioners’ capacity to operate in such an expanded range of roles, it has been suggested that in addition to the traditional focus of training on the development of skills related to working with individuals, that attention also be given...
to developing the skills related to systemic interventions (Helms, 2003; Toporek & Williams, 2006). However, it is only comparatively recently that the field is beginning to clarify the nature of socially just practice (Toporek, Gerstein, Fouad, Roysicar, & Israel, 2006; Toporek & Williams, 2006). For example, the International Association of Educational and Vocational Guidance named social justice as a foundation competency in the International Competencies for Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioners (Repetto, Malik, Ferrer-Sama, Manzano, & Hiebert, 2003).

The identification and introduction of social justice competencies related to social action and advocacy (Arthur, 2005; Arthur, 2008) may provide a starting point for translating the ideals of social justice into practice. Infusing such competencies into training may strengthen career development’s core value of social justice and provide career development practitioners with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to engage more effectively in a broad range of social justice interventions. While social justice has always been a guiding principle of career development, and competencies specific to social justice have been introduced, McMahon, Arthur, and Collins (2008) advocated that such competencies need to be further delineated and tested for their relevance and adoption by career development practitioners. Therefore, the aim of this research study was to identify the ways that career practitioners in Australia conceptualise and implement social justice.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

The sample pool comprised members of ten Australian professional associations representing career development practitioners. The associations ranged in size from approximately 1000 members to approximately 30 members. Some career development practitioners belonged to more than one association. All participants were over the age of 18 and participation was voluntary. The final sample comprised 26 participants, 10 of whom provided at least one example of a critical incident scenario in Part C of the survey. The actual response rate could not be calculated because of the nature of the recruitment process. All of the 26 participants provided descriptions of social justice. Of the participants, 23 were female, 19 were 40 or older, 23 identified as Caucasian, 22 identified as heterosexual, 25 identified as middle class, 23 had postgraduate qualifications, and 18 had been working as career development practitioners for more than six years.

Of the 10 participants who provided examples of critical incident scenarios that went well, nine were female, seven were 40 or older, eight identified as Caucasian, nine identified as heterosexual, nine identified as middle class, six had postgraduate qualifications, and eight had been working as a career development practitioner for more than six years. Of the six participants who provided examples of critical incident scenarios that did not go well, five were female, four were 40 or older, five identified as Caucasian, heterosexual, and middle class, four had postgraduate qualifications, and four had been working as a career development practitioner for more than six years.

**Measure**

The Social Justice and Career Development Survey (SJCDS) (Collins, Arthur, & McMahon, 2006) is designed to gather information about career development practitioners’ professional needs and best practice examples in the area of social justice. The measure was developed by the researchers through a review of conceptual literature to derive competencies in the domains of self-awareness, knowledge, and skills related to social justice. Next, 10 content experts were invited to provide feedback and recommendations regarding the wording of the competency statements. The final online version of the questionnaire contained 41 competency statements and was trialled with practitioners in both Canada and Australia.

The SJCDS is designed in three parts. Part A seeks demographic information and information on the social justice background of participants and takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. Demographic information includes age, gender, level of education, years of experience in the field of career development, primary work setting, and functions of work as a career development practitioner. The social justice background of participants is investigated through four questions, three of which relate to how familiar they are with social justice issues as they relate to career practice, and whether they had attended a workshop or a course on social justice. The fourth question invites participants to describe social justice as it relates to career practice in four to six sentences and include examples.
Part B of the SJCDS seeks information on participants’ attitudes, skills and knowledge related to social justice through a series of multiple choice items on two separate scales: importance to career practice and current competency level. At the end of the third section and concluding Part B of the SJCDS, participants are asked to select from a list of 11 external factors they may recognise as barriers to implementing social justice competencies. Participants can select more than one item, and they can specify other factors if they wish.

Part C of the SJCDS is optional and contains open ended questions and multiple choice items seeking information on critical incident scenarios related to social justice practices. Participants are asked to provide information on two critical incident scenarios related to social justice, one where a recent session or interview went particularly well with a client and a second scenario based on a session or interview that did not go well. For each scenario, information is solicited related to presenting career issues, the relationship between the presenting issues and social justice, the intervention used, skills, knowledge and attitude competencies, barriers to implementing the intervention of choice, competencies that might have supported their work, the outcomes of the intervention, assessment of the intervention and follow-up to the session or interview.

**PROCEDURE**

Recruitment for the study was done via Australian professional associations that represent career development practitioners from different constituencies. Information on the study was emailed by the researchers to the presidents of 11 such associations and permission was sought to distribute information about the survey to their members. No reply was received from one association and the other 10 agreed to distribute information to their members. The association that did not respond was very small, and in general its members also belong to larger associations. The associations’ preferred method of contact with their members was email and electronic newsletters. The project information explained the study and invited career development practitioners to participate by logging into the online survey website. A hotlink to the survey website was included in the information. The online website provided further information for participants and sought informed consent from participants before they proceeded with the survey.

**RESULTS**

This paper reports on findings related to one item in Part A of the SJCDS which invited participants to describe social justice as it relates to career practice and also findings related to Part C of the SJCDS: critical incident scenarios that went well and critical incident scenarios that did not go well. The findings related to descriptions of social justice will be reported first.

### Descriptions of Social Justice

Participants were invited to describe social justice as it relates to career practice in four to six sentences and to include examples if they wanted to. Responses were provided by 26 participants and ranged from a short four word response ‘I am very unfamiliar’, through single sentence responses, to the most lengthy response of five sentences or 191 words. Responses were thematically analysed and revealed five major areas addressed by participants, specifically social justice themes, factors influencing the social justice needs of clients, types of resources, barriers to achieving social justice, and levels of intervention. Some participant responses contained more than one theme.

**Social justice themes** were identified in the responses of 22 of the participants and included: equal access, individual awareness, equal opportunity, social justice awareness, and inclusion. Table 1 lists the social justice themes, the number of participants whose responses related to the themes, and examples of participant responses. Two of the themes, awareness of the individual and awareness of social justice related more to the practitioner’s skills and knowledge, while the other themes related more to desirable social justice goals.

**Factors influencing the social justice needs of their clients** were identified in the responses of 19 participants. Of note, is the number of participants (8) who indicated that socially just practice should apply to all people. The three factors identified were disability, race (including ethnicity), and socio-economic status (including unemployment). Table 2 lists the factors, the number of participants whose responses identified the factor, and examples of participant responses.

**Resources** that facilitate social justice were evident in the responses of 11 participants. Examples of such resources include career counselling, opportunities (including lifestyle choice), education, services, and...
Table 1: Social Justice Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Example of participant response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal access</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Social justice in regards to career practice that everyone has equal access to career counselling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual awareness</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>When I am working with people who come under the social justice umbrella, it is important for me to consider the individual’s circumstances particularly when working with the person on their career development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal opportunity</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>To provide equal opportunities, which includes information, guidance and employment services to everyone in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social justice awareness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>As career practitioners I believe we need to be aware of the social issues that may impact an individual’s access to the above.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Factors Influencing Social Justice Needs of Clients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Example of participant response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Social justice involves treating all clients according to their needs and starting point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Social justice is providing opportunities for my clients to be considered for jobs along with their able-bodied counterparts without being discriminated against on the basis of their disability or perceived health condition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Social justice in career practice would ensure that all individuals had opportunities, regardless of their gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Career counselling needs to be accessible to people who are unable to pay a private practitioner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Resources Important to Social Justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Example of participant response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>That means that all clients should be able to access a career counsellor and have access to resources to assist them in decision-making at every stage of their decision-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Social justice in career practice is focus on equal share in all the opportunities/programs available for individuals to maximise their career potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Every individual should have the same educational and career opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Theoretically being able to offer a wide range of services and assistance to job seekers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Accessibility and equal opportunity for all individuals and groups to mainstream career services, education, resources, employment, life-style choice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
employment. Table 3 lists the resources, the number of participants whose responses identified the resource, and examples of participant responses.

**Barriers to achieving social justice** were identified in the responses of 15 of the participants and included discrimination, marginalisation, prejudice, and inequalities. Table 4 lists the barriers, the number of participants whose responses identified the resource, and examples of participant responses.

The **level of intervention** needed to achieve socially just outcomes was identified in the responses of 13 participants. These included the levels of individual, government, employers, society, practitioners, and the community. Table 5 lists the level of intervention, the number of participants whose responses identified the resource, and examples of participant responses. Three of the intervention levels (employers, society, and the government) relate to intervention at the broader systemic level.

### Table 4: Barriers to Achieving Social Justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Example of participant response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Perceived or real discrimination or issues that may affect the employment of a person in a particular field or a persons willingness to become involved in a particular field or industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginalisation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>In both individual practice intentionally working with those identified as marginalised and in terms of practice as an education act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fair and reasonable access to career development, employment and education opportunities without prejudice or discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequalities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Inequality of opportunity does have a bearing on career choices and decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5: Level of Intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Example of participant response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Treating clients fairly, giving clients the tools to overcome discrimination in the workplace. Assisting clients understand what discrimination is, and what they can do about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>It would also include educating the workforce and government so that only socially just practices prevailed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>If my client is the best person for the job then the employer must make reasonable adjustments to the access to the building in order for the person to do the job or modify the job somewhat so that the person will be enabled to do the job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Social justices in relation to career practice would provide appropriate support that is accessible to all levels of society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Career counselling needs to be accessible to people who are unable to pay a private practitioner. Some counsellors may be able to give their services gratis as a community service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Equality of opportunity and the lessening of any real or perceived divisions between those who are disadvantaged in some way and those who are not, within our community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical Incident Scenarios
For each of the critical incident scenarios, participants were invited to describe the presenting issue and its relationship to social justice; the intervention they used; the attitudes, skills and knowledge that facilitated their intervention; barriers to their choice of intervention; additional attitudes, skills and knowledge that might have assisted them; the outcomes of the intervention and how they were assessed; and the nature of any follow up. As previously mentioned, 10 participants provided examples of critical incident scenarios that did not go well. Due to the overall limited number of scenarios, the fact that not all participants responded to each question and similarities in the nature of the responses, a synthesis of findings related to both types of scenarios will be presented.

A range of client factors was present in the scenarios including ethnicity, gender, age, disability, low socio-economic status, criminal records and poor academic record. Of these, only ethnicity, age, gender and disability were mentioned in more than one scenario. Client limitations, all of which were mentioned in fewer than half of the scenarios, included access to support (family and social), finance, medical assistance, accommodation, opportunities, and employment. Education, training, and qualifications were described in six of the scenarios. Personal limitations of clients such as self-esteem, confidence and a lack of direction were mentioned in three scenarios. In relation to social justice, clients in eight of the scenarios had experienced discrimination. One or two participants reported that their clients had ‘no voice’, no resources and an inability to reach their full potential.

In working with their clients, the participants assumed a range of roles including psychotherapist, counsellor, advocate, advisor, consultant, and change agent. Of these roles, counsellor, psychotherapist, consultant and advocate were most used. In almost all of the scenarios, intervention was described as being at the level of the individual. While a range of other intervention levels was mentioned (e.g., employers, society, government, institutions, teachers), each was only mentioned by one or two participants for each type of scenario. For the scenarios that went well, almost all of the participants indicated that their clients had increased self-awareness whereas this was commented on by only one of the participants who provided a scenario that did not go well. Employment opportunities and training were outcomes for clients in almost half of the scenarios that went well, and a plan of action was an outcome in two of the scenarios that did not work well.

In both types of scenario, fewer participants provided responses related to the knowledge, skills and attitudes that facilitated their choice of intervention, and not all responded to each question. All of the participants reported using their counselling skills in their intervention in both types of scenarios. Most of the participants who described scenarios that went well also used the related skills of communication and problem solving. In relation to the scenarios that did not go well, empathy, support and networking were also used. In relation to the scenarios that went well, five out of the six participants reported using knowledge about the client’s problems; whereas client knowledge was not identified in any of the four responses in the scenarios that did not go well. Knowledge related to external factors such as the labour market, training and work experience opportunities, community resources, career development and professional bodies was mentioned in one or two of each type of scenario. Although very few participants provided a response related to the attitudes that facilitated their intervention, being non-judgemental was mentioned by one participant in each type of scenario. In terms of skills, knowledge and attitudes that might have supported participants’ work, all of the participants who described a scenario that went well indicated that increased knowledge would have been helpful to them whereas only one of five participants in the scenarios that did not go well indicated that increased knowledge would have been helpful. In general, the remaining responses reflected the individual nature of the needs of the practitioners, with each being nominated by only one or two participants in each scenario.

Participants were asked to describe any barriers to implementing their choice of intervention. In the scenarios that went well approximately half of
participants identified work demands and government barriers such as policies, lack of funding, bureaucracies and institutions. Lack of funding and institutional barriers were identified by one or two participants in the scenarios that did not go well, but they were not related to government. In each scenario type, one participant identified the client as a barrier and two participants in the scenarios that did not go well identified themselves as a barrier, specifically a lack of skills and being discriminated against. Barriers operating at many levels such as employers, institutions, professional, and client levels were identified in one or two scenarios. Only government and agency levels were identified by more than two participants, specifically four out of eight participants who provided scenarios that went well.

In terms of outcomes of the interventions described in the two types of scenario, all participants agreed that success had been achieved at the client level. One participant in each type of scenario also noted that the intervention had been successful at the employer level. Client outcomes related to success in both types of scenarios included gaining a job or employment in almost half of the scenarios, and empowerment for the clients of two-thirds of the participants who responded to this question. Other outcomes included training, support, accommodation and increased education. In general, such outcomes were assessed in relation to clients themselves as evident in responses such as client empowerment, client evaluation, client goals met, client attitude and employment. Of these, client empowerment and client evaluation were identified in approximately half of the scenarios that went well. Follow up in the form of additional sessions was provided in approximately half of both types of scenarios. Half of the participants who described a scenario that did not go well provided no follow up, whereas only one of the participants who described a scenario that went well provided no follow up. Curiosity was listed by practitioners who described scenarios that went well as the purpose of the follow up. Other reasons for following up included support, evaluation of client goals and determining project success; but each of these was listed only once in each type of scenario.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings provide some preliminary insights into Australian career development practitioners’ views and experiences of social justice. A limitation of the study is that surprisingly few Australian career development practitioners participated and that even fewer completed the survey. Due to the low participation and completion rates, it is not possible to generalise the findings to the wider population of career development practitioners. Possible explanations for the low response rate include the survey being available online and not in paper-based form and the amount of time required to complete it. Studies have shown that response rates for emailed and email-announced surveys tend to be lower than those for ‘snail’ mail or telephone surveys (Cook, Heath, & Thompson, 2000). By way of explanation, these authors suggested the increased use of email for communication, including junk mail as a possible reason. While response rates may be increased through the use of personalised contact letters (Cook et al.), distribution of information about the survey via email was the preferred medium for the professional associations involved. A further limitation is the completion of the optional Part C of the survey by only 10 of the 25 participants. Cook et al. concluded that completion rates may be high as there is no experimenter or interviewer monitoring the process and little incentive to complete. However, it might also be possible that the topic of social justice is not one that captures the interest of career development practitioners or one that they believe is relevant for professional practice.

Despite the low response and completion rates, tentative conclusions may be drawn which indicate possible future research directions. As evident in Tables 1–5, the understanding of socially just practice revealed by the views and experiences of these Australian career development practitioners accord with those commonly found in the literature (e.g., O’Brien, 2001). In particular, the client groups mentioned in the practitioners’ descriptions of social justice and in the critical incident scenarios are those that have traditionally been regarded as disadvantaged due to cultural diversity and social positioning (Arthur, 2006). It is also worth noting that in determining the success of their interventions, the participants’ responses focused on client outcomes, thus reflecting career development’s long time focus on individuals. This micro-focus persists despite suggestions that career development provides benefits for the wider society (e.g., O’Brien, 2001; OECD, 2003).

It has been suggested that responding to issues related to social justice may require practitioners to intervene at different systemic levels (e.g., Hartung &
Blustein, 2002; Ivey & Collins, 2003) and to assume a broader range of roles (Arthur & McMahon, 2005; Toporek & Williams, 2006). Interestingly, other than intervention between practitioners and individual clients, broader levels of intervention were identified by relatively few participants. While again reflecting career development’s traditional focus on individuals, this finding could also reflect observations that have been made about the limited preparation practitioners have in their professional training to intervene at systemic levels (Helms, 2003; Toporek & Williams, 2006). In keeping with Arthur and McMahon’s (2005) suggestion, participants identified a number of roles that they adopted in their social justice interventions. Most of these roles, however, related to intervention at the individual level and not at the broader systemic level. These findings suggest that career development practitioners may need further training and support to identify and determine methods for intervening towards organisational, community, or political change.

It is of interest that while practitioners tended to have a strong focus on the individual clients with whom they worked, the barriers they identified were predominantly at the level of the broader system such as government and organisations. This reflects career development’s position as an interface between individual needs and political and societal needs (McMahon, Arthur, & Collins, 2008). While practitioners may locate the source of client problems within these broader systems, they may be less well prepared to operate at systemic levels beyond that of the individual (Arthur & McMahon, 2005). In addition, they may face similar barriers to those of the clients they serve in their attempts to ameliorate the systemic factors that result in social injustices and place limitations on client career success. Of further interest in relation to barriers is that two practitioners in the scenarios that did not go well identified themselves as barriers, possibly reflecting a need for enhanced competencies in relation to social justice intervention.

For example, in the scenarios that went well, almost all participants indicated that their clients’ self-awareness had increased. A tentative explanation may relate to the finding that in the scenarios that went well, most participants reported using knowledge of the client’s problems. This suggests that these practitioners took time to get to know their clients and attempted to empower them through both self-understanding and perspective-taking about their career-related issues. Such awareness has long been identified as a core factor in diversity and social justice competency models (Arthur & Collins, 2005).

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

While the findings may not be generalised, they suggest that the Australian career development practitioners in this study hold social justice values that they enact in their work. Further, the findings suggest an intense focus on individuals in social justice interventions by career development practitioners and little systemic intervention. Future research with larger samples and using other measures could examine the nature of this focus and its effectiveness. In addition, future research could examine the reasons for the limited nature of systemic interventions, whether such interventions could enhance effectiveness, and if so, the nature of training needed to assist career development to develop such intervention skills. It might also be important to further examine the perceived or actual barriers to implementation of systemic interventions by career practitioners.

It is hoped that this study will raise awareness of social justice issues in the context of career development. It is also hoped that this study will encourage discussion about roles and training needs for incorporating social justice into career development interventions, topics which to date had relatively little attention in the Australian career development literature.

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THEORY AND PRACTICE

This section is designed as a brief professional review of the article. It provides relevant study questions and answers for readers to test their knowledge of the article.

Hasn’t social justice always been a part of career development?
Answer: It is true that career development had its beginnings in social justice reform. However, since that time social justice has sometimes been more implicit than explicit and issues related to social justice such as multiculturalism have received some attention. Social justice is now receiving more attention in the field of career development as the rapid change in society is producing greater societal inequity that is reflected in the more complex needs of our clients.

How would a focus on social justice change the work of career development practitioners?
Answer: Career development practitioners have always worked in the best interests of their clients to produce effective outcomes. However, socially just outcomes for clients may not always be achievable if injustice is entrenched in the broader system and career development practitioners only intervene at the individual client level. Better client outcomes may be possible by also intervening at systemic levels.
In recent years, the career development of athletes has become an increasingly topical subject. Sport is now a major business and the career focus of many an aspiring young athlete. On a practical level, this interest has translated into a dramatic increase in the number of athlete career development programs around the world, such as the Athlete Career Education (ACE) program here in Australia (Albion & Fogarty, 2003). To support these practical initiatives, there is a requirement for continued input from the research community on the theoretical constructs that shape career decision-making processes. Hinkle (1994) identified this need when he called for the development of educational programs that not only assist athletes with performance but also career development and life planning. Hinkle believed the delivery of sport psychology services would be greatly enhanced as a function of expanding the research base upon which it is founded, particularly in the areas of athletic self-concept, self-efficacy beliefs, and career life-planning.

Looking back on the intervening period, it seems that much of the career-related research on athletes has
focused on career transition issues (e.g., Wyllerman, Allermann, & Lavallee, 2004) with fewer empirical investigations into factors influencing the career exploration, planning, and decision-making processes of early- or mid-career athletes. The difficulties faced by young athletes having to make substantial investments of time and energy into activities linked with very uncertain rewards do not attract the same attention. The present study addresses this weak area in the literature by exploring the role of demographic variables, self-efficacy, and locus of control on the career decision-making difficulties experienced by a sample of elite Australian athletes who were part of the ACE program. We begin by explaining the nature of career decision-making difficulties and how they are measured.

**CAREER DECISION-MAKING DIFFICULTIES**

Early attempts at investigating career decision-making difficulties had as their primary focus the development of a variety of measures geared at assessing indecision. Tinsley (1992) criticised these empirical attempts for being conducted independently of theory. In response to this criticism, Gati, Krausz, and Osipow (1996) drew upon classical decision theory to develop a taxonomy of difficulties encountered in career decision-making. In order to test their model, they constructed and validated the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ). The components of the CDDQ give some insight into how Gati et al. conceptualised career decision-making difficulties, so we will describe the instrument in detail.

The CDDQ comprises 44 statements that assess attitudes and beliefs regarding career decision-making. Designed to assess the particular areas of difficulties individuals are facing in their career decision-making, the 44 items cover three global first-order categories of difficulties, namely: Lack of Readiness to Make a Career Decision, Lack of Information, and Inconsistent Information. Lack of Readiness, the first major difficulty category, pertains to the period preceding an individual’s engagement in making a career decision and is further subdivided into the three difficulty categories of Lack of Motivation (3 items), Indecisiveness (4 items) and Dysfunctional Myths (3 items). Each of the other two major categories comprises categories of difficulties that arise during the career decision-making process. The second category, Lack of Information, is subdivided to include the subscales of Lack of Knowledge about the Process (3 items), Lack of Knowledge about the Self (8 items), Lack of Knowledge about Occupations (4 items) and Lack of Knowledge about How to Access Additional Sources of Information (2 items). The final category, Inconsistent Information, incorporates the categories of Unreliable Information (6 items), Internal Conflicts (7 items), and External Conflicts (4 items). These 44 items can be summed to yield a score indicating the severity of difficulties facing an individual. The CDDQ also includes a number of introductory questions aimed at providing a general overview of level of career indecision, including questions regarding level of undecidedness, satisfaction with this decision status, and confidence in current choice. A measure of career decision status can be obtained from these questions.

Osipow and Gati (1998) reported that the CDDQ was correlated with the Career Decision Scale (Osipow, Carney, Winer, Yanico, & Koschier, 1976) and negatively correlated with the Career Decision-Making Self Efficacy Scale (Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996). In addition, the CDDQ was able to distinguish between decided and undecided students, providing evidence of its concurrent validity. In their analysis of the CDDQ, Albion and Fogarty (2002) reported a five-factor structure, including Lack of Motivation, Indecisiveness, Lack of Information, Internal Conflicts, and Conflicts with Others. Their analysis of the three items that preceded the CDDQ difficulty items revealed a single underlying factor, which they labelled Decision Status. Scores on scales derived from the five CDDQ difficulties factors predicted CDDQ Decision Status. In a second study, based this time on elite young athletes who were part of the ACE program and non-athletes of comparable age, Albion and Fogarty (2005) reported that scores on the CDDQ Difficulties section were associated with scores on the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Brewer, VanRaalte, & Linder, 1993) with high scorers on the AIMS more likely to experience career decision-making difficulties. The CDDQ was judged to be the best available self-report measure for career indecision and was therefore used to provide the dependent variables in the current study. In the paragraphs that follow, we review constructs that are believed to be associated with career indecision.
Demographic Variables

Research investigating the relative contribution of demographic variables to career maturity and career decision status is equivocal (Patton & Creed, 2001). Following an investigation into the developmental differences in career decision status of Australian adolescents, Patton and Creed outlined the complexity of the relationship between age, gender and status, highlighting the need for these and other demographic factors to be explored further. The present study explored the relations between career decision-making difficulties and gender, age, and number of hours spent participating in sport.

Athletic Identity

Murphy, Petitpas, and Brewer (1996) were among the first investigators to examine potential influences of career-related variables and constructs among athletes. Stimulated by an article in which Brewer et al. (1993) discussed the proposed consequences, both positive and negative, of exclusively identifying oneself as an athlete, these early attempts hypothesised that a strong athletic identity would be related to lower levels of career maturity. In support, Murphy et al. observed an inverse relationship between the self-identity variables of identity foreclosure and athletic identity, and the career maturity attitudes of 124 intercollegiate athletes. Significant effects were also observed for gender, playing status, and type of sport. More specifically, those athletes projected to be most likely at risk of not acquiring career decision-making skills were ‘male varsity student-athletes in revenue producing sports’ (Murphy et al., p. 293).

Brown and Hartley (1998) found no relationship between athletic identity and decision-making, world-of-work information, and knowledge of preferred occupational group. Subsequent studies (Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001; Martens & Cox, 2000) also failed to support the proposed negative association between athletic identity and career maturity. Albion and Fogarty (2005) found a weak relationship between athletic identity and career decision-making difficulties but reported that it was due to a small section of their sample of athletes. In fact, it was the same section identified by Murphy et al. (1996). In general, whilst the early literature suggests a negative relationship, more recent findings indicate that there is probably no relationship between identity and decision-making. One possibility is that the growth of athlete career education programs, such as ACE, has addressed what was formerly a deficiency in the career development of athletes. The present study will explore this research question further in a sample of elite Australian athletes.

Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1986) referred to self-efficacy as the belief an individual holds regarding his or her ability to perform a certain task. Accordingly, career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE) depicts the confidence one has in one’s ability to perform the behaviours necessary for effective career decision-making. One of the most popular measures of this construct is the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale Short-Form (CDMSE-SF), which measures an individual’s degree of belief that he or she can successfully complete tasks considered as necessary in making career decisions (Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996).

Among the general population, self-efficacy beliefs have been implicated in career maturity (Luzzo, 1995), career planning (Rogers, Creed, & Glendon, 2008), and individual levels of indecision (Taylor & Betz, 1983; Taylor & Pompa, 1990). Following a review of the literature on career maturity, career identity, and self-efficacy, Prideaux and Creed (2001) noted that the three have much in common and should be studied in unison. Working with a sample of athletes, Brown, Glastetter-Fender, and Shelton (2000) explored the relations between athletic identity, identity foreclosure, and the more narrowly defined constructs of career locus of control and career decision-making self-efficacy. They found that hours of sport participation and external career locus of control were both associated with lower self-efficacy beliefs for making decisions regarding career-related tasks. One drawback to this study was the use of the Career Locus of Control Scale (CLCS) (Trice, Haire, & Elliott, 1989), which yields a measure of external locus of control. For reasons that will become apparent in the next paragraph, we were interested in measuring internal as well as external locus of control.

Career Locus of Control

Locus of control (Rotter, 1966) refers to the extent to which people believe outcomes are dependent upon their own actions (internal orientation) or largely under the control of chance factors, powerful others, or the difficulty of the task (external orientation).
Empirically, locus of control has been linked to a variety of career development activities and, in particular to career decision, with individuals showing an internal locus of control tending to demonstrate both higher levels of career maturity and lower levels of indecision (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Hartman, Fuqua, & Blum, 1985). Working with students, Lease (2004) found that external locus of control (measured by CLCS) was related to career decision-making difficulties (measured by CDDQ). In their investigation into the relationship between athletic identity, career decision-making self-efficacy, career locus of control, and demographic variables amongst 259 junior college student-athletes, Kornspan and Etzel (2001) found that career self-efficacy and career locus of control, and not athletic identity, were the most important predictors of career maturity. Luzzo (1997) also reported that external locus of control (measured by CLCS) was negatively associated with career decision-making self-efficacy (measured by CDMSE-SF).

**RESEARCH AIMS**

Much of the research on career decision-making in athletes is clouded by contradictory findings. As Patton and Creed (2001) asserted, there are many complex interactions in this area. Do athletes have more trouble making career-related decisions? The answer may well depend on the nature of the athletic population being studied, the presence of demographic variables that can act as moderators, and psychological variables that interact to produce effects that are not replicated in other studies. The aim of the present study was to examine the effects of the demographic variables, gender, age, level of participation, hours of sport participation per week and the psychological variables athletic identity, career decision-making self-efficacy, and career locus of control on decision-making difficulties in a sample of elite athletes. By choosing an elite athlete population we were able to exert some control over such factors as level of commitment and level of achievement, and by adopting a multivariate framework, we hoped to be able to judge the relative contribution of these variables, all three of which have been identified in the literature as related to career decision-making. A further aim of this study was to examine the influence of internal, as well as external, locus of control.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Participants in this study included 117 athletes (51 males and 66 females) affiliated with the Western Australian Institute of Sport (WAIS) in Perth (N = 70) and the Queensland Academy of Sport (QAS) in Brisbane (N = 47). The average age of participants was 21 years (SD = 5.0) with the number of hours participants spent training ranging from 10 to 20 hours per week (M = 17.59). Participants came from 30 sports with the greatest representation coming from the sports of netball (N = 14), athletics (N = 11), golf (N = 11), swimming (N = 9) and triathlon (N = 9). The majority of athletes (N = 69, 60%) reported having represented their country at international level.

**Measures**

**Demographic Variables**

Athletes were asked to provide information regarding age, gender, the age at which they began the sport they are involved in, the number of hours they devote to this sport on a weekly basis, the highest sporting level they have attained, and the number of years they have competed at this level.

**Career Decision Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ)**

The 44-item CDDQ (Gati et al., 1996) was described earlier. In their analysis of the factor structure of the CDDQ, Albion and Fogarty (2002) reported five first-order factors, as opposed to three higher-order factors and various second-order categories reported by Gati et al. (1996). An abbreviated version of the CDDQ was developed for the purposes of this study. The intention was to retain sufficient items to capture the five factors identified by Albion and Fogarty. The resulting 18-item scale used the same CDDQ 9-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Does not describe me) to 9 (Describes me well). A high score on this scale indicates that the individual is having trouble making career decisions.
related decisions. The three items relating to decision status were also included. To form a scale from these three factors, it was necessary to reverse the scoring of the first question, which in its original form indicated undecidedness. To avoid confusion in this paper, we will call the first of these scores (based on the 18 items) CDDQ Difficulties and the second score (based on three items) CDDQ Decision Status.

Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale Short-Form (CDMSE-SF)
The 25-item CDMSE-SF measures an individual’s degree of belief that he or she can successfully complete tasks considered as necessary in making career decisions (Betz et al., 1996). Respondents are asked to consider tasks and indicate on a five-point Likert scale the extent to which they have confidence in their ability to perform these tasks, circling ‘1’ if they have no confidence at all, through to ‘5’ if they have complete confidence. The CDMSE-SF has a high internal consistency reliability of 0.94 and is correlated with criterion measures of career indecision and vocational identity (Betz, 2001). Given that the CDMSE-SF is generally treated as a unidimensional measure (Prideaux & Creed, 2001), we also reduced it to just 10 items.

Work Locus of Control Scale (WLCS)
The WLCS (Spector, 1988) measures the extent to which individuals attribute success and failure to their own efforts (internal locus of control) or external factors (external locus of control). The 16 items are set in an organisational context and use a six-point scale anchored by Strongly Disagree and Strongly Agree. Respondents are asked to mark the point along the scale that they believe best describes them. The WLCS is balanced by equal numbers of externally and internally worded items. Macan and Trusty (1996) reported that the WLCS consists of two dimensions, namely, internality and externality, and they advised users of the scale to compute separate subscales. They demonstrated reliability coefficients for the WLCS ranging from 0.72 to 0.86 for the internal subscale and 0.85 to 0.87 for the external subscale. The fact that separate scales could be obtained made this a better choice of instrument for the present study than the unidimensional CLCS (Trice et al., 1989). Again, minor adaptations were made to the wording of items to suit the current context. The two measures obtained from this scale were labelled LOC-INT and LOC-EXT respectively.

Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS)
The AIMS (Brewer et al., 1993) is a self-report measure designed to assess both the strength and exclusivity of identification with the athlete role. Respondents are asked to indicate on a seven-point scale the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of the 10 statements included in the inventory. A high score indicates high athletic identity. Brewer et al. (1993) reported that the AIMS has an internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.93. Test-retest reliability, following a two-week interval, was reported to be 0.89, with AIMS scores positively correlating with measures of both sport importance and sport orientation.

Procedure
In preparation for the data collection phase, an explanatory proposal outlining the nature of the study and its requirements was sent out to the Western Australian Institute of Sport and the Queensland Academy of Sport. As an incentive to participate, athletes were offered individual written feedback regarding their current career status with respect to career decision-making, the nature of their career decision-making difficulties, and confidence in their ability to make career decisions. To aid returns, all surveys included a pre-addressed reply-paid envelope addressed to the researchers at the University of Southern Queensland. The study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Southern Queensland. Prior to commencement of the study, the participants were provided with an information sheet about the purposes and procedures of the study and requested to complete a consent form should they agree to participate. If the participants were under the age of 18 years, they were asked to have their parent/guardian sign the consent form on their behalf. The questionnaire took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete.

Statistical Analysis
Because many of the instruments were modified for the present study, to determine the underlying factorial structure of the questionnaire all sections were subjected to Principal Axis exploratory factor analysis. Scree plots were used to assess the number of factors and oblique rotation methods (oblimin) were
employed. Pearson Product Moment correlations and multiple regression techniques were used to explore relations among the variables.

**Results**

The data were screened through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for accuracy of data entry, missing values, and fit between the distributions and assumptions required for inferential statistics. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett test of sphericity were used to test the factorability of the correlation matrices. The results were within acceptable limits for all scales.

The factor analysis of the 18-item CDDQ yielded four correlated factors, which were labelled as Lack of Information, Lack of Motivation, Indecisiveness, and Conflicts. In the shortened version of the scale used in the present study, the Internal Conflicts and Conflicts with Others factors obtained by Albion and Fogarty (2002) merged to form a single factor. Although a four-factor solution represented an acceptable solution, the dominance of the first eigenvalue (accounting for 40% of the variance) of this shortened version of the CDDQ pointed toward a single difficulties factor representative of the general difficulties experienced by athletes when making career-related decisions. We decided to use a scale based on this single factor in subsequent analyses. The scale, which we called CDDQ Difficulties, was formed by summing the items. The three introductory items that prefaced the 18 items of the CDDQ were analysed separately. Exploratory factor analysis supported a unidimensional structure. After reversing the scoring of the decision status item so that it was scored in a positive direction, the three items were summed to form a variable called CDDQ Decision Status.

Factor analysis of the adapted form of the CDSME yielded two correlated factors. However, internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s α) was highest if the scale was treated as unidimensional, so subsequent analyses are based on the general career decision-making self-efficacy scale. The Locus of Control scale separated neatly into two uncorrelated factors with all items loading in accordance with expectations. Although the authors of the AIMS now favour a three-factor solution (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001), it was very clear that the AIMS was unidimensional in the present data.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Having described the statistical rationale for treating the constructs of CDDQ Decision Status, CDDQ Difficulties, Athletic Identity, and Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy as unidimensional and Locus of Control as comprising two factors, the next step involved summing the items to yield a total score for each of the scales. Results of these analyses are presented in Table 1. To facilitate comparisons with other studies that have used differing numbers of items in the scales, the average score per item is reported for each scale.

Overall, the athletes in the present study were satisfied with their career decision status with a mean score of 7.05 out of a possible 9.0 on this three-item scale. The average scores for the CDDQ obtained by the athletes in this sample (M = 3.35, SD = 1.59) were similar to those reported by Gati et al. (1996) for American (M = 3.60, SD = 1.32) and Israeli (M = 3.49, SD = 1.36) students and pointed toward relatively low levels of difficulties, given that the maximum possible score per item was nine. The CDDQ scores were also similar to those reported by Albion and Fogarty (2002) for a mixed sample of Australian adults and high school children and almost identical to what they observed working with a much larger sample.
Relations among Scales

The correlation matrix showing the relationships among the variables is presented in Table 2.

The pattern of correlations shown in Table 2 was in accordance with expectations. We will defer discussion of individual relations except to note here that only two of these variables correlated with CDDQ Decision Status whereas three variables correlated with CDDQ Decision Difficulties. We also note that the two locus of control variables were not correlated, justifying their inclusion as separate variables. They exhibit different patterns of relations.

One of the main aims of the study was to assess the relative contribution of these demographic and dispositional variables to career decision-making. Accordingly, the two decision outcome variables (CDDQ Decision Status and CDDQ Difficulties) were regressed onto the independent variables shown in Table 2. When predicting CDDQ Decision Status, we used hierarchical regression to separate the contribution of CDDQ Difficulties because it is a measure taken from the same instrument as the outcome variable. To conserve space, we have not shown the results for the demographic variables—age, gender, and participation—which made no contribution.

It can be seen that the equation accounted for 35% of the variance in Decision Status with the strongest predictors CDSME and the CDDQ Difficulties. In the next regression analysis, CDDQ Difficulties is the dependent variable and CDDQ Decision Status is omitted.

The only variable that made a contribution to the prediction of Decision Difficulties ($R^2 = .21$) was Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy.

**DISCUSSION**

The main aim of this study was to investigate relations among the constructs of career decision-making difficulties, career decision status, and the dispositional variables of athletic identity, career locus of control, and career decision-making self-efficacy. Before discussing these relations, however, we will comment briefly on some broader trends emerging from this study. Hinkle (1994) suggested that as a function of the extensive commitment required for participation in sport that athletes are a population at risk for career-development deficiencies. The first point to note about the data reported in Table 1 is that, by comparing these figures with those reported in other studies, there is no evidence that athletes differ from the rest of population in terms of career indecision. Nor do we find evidence in a much larger sample of elite athletes (Albion & Fogarty, 2003). There may be sub-groups within this population that do exhibit this tendency (Albion & Fogarty, 2005; Murphy et al., 1996), but it seems that it is a description that can no longer be applied to the population of athletes. Historically, a lack of direct career support and guidance is one possible reason for previous reports that athletes score lower than students on career decision-making self-efficacy (Brown et al., 2000) and career development (Martens & Cox, 2000). The advent of athlete career education programs such as ACE and the widespread implementation of these programs is almost certainly one of the reasons for the improvement (Albion & Fogarty, 2003).

Turning to the main research questions of this study, to assist the discussion of the large number of relations observed (see Table 2), we will take each variable in turn and discuss the findings for that variable. In relation to gender, where males were coded as ‘1’ and females as ‘2’, we found that females were more likely to be older, to spend less time training for sport and participating in sport,
Table 2: Correlations Among Variables (N = 117)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current age</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation hours</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDMSE</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC–INT</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC–EXT</td>
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<td>-.02</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIMS</td>
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<td>.20</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDDQ Difficulties</td>
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<td>-.19</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.47</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.05</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDDQ Decision Status</td>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Bold text indicates significance at the .05 level.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting CDDQ Decision Status (N = 117)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Decision–Making Self–Efficacy</td>
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<td>.23</td>
<td>.41*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of Control – Internal</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of Control – External</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Identity</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Decision–Making Self–Efficacy</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of Control – Internal</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of Control – External</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Identity</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Decision–Making Difficulties</td>
<td>-.44</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.44*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R² = .20 for Step 1 (ps < .05); ΔR² = .15 for Step 2 (ps < .05).
* p < .05

Table 4: Standard Regression Analysis Predicting CDDQ Decision Difficulties (N = 117)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career Decision–Making Self–Efficacy</td>
<td>-1.19</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.47*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of Control – Internal</td>
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<td>.26</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of Control – External</td>
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<td>.15</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Identity</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R² = .21 (ps < .05).
* p < .05
to have lower career decision-making self-efficacy, and were less likely to attribute success in sport to factors such as luck. In contrast to previous findings identifying male athletes as more at risk (Brewer et al., 1993; Matheson, Brewer, Van Raalte, & Anderson, 1994), the present study found no relationship between gender and career decision-making difficulties or decision status. Furthermore, the finding that these female athletes scored lower than their male equivalents on career decision-making self-efficacy is at odds with reports that there are usually no differences, or even differences in favour of females (see review by Scott & Ciani, 2008). The finding is more puzzling when one considers evidence from this study that there are no differences between males and females regarding career decision-making difficulties or career decision status. The answer may well lie in the domain being investigated. Bandura (2006) pointed out that females have higher self-efficacy in some career fields (e.g., health care) and males higher self-efficacy in others (e.g., science and technology). It may be that the notion of careers in sport is still unfamiliar to female athletes and consequently they feel less capable of making well-informed career choices.

In relation to age, we found that younger athletes were more likely to experience career decision-making difficulties. Although the CDDQ was treated as a unidimensional measure in this study, root one criterion also supported a four-factor solution with factors corresponding to Lack of Motivation, Decisiveness, Lack of Information, and Conflicts. Post-hoc analyses revealed that the relationship between age and difficulties was due entirely to the Lack of Information items. We will return to this issue in the recommendations section of the paper.

The number of hours devoted to sports participation (including training) was positively associated with internal locus of control and athletic identity. We are unaware of other research on this relationship but we note here that time spent practising is one way in which a person with high internal locus of control can influence outcomes, so the association is a logical one.

CDDQ Decision Status was negatively correlated with CDDQ Difficulties and positively associated with career decision-making self-efficacy. The first of these relations make theoretical sense. Indeed, Albion and Fogarty (2002) modelled Difficulties as a latent construct influencing Decision Status in their successful analysis of the structure of the CDDQ. The link between Decision Status and career decision-making self-efficacy also makes theoretical sense and is supported by empirical research demonstrating that programs designed to develop career decision-making self-efficacy have a beneficial effect on vocational identity (Scott & Ciani, 2008).

Athletes who scored highly on CDDQ Difficulties were more likely to be younger, to be less satisfied with their decision status, to have lower career decision-making self-efficacy, and to have higher scores on external locus of control. We have discussed the first three of these relations already. Regarding locus of control, it is not surprising that there is a relationship between believing that luck and significant others are responsible for career outcomes and actually experiencing more decision-making difficulties. Analysis of this relationship at the CDDQ item level revealed that it was due primarily to difficulties stemming from Lack of Motivation and Conflicts (internal only). There was also an association with one of the Lack of Information items. Interestingly, that item was ‘I find it difficult to make a decision because I don’t know what factors to take into consideration’. These findings suggest that when it comes to making career decisions there is an element of confusion in the minds of athletes who have an external locus of control.

Looking at other data relating to locus of control, athletes with higher scores on internal locus of control were likely to spend more time participating in sport, to have a higher degree of career decision-making self-
efficacy, and to have a stronger sense of athletic identity. These findings are in accord with reports by Hartman et al. (1985) and Carver et al. (1989) that individuals with an internal locus of control demonstrate higher levels of career maturity and less indecision. Brown et al. (2000) reported the same positive association between career decision-making self-efficacy and internal locus of control.

Athletes with higher scores on external locus of control were likely to be male, to experience more decision-making difficulties, and to have a lower degree of career decision-making self-efficacy. Lease (2004) also found that external locus of control was associated with career decision-making difficulties and Luzzo (1997) reported the same negative association between external locus of control and career decision-making self-efficacy. Clearly, of the two orientations, internal locus of control is to be preferred.

Athletes with a strong sense of athletic identity were more likely to be male, to devote more time to their sport, and to have an internal locus of control. As with previous research by Brown et al. (2000), athletic identity did not relate to career decision-making self-efficacy. Perhaps the most interesting outcome regarding athletic identity was the lack of relationship with decision-making difficulties. This finding is consistent with other reports that athletic identity was not related to career maturity (Brown & Hartley, 1998; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001) or career development (Murphy et al., 1996). Although Brewer et al. (1993) conceptualised athletic identity as a trait-like construct, career development theory rejects the notion of role exclusivity and rather highlights the variety of roles that an individual is likely to play (Super, 1980). It is not surprising, therefore, that previous explanations of this lack of relationship generally centre around the possible moderating effect of other roles (e.g., student identity) on athletic identity. A further explanation for the lack of relationship is one that we have raised already: elite athletes in this sample were all part of an athlete career education program, the main purpose of which is to assist with career development issues.

Limitations
The study suffered from several methodological limitations. Firstly, the cross-sectional nature of the research precludes causal inferences regarding the relationships among career decision-making difficulties, career decision status, and the dispositional variables of athletic identity, career locus of control, and career decision-making self-efficacy. We have confined our observations to noting associations among these variables but a longitudinal design, such as that employed by Creed, Prideaux, and Patton (2005), would obviously provide a better basis for making claims about causal pathways. Secondly, the athletes who completed the questionnaires were volunteers and constituted a relatively small subset of those involved in the ACE program. It may be that those athletes who chose to participate were either more interested in career matters or at a developmental decision-making stage where the feedback offered by the researchers appealed to them. Thirdly, a larger sample size would have enabled us to undertake modelling work, which was not advisable with a sample of 117. Fourthly, the scales used to measure CDM difficulties, CDM self-efficacy, and athletic identity, were treated as unidimensional measures in this study. That suited our purposes but follow-up work should examine relations at the sub-scale level to discover the underlying reasons for the relationships. The relationship between age and career decision-making difficulties is a case in point where analyses at the sub-scale level revealed that the problem for younger athletes was confined to difficulties concerning a perceived lack of information.

Recommendations and Future Research
The findings lead to some recommendations for counsellors working with athletes. Integral to the delivery of effective career counselling is the process of firstly assessing the needs of elite athletes and secondly ensuring that the athlete career education programs available to these athletes meet these needs. In terms of demographic predictors, our findings indicate that career decision-making difficulties are not likely to be associated with particular groups. The exception in this study is younger athletes who reported having difficulty with career related information. Athletes in the early stages of their careers may require more support and assistance in making decisions regarding their athletic careers. Otherwise efforts to differentiate the service provided according to demographic variables (e.g., gender, age) are not warranted unless it targets specific variables, such as career decision-making self-efficacy (for females) or external locus of control (for males). In general, our findings support claims that interventions aimed at self-efficacy (Scott & Ciani, 2008) and internal locus of control (Kornspan &
Etzel, 2001) are likely to prove most beneficial in terms of career planning.

Although no evidence of systematic bias was detected in the sample, future studies would do well to implement a randomised procedure for participant selection. A representative sample from all of the major sporting institutes and academies would provide a better basis for generalising findings. We also recommend research into the range of situational influences that may affect athletic identity such as cultural differences, access to professional support, and timing within the competitive season. Future research should also continue to investigate the validity of the measures used in the present investigation as a means to developing career measures that take into account the unique needs and unique context of elite athletes. Tracking changes in psychological constructs over time through a longitudinal design and supplementing these findings with qualitative data would lead to greater insight into the developmental nature of the career decision-making process in athletes.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the athletes, coaches, and counsellors of the National Athlete Career and Education program for their participation in this study.

References


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**THEORY AND PRACTICE**

This section is designed as a brief professional review of the article. It provides relevant study questions and answers for readers to test their knowledge of the article.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why is it important to study career decision-making among athletes?</td>
<td>Answer: Sport is no longer exclusively, or even predominantly, an amateur affair. It represents a career for thousands of young people in this country alone. What sets sport apart from other careers is that decisions have to be made at a relatively young age and that the commitment is major in terms of effort, time and money. If we can help athletes and their counsellors to identify key factors in the career decision-making process, aspiring athletes will make better informed choices and enjoy better outcomes, whatever the ultimate direction of their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compared with non-athletes, do athletes have more trouble making career-related decisions?</td>
<td>Answer: Younger athletes encounter more difficulties, but overall, recent findings are encouraging. Athletes attached to programs such as ACE do not appear to experience difficulties in terms of motivation to make a decision, information needed to make a decision, or barriers to career pathways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the major positive influences on career decision-making among athletes?</td>
<td>Answer: Career decision-making self-efficacy (CDSME) is a major positive influence. Given that CDSME represents a feeling of having the skills required to make informed decisions, educational programs aimed at developing those skills will have benefits in terms of self-efficacy and satisfaction with the decisions that have been made. Internal locus of control is another desirable attribute that can be targeted by career education programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have we done enough to improve career decision-making among athletes?</td>
<td>Answer: The development of athlete career education programs, such as the ACE program in Australia, has undoubtedly been a very positive influence but there are many aspiring athletes who cannot gain access to this program. There is always a need for more widely-based programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the findings of the present study apply to other potential careers?</td>
<td>Answer: Undoubtedly. Careers in music and art come to mind where there is a similar investment in time and effort from an early age. The same decision-making difficulties should apply and the same psychological factors will moderate and mediate the outcomes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personal assessments of one’s own level of ability or performance have generally been shown to be flawed (e.g., Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Most studies report the relationship between estimates of ability and actual ability to be only moderate (Mabe & West, 1982). Despite this low correlation, self-ratings of abilities or self-appraisals continue to be used extensively in career counselling. Self-appraisal is central to many models of career decision-making, particularly in theories that consider career as a process of self-realisation (Chen, 2003). It is the application of self-estimates in the area of career counselling, particularly as it relates to
students engaged in career decision-making, that is the focus of this paper. Comparisons are made between those who overestimate how well they will perform (over-estimators), those who underestimate their level of performance (under-estimators) and those who have an accurate perception of their performance level (accurate estimators) to determine how the three groups differ. If differences exist then recommendations can be made to improve the accuracy of self-estimates, and thereby improve the efficacy of such measures.

**Use in Career Counselling**

Theories such as Gottfredson’s Theory of Circumscriptio and Compromise (1996), Super’s Theory of Self-Concept (1990), and Holland’s Theory of Vocational Choice (1997) incorporate self-knowledge as a central component in making informed career decisions. Self-knowledge is also pivotal in the Cognitive Information Processing Theory (Sampson, Peterson, Reardon, & Lenz, 2003). This theory has been developed as a model of career problem-solving and decision-making encompassing the information required to make decisions as well as the decision-making process itself. Self-knowledge serves as an important source of information on which to base decisions (Sampson et al., 2003).

However, use of self-appraisal may be problematic. Research has shown that self-ratings tend to be unreliable and biased towards individuals rating themselves more favourably than is accurate (Burson, Larrick, & Klayman, 2006) and being more lenient judges of themselves in comparison to supervisor ratings (Fox, Caspy & Reisler, 1994). In a review of 55 studies that compared individuals’ self-assessment of ability with an objective measure, Mabe and West (1982) found that on average the correlation between the self-assessment and the objective measure of ability was just 0.29.

A significant issue that must be addressed for self-assessment to remain viable in research and decision-making is to devise methods that will enable greater accuracy of self-ratings. A key consideration is what differentiates those that are able to accurately self-assess from those that produce erroneous self-assessments.

**Factors Affecting Accuracy of Self-Assessment**

We investigated the relative contribution of several factors thought to influence the accuracy of self-assessment: ability, use of feedback, sources of feedback, goal orientation, self-efficacy and confidence.

**Ability, Experience and Metacognition**

Research has shown that a lack of experience in the domain in which the individual is assessing themselves often leads to erroneous self-ratings as the individual is not capable of differentiating between good and poor performance in that field (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Kruger and Dunning assessed the magnitude of difference between self-estimates and others’ ratings or objective scores and found that individuals generally overestimated their performance. In particular, researchers found that individuals placed in the bottom quartile, based on others’ ratings or objective scores, grossly overestimated their abilities compared to other respondents. They hypothesised that incompetence in performance also deprived the individuals of the metacognitive ability to realise the inaccuracy of their self-rating. After coaching in the domain of interest, however, it was found that individuals were better able to recognise their level of performance and how it compared to the performance of others. Thus it seems that more experience is related to higher levels of metacognition.

Subsequent research has shown that the experience and metacognition effect found by Kruger and Dunning (1999) may be moderated by task difficulty (Burson, Larrick, & Klayman, 2006). On more difficult tasks, those with high levels of ability were worse at estimating their performance than those with less skill, and tended to underestimate their ability. Burson et al. (2006) proposed that on easy tasks the tendency for all people is to estimate that their performance is good, and thus good performers will necessarily be more accurate, and that on difficult tasks the tendency for all people is to estimate that their performance is weaker, and so poor performers will necessarily be more accurate.

**Sources of Feedback**

Athanassou (2005) identified three key sources of feedback used by people in deriving self-estimates: social messages, personal factors and situational factors. Social messages were sources of information derived from interaction with others. Three types of social messages influenced self-evaluation: comparisons we make of ourselves with others, feedback we receive from others, and the social and cultural stereotypes on
which we base our perceptions. The second component is personal factors, or characteristics of the individual, such as actual level of ability and use of rating heuristics such as leniency and other biases. The third and final influence on self-evaluations defined in the model is situational factors, essentially the context in which the individual is making the self-evaluation. Situational factors included prior experience with the criterion of good performance, whether the evaluation is made prior to or after performance, and measurement conditions such as social desirability.

The focus of this study will be on feedback via social messages—specifically feedback received from others—and will also examine personal factors such as ability. It is already known that feedback affects self-assessments (Athanasou, 2005), but this study will examine what factors influence: a) whether individuals pay attention to feedback; b) what sources of feedback they pay attention to; and c) whether there are differences between those that can accurately self-assess and those that cannot.

Feedback Seeking
Feedback seeking behaviour has been studied extensively, with researchers focusing on many different aspects such as individual differences and their effects (Herold & Fedor, 1998), frequency (Miller & Jablin, 1991), the relationship between feedback seeking and task performance (Ang, Cummings, Straub, & Earley, 1993). However it was noted that a distinct lack of research existed regarding the process of feedback seeking (e.g., Levy, Albright, Cawley, & Williams, 1995). Researchers addressing this paucity in the literature (e.g. Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003; VandeWalle, 2003) have investigated six dimensions in feedback seeking behaviour:

- method (whether feedback information is sought by monitoring situations or by inquiring of people);
- frequency (whether feedback information is sought at a high or low frequency);
- type (whether feedback is sought regarding the outcome of the activity or the process);
- timing (whether feedback is sought immediately or after a delay);
- source (whether feedback is sought from those who are powerful in relation to the individual or those that possess expertise); and
- sign (willingness to seek feedback that is negative).

VandeWalle (2003) proposed that goal orientation influenced these six dimensions of feedback seeking behaviour and that these dimensions were related to task performance.

Goal Orientation
Goal orientation refers to the mental framework that influences how people approach situations of achievement in terms of interpreting the situation and motivation to achieve (Griffin, 2005). Button, Mathieu and Zajac (1996) found that goal orientation has both dispositional and situational components.

There are two types of goal orientation: performance orientation, where the aim of completing a task is to gain favourable judgements of one’s performance; and learning orientation, where the aim is to gain knowledge (Button et al., 1996). These orientations produce different behaviours such that those with a performance orientation are more likely to avoid challenges and pressure which will cause performance to deteriorate, while those with a learning orientation seek out challenges and maintain drive even under difficult conditions as even failure is a form of useful feedback.

Button et al., (1996) concluded from their investigations that learning and performance goal orientations were not mutually exclusive, with each inhabiting different ends of a continuum, nor did they contradict each other. It is possible to want to perform well in comparison to others (performance orientation), as well as want to improve one’s own skill set at the same time (learning orientation).

Research indicated that goal orientation exists as a trait in individuals (VandeWalle, 1997) but it can also be influenced by situational cues (Ames, 1992). In instances where the situation did not offer cues as to which orientation is preferred, trait preferences govern behaviour (VandeWalle & Cummings 1997). However when the situation offered strong enough cues, trait preferences were overridden.

Combining Feedback Seeking and Goal Orientation
VandeWalle and Cummings (1997) investigated how goal orientation may affect feedback seeking and found that learning goal orientation was positively related to feedback seeking, while performance goal orientation was negatively related to feedback seeking; those with a learning goal orientation are more likely...
to seek feedback than those with a performance goal orientation. Both the performance-prove and the performance-avoid facets of performance goal orientation displayed this negative relationship, with the performance-avoid group exhibiting it in slightly greater magnitude. Based on the results of their study, the authors concluded that goal orientation was a central influence in the feedback seeking process.

Learning goal and performance goal oriented individuals regard the cost and value of feedback seeking differently due to their different beliefs regarding the controllability of personal attributes (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). Learning goal oriented individuals subscribe to an incremental theory of abilities, meaning they believe abilities to be malleable attributes (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Performance goal oriented individuals on the other hand subscribe to an entity theory of abilities, believing that abilities are fixed and uncontrollable, and therefore the individual is unable to make any improvements in their performance (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

These goal orientations and beliefs also mediate responses to failure. Those with a learning goal orientation adopt an adaptive response pattern to task failure, characterised by persistence and an escalation of effort to overcome hurdles. In contrast, those with a performance goal orientation respond to task failure in a maladaptive manner by withdrawing from and expressing a decreased interest in the task (Vande Walle, 2003).

Renn and Fedor (2001) found feedback based goals to be positively related to feedback seeking and task performance. The authors also found self-efficacy to be positively related to task performance, but did not find self-efficacy to be related to feedback seeking.

**Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy refers to the belief individuals have that they are able to perform successfully at a task specific level or more generally across different situations, and is formed following self-assessment (Yeo & Neal, 2006). Research regarding self-efficacy more commonly refers to estimating one’s ability to perform in a specific situation, which is positively correlated to general self-efficacy (Whyte, Saks, & Hook, 1997). It is argued that the probability that an individual will engage in a task is dependent on their belief that they are able to perform it successfully, i.e. self-efficacy.

Studies (e.g. Vancouver & Kendall, 2006) have shown that high self-efficacy can be negatively related to performance at a within-person level as it may result in poor resource allocation to task performance due to the high self-efficacy based past successes. Those with high self-efficacy will allocate fewer resources than is required to the task, as they inaccurately perceive the gap between their own performance and desired performance to be less than it actually is.

Thus it appears that individuals with high self-efficacy do not pay as much attention to feedback as their less self-efficacious counterparts, as evidenced by their inaccurate perception of the gap between their own performance and desired performance. High self-efficacy has also been shown to be related to unwise escalation of commitment to a course of action due to the high belief in their ability to salvage the situation, even if it is likely that action will result in a bad outcome (Whyte, et. al, 1997). This may induce highly efficacious individuals to disregard information that is contrary to their beliefs, as their belief in themselves is so strong.

**Confidence**

Confidence can be defined as a person’s certainty that the information they have provided is correct (Luus & Wells, 1994) and has been linked to self-efficacy (Stajkovic, 2006). Confidence ratings have been used when assessing ‘calibration’ of students; that is whether they can accurately assess what they do and do not know (Wahlstrom, 2001). This calibration has been assessed by analysing the correlation between students’ comprehension confidence and their actual performance on a comprehension task (e.g. Sjolstrom & Marks, 1994). These confidence ratings have been found to remain relatively stable over time regardless of feedback. This stability even in the face of feedback may be due to confirmation bias, a tendency for people to seek or pay attention to information that confirms their existing beliefs, expectations or hypotheses, similar to the relationship demonstrated with self-efficacy above (Jonas, Schultz-Hardt, Frey, & Thelan,
However some evidence suggests that confidence is malleable and may be quite easily manipulated (Wells, 1993), which may account for the relationship between confidence and accuracy often being found to be weak (Shaw, Zerr, & Woythaler, 2001). Overconfidence has been linked to high self-efficacy and poorer performance (Vancouver, Thompson, Tischner, & Putka, 2002), and some evidence suggests overconfidence can be linked to overestimation regarding outcomes (Malmendier & Tate, 2005).

In summary, it appears more accurate self-estimates are made by those who have a higher level of ability. Those that are more able also seek more feedback, and feedback seeking is positively related to having a learning goal orientation. However, overly high levels of self-efficacy and confidence are negatively associated with performance and feedback seeking.

**Present Study**

This study aims to determine whether or not individuals that are able to form accurate self-assessments may be differentiated by ability, the type and amount of feedback they take into account, confidence, goal orientation, self-efficacy and response to feedback. With reference to prior research, it is hypothesised that differences in these variables will explain whether individuals are able to accurately self-assess.

**Method**

**Participants**

There were a total of 94 participants in the study, 43 male and 51 female students in Year 12 at a high school in NSW. The average age of the sample was approximately 17 years 8 months. All participants were volunteers that were entered into a prize draw in appreciation of their participation.

**Materials**

**Sources of Feedback Questionnaire**

The sources of feedback questionnaire was developed by the researcher through focus groups and consultation with professionals in the area of career counselling, and consisted of two sections. The first section of the feedback questionnaire was designed to gather information regarding participants’ self-assessment of their ability and of their strengths and confidence in these assessments. The second part of the feedback questionnaire was designed to determine how individuals used sources of feedback, specifically what types of sources and how useful they find these sources to be. Participants were asked to rate the usefulness of potential feedback sources on a five-point scale of **very useful** to **not at all useful**, and provide information regarding any additional sources of feedback they use that were not included in the list of potential sources. A copy of the Sources of Feedback Questionnaire is available from the authors upon request.

**Self-Efficacy**

The New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSE) is an eight item five-point Likert Scale rated questionnaire with Cronbach’s α of .86 developed and validated by Chen, Gully and Eden (2001). It has been found to be predictive of specific self-efficacy (Chen et al., 2001) and Scherbaum, Cohen-Charash and Kern (2006) found it to be superior to other validated self-efficacy scales in use. The scales used in the NGSE range from **strongly agree** to **strongly disagree**. Examples of items include ‘When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them’.

**Goal Orientation**

This consists of two 8-item Likert scale rated questionnaires developed by Button, Mathieu and Zajac (1996) to determine whether the goal orientation of individuals was performance or learning. Cronbach’s α was 0.73 for the performance goal orientation scale and 0.79 for the learning goal orientation scale. This questionnaire has previously been administered using five-, six- and seven-point Likert scales. In this instance a five-point Likert scale has been adopted to be consistent with the NGSE. Examples of items include ‘I try hard to improve on my past performance’ and ‘The things I enjoy the most are the things that I do best’.

**Attitude Towards Feedback Scale**

The 20-item Attitude Towards Feedback Scale was developed and validated by Lau (2005) to measure participants’ willingness to accept feedback from others and their ability to incorporate feedback to improve their abilities or performance. Cronbach’s α for the scale was found to be 0.71 (Lau, 2005). Items are rated on a 7-point rating scale ranging from **not true** to **very true**. Examples of items include, ‘I am willing to accept feedback from others’ and ‘Others’ feedback
or comments are not always useful in advancing my performance.

Higher School Certificate (HSC) English Trials

Students' scores on their HSC English Trials served as an objective measure of ability for the secondary school sample.

Overall HSC English Scores

Participants' overall scores for English in the HSC were provided four months after initial data collection as a comparison to HSC Trial results.

Procedure

Participants from the senior college were recruited through flyers distributed during mentoring meetings at the school. Students were advised that participation was voluntary; however participation would make them eligible to enter a prize draw.

Participants were asked to complete the Sources of Feedback questionnaire first, followed by the NGSE, Goal Orientation and Attitude Towards Feedback Scale questionnaires in their own time. This order ensured that responses regarding sources of feedback were not influenced by consideration of questions regarding their goal orientation, self-efficacy and responsiveness to feedback. The questionnaires could be completed online or in pen and paper format.

Students were also asked to provide an estimate of their performance on HSC English Trials. The results of the trial HSC exam in English were provided to the researchers by the school for those students who consented to participate in the study. Six months after initial data collection, final HSC English exam results were obtained from the school.

Results

Learning goal orientation and performance goal orientation scores were calculated for each individual. Cronbach's $\alpha$ for this sample was calculated to be 0.74 for performance goal orientation and 0.85 for learning goal orientation. Attitude towards feedback scores were calculated and the internal reliability coefficient for the sample in this study was 0.74. Scores for self-efficacy were calculated by averaging responses across the 8 items of the NGSE. The Cronbach's $\alpha$ calculated for this sample was 0.87. Individual scores for overall usefulness of sources of feedback were similarly calculated and the internal reliability for the sources of feedback questionnaire was found to be 0.80.

Descriptive statistics for the confidence, usefulness of sources scores, self-efficacy, performance goal orientation, learning goal orientation, and attitude towards feedback scores, as well as the correlations between them, are summarised in Table 1.

Measuring Usefulness of Feedback Sources

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the 15 sources of feedback that were rated by the participants to determine whether an underlying pattern existed in terms of the type of sources found to be useful by individuals. Four factors were identified using this method: 'family-related', 'external benchmarking', 'education', and 'own opinions'.

Table 1: Mean Scores for and Correlations between Variables Hypothesised to Predict Accuracy of Self-Estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>67.37</td>
<td>16.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness of sources</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>.252*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>.371**</td>
<td>.437**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance orientation</td>
<td>33.19</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>–.013</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.236*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning orientation</td>
<td>31.30</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>.309**</td>
<td>.400**</td>
<td>.602**</td>
<td>.276**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards feedback</td>
<td>53.89</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>.231*</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.315**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Comparing Accurate Estimators, Over-Estimators and, Under-Estimators

This study followed the example of Atwater and Yammarino (1992) and categorised people as under-estimators, accurate raters or over-estimators according to the magnitude of the difference between their estimates of their performance and their real performance. Participants with standardised difference scores of between -0.5 and 0.5 were categorised as ‘accurate raters’ (n = 33). Participants who had z-scores that were less than -0.5 were categorised as ‘under-estimators’ (n = 31), and those who had z-scores greater than 0.5 were categorised as ‘over-estimators’ (n = 30). This categorisation method makes it possible to understand the direction of differences and distinguish between over-estimators, under-estimators and accurate raters.

Ability

Significant differences were found to exist between over-estimator, under-estimator and accurate estimator groups on the real scores obtained via objective measures of ability, F(2, 91) = 16.23, p < .001. Further analyses showed that under-estimators had significantly higher real scores (M = 71.87, SD = 9.38) than accurate estimators (M = 63.09, SD = 9.52), t(91) = 3.96, p < .001, and over-estimators (M = 59.30, SD = 7.47), t(91) = 5.53, p < .001.

Significant differences were also found to exist between the accuracy groups in terms of their performance estimates, F(2, 91) = 14.44, p < .001. Over-estimators made significantly higher estimates of their performance (M = 81.03, SD = 6.48) than accurate estimators (M = 72.42, SD = 9.78), t(91) = -3.43, p = .001, and under-estimators (M = 67.50, SD = 12.55), t(91) = -5.31, p < .001.

Confidence

Significant differences between these groups were found on confidence in the accuracy of estimation F(2, 91) = 3.18, p = .046. Further analyses revealed that over-estimators were significantly more confident in the accuracy of their estimates (M = 73.17, SD = 16.99) than accurate estimators were (M = 63.09, SD = 17.25), t(91) = -2.48, p = .015.

Goal orientation

The overall ANOVA for learning goal orientation was not significant, F(2, 90) = 2.94, p = .058. However planned contrasts revealed that over-estimators (M = 33.21, SD = 4.25) showed significantly higher levels of learning goal orientation than accurate estimators (M = 30.39, SD = 4.71), t(90) = -2.20, p = .030, and under-estimators (M = 30.61, SD = 5.89), t(90) = -2.00, p = .048. No significant differences were found between the accuracy groups on performance goal orientation, F(2, 90) = 1.36, p = .263.

Sources of feedback

The overall ANOVA on the overall usefulness score encompassing all 15 sources of feedback showed no main effects, F(2, 91) = 2.84, p = .063. Planned contrasts revealed that there was a significant difference between accurate estimators and over-estimators, t(91) = -2.20, p = .031, such that over-estimators (M = 37.4, SD = 0.59) on average found sources to be significantly more useful than accurate self-assessors (M = 34.1, SD = 0.62). Factor scores were derived for individuals that had responded to all 15 options using the regression method. There were no differences among the accuracy groups across the four factors relating to usefulness of feedback sources: ‘family-related’, F(2, 56) = 2.21, p = .119; ‘external benchmarking’, F(2, 56) = 2.49, p = .092; ‘education’, F(2, 56) = .66, p = .523; or ‘own experience’, F(2, 56) = .06, p = .945.

Self-efficacy

No significant differences were found between accurate estimators, under-estimators and over-estimators on levels of self-efficacy, F(2, 91) = 1.29, p = .279.

Attitude towards feedback

No significant differences were found across under-estimators, over-estimators and accurate estimators in terms of response to feedback, F(2, 91) = 1.24, p = .295.

Further Post-Case Analyses

Final HSC English results were obtained for the participants in the study and further analyses were conducted using the participants’ previous allocation to the over-estimator, under-estimator, and accurate estimator groupings. Final HSC English scores were significantly correlated to the dependent variable of HSC English Trial scores, r = .6I, p < .001, and estimates of HSC English Trial performance collected from participants, r = .47, p < .01. No differences were found among the three groups in their final HSC English scores, F(2, 91) = .71, p > .05.
A comparison was also made between scores on HSC English overall and scores on the HSC Trial for English. The differences between those scores varied across the three accuracy groups, \( F(2, 91) = 14.80, p < .001 \). Those who overestimated their performance on their HSC Trials also showed the greatest improvement between Trial scores and overall HSC scores for English, \( M = 12.17, SD = 7.75 \), significantly greater than those that underestimated their performance on their HSC Trial, \( M = 2.23, SD = 6.54 \), \( t(59) = -5.42, p < .001 \) (see Figure 1).

**Discussion**

The findings of the present study support previous research specifying a positive relationship between learning goal orientation and feedback seeking. The positive link between levels of ability and accuracy of self-estimates is also supported. No evidence was found regarding the relationship of self-efficacy and accuracy of self-estimates, however, overconfidence was found to be related to overestimation of performance as hypothesised. Contrary to expectations, overestimation was also found to be positively related to the use of feedback and learning goal orientation. The implications of these findings are discussed below.

**Ability**

Support was found for Kruger and Dunning’s (1999) work showing that underperformers overestimated their performance, and those who performed the best were more likely to underestimate their performance. It was also found that over-estimators made significantly higher estimates of their own performance than accurate estimators and under-estimators. Contrary to the findings of Burson et al., (2006) it appears that over-estimators may be unable to fathom true competence, possibly due to their low level of ability (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). It follows that further coaching in the field of interest, as suggested and implemented by Kruger and Dunning (1999), will improve both the ability of the over-estimators in terms of performance and their ability to self-assess, as well as understand their performance in relation to others.

**Confidence**

The data confirmed the hypothesis and previous research regarding the relationship of overly-high confidence levels with poorer performance (Vancouver et al., 2002) and overestimation (Malmendier & Tate, 2006). Since high levels of confidence result in overestimation of one’s level of ability, careful consideration must be given to the fine line between building up the confidence and self-efficacy of individuals, and making them overconfident. Self-efficacy and confidence are necessary for individuals to have the courage to approach tasks in order to achieve goals in life. Evidence was found to suggest that those who were confident of their abilities (as seen by overestimating trial performance) were also those who made the greatest improvements.

**Goal Orientation and Use of Feedback**

The data did confirm the existence of a significant positive relationship between learning goal orientation and attitude towards feedback as well as ratings of source usefulness. These findings are in line with the hypotheses and previous evidence (e.g. VandeWalle &
Cummins, 1997; VandeWalle, 2003) regarding the relationship between feedback seeking and learning goal orientation. However, contrary to the hypotheses, it was over-estimators rather than accurate estimators who showed a higher learning goal orientation.

Also unexpected was that over-estimators indicated that they found feedback overall to be more useful than accurate estimators did. Several explanations may exist. It may be that over-estimators enter more competitions and participate in more extracurricular activities as they are so sure that their performance will be good, and they will therefore have more experience to draw from when rating sources on this factor. Alternatively, given the evidence of over-estimators generating high scores on other measures contrary to the hypotheses, over-estimators may have a tendency to inflate the ratings they give on all measures. If it is the case that differences are due to biases in ratings, further research may need to consider attempting to correct for these biases, perhaps using unbalanced, positively skewed scales such as those used by Fox et al. (1994). If over-estimators really do pay more attention to feedback and possess a learning goal orientation, then the emphasis placed on mastery and consideration of feedback to improve performance may be incorrect.

Categorising Sources of Feedback
Overall, participants found feedback to be moderately useful when trying to form a view of their abilities, and gathered feedback from the four types of feedback sources. While over-estimators indicated that they found feedback to be more useful than accurate estimators when considering the sources of feedback, over-estimators, under-estimators and accurate estimators did not differ in their scores across the four categories.

Post-Case Analyses
The post-case analyses demonstrated that there were no differences in overall HSC English results across the three accuracy groups, although differences in English ability scores did exist at the HSC Trial stage. We discovered that those students who had originally overestimated their abilities were also the ones to make the greatest improvement between the Trial and overall HSC results for English.

Earlier analyses identified two key areas of difference between over-estimators and the other two groups: these were learning orientation and confidence in their own opinion. By setting goals in relation to their learning, and believing in themselves, over-estimators made the greatest improvements. Over-estimators also indicated that they found feedback overall to be more useful than accurate estimators did. It may be that over-estimators integrate feedback and provide estimates of what they believe they can ultimately achieve, but that HSC Trials were too soon after receiving feedback to see improvements in their ability. However, these improvements were later demonstrated at the time of the Final HSC exams.

These variables may provide a key in understanding ways to improve performance between Trial and overall HSC results—students should be encouraged to set goals beyond their current capabilities, use trials as an opportunity to learn about their capabilities and integrate trial feedback to improve their final performance.

Limitations and Future Directions
In contrast to previous research (e.g. Vancouver & Kendall, 2006) and the hypotheses, no significant differences in accuracy were found depending on attitudes to feedback, self-efficacy and performance goal orientation. However, self-efficacy was found to be significantly related to confidence, which did show a significant effect across accuracy, therefore it may be that hypothesised differences in self-efficacy, performance goal orientation and attitudes to feedback were not detected due to power considerations and the sample size.

However, the lack of significant relationships of these predictors with accuracy does indicate that any relationships that may exist are not as strong as the relationship of accuracy of self-assessment with learning goal orientation, confidence in achievement, actual levels of ability and the number and type of sources of feedback used.

Also, this sample consisted wholly of high school students preparing to complete their HSC and make decisions regarding their future directions. While this sample is appropriate in terms of consideration of self-assessment in relation to career decision-making, there
is some doubt as to whether findings from this sample

can be generalised to the wider population. Some

characteristics such as ability level have been similar

to previous findings, however others such as learning
goal orientation and attention to feedback have not.

Finally, in regards to the post-case analyses, there is

some small concern that improvement scores may be

affected by ceiling effects. At the HSC English Trials,

over-estimators on average showed the least amount of

ability, with under-estimators showing the most ability

on average, and accurate estimators in the middle.

Thus over-estimators may have improved the most

because they had the most room to improve. However

none in the sample achieved perfect scores, meaning

there was room to improve for all participants.

Further research is needed to determine the exact

relationship between the use of feedback, learning
goal orientation and accuracy of self-estimates. The

findings of this study are at odds with previous research

suggesting that having a learning goal orientation and

paying attention to feedback can increase accuracy in

self-assessments. One suggested explanation—that

over-estimators may inflate their ratings on multiple

scales—needs to be further explored, possibly with the

use of unbalanced rating scales.

Our research findings identified important differ-

ences between over-estimators and others. We were

able to determine that students in this group were

more confident, made more use of feedback and were

more learning goal oriented. More importantly this

group also made the greatest improvements between

the Trial exams and actual HSC exams. This raises

the bigger question, when it comes to self-assessment

should accuracy be our aim?

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THEORY AND PRACTICE

This section is designed as a brief professional review of the article. It provides relevant study questions and answers for readers to test their knowledge of the article.

Why is accuracy of self-assessment important in vocational and career psychology?
Answer: Many of our career assessment methods use self-ratings of ability as important inputs to the career decision-making process. It is in our best interests to try and identify ways to make self-estimates more accurate.

Who are important empirical proponents to the self-ratings research?
Answer: Mabe and West (1982) completed the most comprehensive meta-analysis, although it is quite old now. This would be a great topic for a PhD thesis or an ambitious Masters thesis. More recent influences have included Kruger and Dunning.

What were the determinants of self-accuracy investigated?
Answer: We examined ability, confidence, goal orientation (learning and performance), sources of feedback, usefulness of feedback, self-efficacy and attitudes towards feedback. Our key findings were that sources of feedback, learning orientation and confidence were all features of those people who over-estimated their performance. Over-estimators were also the group to make the greatest improvements in performance over time.

How can research findings be applied to career counseling and assessment?
Answer: It is important to note that those people with the greatest ability may also be the people that continue to under-estimate their performance. Evidence of over-estimation may not necessarily be a bad thing. The individual may simply be expressing ambitious goal setting and take time to integrate feedback into performance improvements.

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With notable flagship publications leading and guiding the field (e.g., Cochran, 1997; Peavy, 1997), narrative career counselling is an accepted approach to practice, with a variety of emergent applied theoretical frameworks, and assessment and intervention techniques and instruments (McIlveen & Patton, 2007a). Yet, despite the proliferation of narrative assessment procedures—under the aegis of constructivism—there has been insufficient research into their outcomes and processes (McIlveen & Patton, 2007a). This paper reports a study of adult clients’ experience of My Career Chapter, which is a theoretically-informed, qualitative career assessment and counselling procedure. My Career Chapter engenders personal exploration through a client’s writing and reading aloud a career-related autobiography, which is formulated on the basis of structured steps and a sentence-completion process. In a predominantly qualitative, mixed method design (i.e., QUAL+quan), interpretative phenomenological analysis of six interview transcripts constructed three major clusters representative of clients’ experiences: implications for instructions and guidelines; induction of personal contemplation and self-reflection; and positive emotional experience. Secondary quantitative data aligned with the primary qualitative results. The results of this study were consistent with and extend upon previous research; and were indicative of the safety and potential of My Career Chapter as a narrative career assessment and counselling procedure for adults.
2007a); which is a state of affairs consistent with equivalently limited research into career counselling outcome and process broadly (Whiston & Oliver, 2005). This paper contributes to the applied research literature on process (cf. Heppner & Heppner, 2003) by reporting on an investigation into adult clients’ experience of a new narrative assessment and counselling procedure: My Career Chapter: A Dialogical Autobiography (McIlveen, 2006)—shortened to My Career Chapter for convenience.

DESCRIPTION OF MY CAREER CHAPTER

My Career Chapter is a theoretically-informed procedure based upon the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006), the Theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2005), and the Theory of Dialogical Self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993); and, moreover, it is informed by scholarship toward those theories’ integration (McIlveen, 2007c; McIlveen & Patton, 2007b). My Career Chapter facilitates clients’ writing of a career-related autobiography ranging across their views on myriad factors and influences upon their careers, using a guided and structured format, presented in a printed workbook. It is prescribed by counsellors as a homework task, should an interpretative narrative approach be chosen as an appropriate intervention.

With respect to the writing of the manuscript, the client works through seven steps laid out in a printed booklet, beginning in Step 1 with general career-related questions as ‘warm-up exercises’ to orient the user to the autobiographical project. In Step 2, the client contemplates the proximal influences (e.g., personal: gender, interests, values; interpersonal: relationships, family) and distal influences (e.g., social: community groups; environmental/societal: labour market) described in the Systems Theory Framework. This contemplation process is facilitated in Step 3: it requires the client to rate how compatible or incompatible the influences in his or her life are with one another, in a matrix with proximal and distal influences opposing one another. The 5-point rating scale includes –2 = very much incompatible, –1 = mostly incompatible, 0 = neither compatible nor incompatible, +1 = mostly compatible, to +2 = very much incompatible. The compatibility matrix task operationalises the notion that a person, as a dialogical self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993), can take multiple internal and external positions on himself or herself. Methodologically, it is fashioned upon the principles of an established psychometric derived from the Theory of Dialogical Self (Hermans, 2001). Having completed the compatibility task which aims to ‘decentre’ the client’s thinking of himself or herself, the client then writes the bulk of the autobiographical manuscript in Step 4, which is a structured process consisting of a series of part-sentences associated with each of the influences of the Systems Theory Framework. This was modelled after the sentence-completion procedure for exploring ego development (Loevinger, 1985). Each influence is expressed in a past, present, and future sentence-stem, along with two sentence-stems containing ratings of how strong the influence is for the client in terms of its impact, and how the client feels in relation to it. For example, the career influence age would entail the following:

When I was younger…
My age allows me to…
By the time I reach retirement I want…
I mostly feel very positive/positive/indifferent/negative/very negative in relation to my age because…
My age has a very positive/positive/neutral/negative/very negative impact upon my career because…

Upon completing the sentence-completion task (which is the bulk of the autobiography), in Step 5 the client must submit the draft to an ‘editor’ for proof reading and review. The editor, in this case, is the client himself or herself, but 5 years younger. The client reads the manuscript aloud to himself or herself, as if he or she were the younger self, and then in reply writes editorial comments to the older (current) self. Upon receiving the editorial comments, the older (current) self writes back to the editor with a summary of the career story and future. This self-editorial process was founded upon a similar procedure used to generate dialogical transactions with oneself (cf. Hermans & Kempen, 1993). In Step 6 the manuscript is completed by the writing of a conclusion section with a focus upon strengths, obstacles, and the future. Step 7 is an open space for writing reflective ideas and experiences that may arise over days subsequent to completion of the manuscript.
The writing phase can take up to 2 hours; it may be completed in one sitting or over several periods according to the client’s preferences.

The completed manuscript is subsequently read aloud by the counsellor in the next session. Whilst engaged in the reading process, the counsellor may elect to form his/her own interpretations of the text, and present them to the client unilaterally or co-constructively. Following the reading and interpretation process, the manuscript and subsequent dialogue are integrated into counselling thereafter.

The dual reading of the manuscript—the client with himself or herself, and subsequently with a counsellor—is a crucial feature of My Career Chapter, serving to further embed its theoretical dialogical processes. Hence, My Career Chapter not only engenders personal exploration through writing and hearing a story, its resultant text serves as idiographic assessment data. Accordingly, its design aligns with evidence pertaining to the value of written exercises and individualised interpretation described by Brown and Ryan Krane (2000).

My Career Chapter is similar to the My System of Career Influences reflection activity (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005, 2007), which is likewise based upon the Systems Theory Framework. Both facilitate users’ exploring their career influences and documenting their understanding in a workbook. A difference between the two is that My Career Chapter is predominantly verbal in process, whereas My System of Career Influences is more inclusive of visual and spatial processing through clients drawing their systems of career influences. Whilst they are not parallel forms in a psychometric sense, they present a useful alternative for practitioners wishing to operationalise the Systems Theory Framework and a choice between a verbal and visual procedure, depending upon the counsellors’ and/or clients’ needs and preferences.

**Research Status**

The theoretical origins of My Career Chapter have been explored critically and reflexively in an auto-ethnographic study (McIlveen, 2007b). Research has investigated counsellors’ experience of My Career Chapter in a formal training program, which was inclusive of their personal application of the procedure and their subsequent professional appraisal of its construction and potential clinical utility for adults (McIlveen, 2007a) and adolescents (McIlveen, Patton, & Hoare, 2007). Both of those studies found that My Career Chapter closely aligned with the recommendations for the construction and administration of qualitative career assessment procedures proposed by McMahon, Patton and Watson (2003). It was recommended, nevertheless, that My Career Chapter’s instructions be modified or simplified, particularly for the compatibility task of Step 3. A study of adult clients’ reactions to a pilot version of the procedure indicated that it was clinically safe with respect to not distressing or harming clients, and that there was evidence of a mild positive reaction to the process of its completion, including feelings of optimism and self-agency (McIlveen, Ford, & Dun, 2005). The current study extends the previous research into adult clients’ reactions by intensively investigating the experiences of individuals who used the procedure in relation to their seeking constructivist-oriented career counselling. Unlike the quantitative study by McIlveen, Ford and Dun, this study investigated clients’ experiences using a qualitative lens.

**Method**

**Research Design**

This study sought to understand the unique experiences of clients and attempted to synthesise their experiences into a composite, meaningful account. We deployed a concurrent nested mixed method design, with priority given to qualitative data over quantitative data (i.e., QUAL+quan) (Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). Similar to research into counsellors’ experiences of My Career Chapter (McIlveen, 2007a), the current study used the qualitative research method, interpretative phenomenological analysis (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith, 1996; Smith & Osborn, 2003) to capture the unique experiences of the clients. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is phenomenological and hermeneutic in theoretical origin and aims to facilitate understanding of how individuals make sense of their psychosocial worlds, experiences, and events. Application of interpretative phenomenological analysis in this study aimed to explore clients’ experience of My Career Chapter with respect to their working through each of the steps in the booklet, writing and reading their manuscript, and then hearing their manuscript being read back to them by a counsellor in the interpretive follow-up session. Clients’ interview
Participants
A State-registered psychologist, who worked in the Career Service at the University of Southern Queensland and who was trained in the application of My Career Chapter, collaborated in this study by selecting the participants for the study and by meeting in a session with the participants for the reading and interpretation process. Individuals who demonstrated high levels of career-related anxiety and sought urgent attention at triage were excluded from the study and referred to standard career counselling services offered by the university’s Career Service. Interpretative phenomenological analysis requires small, homogenous samples, with their homogeneity being theoretically or purposefully defined without the criterion of generalisability (Smith & Osborn, 2003). As My Career Chapter was originally configured in the field for a particular population of clients (i.e., adults with relatively high English verbal ability), purposive selection (Polkinghorne, 2005) was used for this study. Thus, participants were limited to: (a) adults; (b) seeking a career exploration experience consistent with a constructivist approach; (c) whose level of post-secondary education was of at least undergraduate level; and (d) whose first language was English. There were seven participants, with ages ranging from 24 to 62 years, six female and one male. All but one had completed an undergraduate bachelor-level degree, with one participant having taken leave from her senior years of undergraduate study for the birth of her child.

Sources of Data
Participants completed My Career Chapter in their own time and then returned for a 1-hour follow-up session with the counsellor in which their manuscript was read by the counsellor and interpreted co-constructively. Approximately 1 week after their sessions with the counsellor, participants were interviewed for no more than 1 hour in a follow-up appointment. The interviews followed a semi-structured format to elicit the users’ experience of completing My Career Chapter, and the reading and interpretive session with the counsellor. Following interpretative phenomenological analysis guidelines (Smith & Osborn, 2003), the interviews entailed semi-structured protocols. Interviews were electronically recorded and professionally transcribed. Two semi-structured interview schedules were used for this procedure, and these were followed by a print questionnaire.

Client Experience Interview
The first interview schedule was formulated specifically for this study. The items covered participants’ experience overall and then specifically with each step of the process of completing My Career Chapter. Procedurally, the client was reminded of each step and then questioned on their experience of it (e.g., “You would have noticed that some of the sentence-parts contained a past, present, and future element. What was that like for you?”). This set of questions was supplemented with the personal items from the bank of questions in the Reflecting on My Career Influences exercise (McMahon & Patton, 2006, p. 106). The questions pertaining to constructivist notions of connectedness (e.g., “What was it like for you to have the undivided attention of someone listening to your career story?”), reflection (e.g., “What was it like for you to have a space where you could take time to reflect on your career story written in My Career Chapter?”), meaning-making (e.g., “What new or different understandings do you have about yourself as a result of completing My Career Chapter?”), learning (e.g., “What is the most significant learning process for you from completing My Career Chapter?”), and agency (e.g., “What steps may you take in your own life as a result of completing My Career Chapter?”).

Helpful Aspects of Therapy Interview
This interview schedule was adapted from the original version (Llewelyn, 1988) and an online version (Elliot, 1993). This open-ended semi-structured questionnaire has been used in counselling and psychotherapy process research, and is completed by clients at the end of their session with the counsellor. Clients are asked to describe the most helpful event in their session with the counsellor and to rate its helpfulness using a simple Likert scale ranging from 1 = extremely hindering to 9 = extremely helpful. In addition, clients are also asked to describe an event that was unhelpful or hindering. In this study, clients were invited to describe any experience in the writing, reading, or interpretation processes of My Career Chapter that was helpful or
unhelpful. The original schedule was modified to include wording referring to My Career Chapter and career-related issues.

Client Reaction: System Questionnaire

Following the semi-structured interview schedules, the participants’ reactions to My Career Chapter were recorded using the Client Reactions System (Hill, Helms, Spiegel, & Tichenor, 1988), as was used in previous research (McIlveen, Ford, & Dun, 2005). The scale consists of 14 positive reactions (e.g., I felt understood, or hopeful) and 7 negative reactions (e.g., I felt worse, or confused). Participants were instructed to rate their level of agreement using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. For this study, the instructions were modified to suit the study with reference to thinking about their experience of writing, reading, and hearing their My Career Chapter. The results from this questionnaire were used firstly to triangulate the qualitative interview data and secondly to make another check to ensure that participants, as client-users of My Career Chapter, were not adversely affected.

Data Analysis

Six interview transcripts were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. However, due to a technical failure in one interview, only the last half of that interview was properly recorded; and consequently the handwritten notes on the Helpful Aspects of Therapy Interview form and Client Reactions System Questionnaire for that case were retained as data for a check of trustworthiness.

The recommended procedure for interpretative phenomenological analysis was followed. Prior to commencing the analysis, the transcripts were read while listening to the audio recording, so as to refresh the researcher’s memory, note transcript omissions or errors, and to actively re-engage with the dialogue of the interviews. The initial step of interpretative phenomenological analysis entailed repeatedly reading through one interview transcript before working through any of the others. Multiple readings sought evidence for induction of specific experiences, which were subsequently rolled-up into themes. The thematic level of this analysis was conceptually higher than that of the first and aimed to create psychological understandings of the text, which were grounded in an individual’s interview, yet sufficiently abstract to allow for connection with the themes from other cases. The themes were reviewed to determine conceptual clusters and checked against the raw transcripts for meaningfulness. A text quotation which was indicative of cluster and theme meanings was retained for exemplification. The entire process was repeated for each transcript. Thus each individual’s transcript was analysed ideographically so as to create a full account of his or her experience. Following the iterative procedure performed on each case, a final list of themes and superordinate clusters was constructed so as to indicate the aggregated meanings from the group. This interpretative process entailed repeatedly moving back and forth across the participants’ themes and checking if themes were conceptually related to a superordinate cluster. This list was used to enable a thematic reporting of results.

Trustworthiness

A check was made to assure trustworthiness of the data and the analysis according to the paradigm-specific requirements for constructivist research (Morrow, 2005). Whilst the data saturated relatively early in the analysis, care was taken to abduct negative evidence and discrepancy within the data to ensure a balance of participants’ experiences and to satisfy the criterion of fairness. Accordingly, whenever appropriate, divergent views have been presented in the results section. The criterion of ontological authenticity requires that participants’ data be expanded and elaborated. This requirement was satisfied as an inherent part of the interpretative phenomenological analysis interview process, in which their experiences were elaborated to the point of shared understanding with the interviewer. Educative authenticity was satisfied through individual discussions with the participants regarding how they learned through completing My Career Chapter and participating in the reflective process. Catalytic authenticity pertains to action that is stimulated by the research process and this is covered in the Discussion section. Morrow’s criteria pertaining to meaning, especially shared meaning, were satisfied through the process of the participants being able to confirm their transcripts and the themes derived from
them. It should be noted, however, that interpretative phenomenological analysis does not require the final interpretation to be a shared construction, as it ultimately represents meanings generated and owned by the researcher, rather than the participants.

In this study, the quantitative results derived from the Helpful Aspects of Therapy and Client Reactions Systems questionnaire were primarily interpreted idiosyncratically alongside each participant’s interview transcript. Nevertheless, the Likert scale data were summarised nomothetically to act as a supplementary source of data for the purposes of triangulation and establishing a further indicator of saturation and trustworthiness.

RESULTS
The interpretative phenomenological analysis derived four superordinate clusters from the participants’ interview transcripts: instructions and guidelines, induction of contemplation and self-reflection, hearing and interpretation, and positive experience. These clusters are described first and then supplemented by the results of the quantitative measures of helpful aspects and reactions.

Instructions and Guidelines
Notwithstanding participants’ completion of My Career Chapter without major concerns, there was a consistency in themes around the instructions and guidelines for completing the procedure. Participants indicated that the instructions should be simplified and enhanced to enable them to comprehend fully what was to be undertaken. The need for instructional clarity was best exemplified in some participants feeling somewhat confused with complex components, most particularly with the Step 3 compatibility task in which career influences are compared and contrasted in a matrix using a rating scale. One participant recommended presentation of the Systems Theory Framework figure, used in Step 2, in colour so as to improve ease of use.

Induction of Contemplation and Self-Reflection
The participants uniformly described how the procedural structure of My Career Chapter induced contemplation and reflection upon their career. The contemplation was attributed to the step-wise approach and the specific tasks and procedures. With respect to the overall experience of My Career Chapter, one participant indicated that it was enjoyable because it served as a lifelong reflection, and stated:

“Tracking through what I’ve done in my life and thinking about what I might have done differently if I’d been going through study now, and that sort of thing, and starting out. (Participant 2)"

With respect to the specific procedural elements of My Career Chapter, the sentence-stem procedure in the manuscript was deemed useful as a structure. One participant stated:

“It sort of, as I said before, makes you take stock of where you’ve been, what you are now, and things in the future, which sometimes you don’t do. (Participant 6)"

It was evident that participants were conscious of reflecting upon aspects of life that they would not ordinarily associate with their career, but rather with their personal life (e.g., relationships). There was no evidence that this was taken as impertinent or offensive, but seemed to be taken as surprising that career would extend beyond work-related topics and that personal life would likewise extend into the domain of career. Having heard her story read out by the counsellor, one participant felt affirmed that she summarised her family, but was interested to summarise how it touched on her career:

“I know how strong my family ethics are, I kind of knew, but I didn’t realise it was coming out in other spots, so that was interesting. (Participant 1)"

Hearing and Interpretation
Participants uniformly expressed joy, pleasure, or satisfaction, in hearing their manuscripts read by the counsellor in the follow-up session. It was evident that the participants felt personally moved by hearing their stories read aloud and being focused upon so intensely. The breadth of the storying of the person’s whole life was also emotively potent; for example:

“I found it a little bit, not embarrassing, I guess it was a little bit, just because you’re looking at all aspects of your life. (Participant 5)"

This participant was not perturbed by the emotional intensity, but somewhat surprised that a career counselling experience could be so. The reading aloud and hearing of the manuscript also contributed
to participants’ “making sense” of their stories; for example:

It made a lot more sense when [the counsellor] read it than when I was reading it. Well, actually, it sounded like a story; and it sort of, because I was sitting and listening to it, things were clicking into place.

(Participant 3)

Positive Experience
Despite their minor troubles with some aspects of the procedure, participants described the overall experience as positive and one from which they felt they had learned something new or had something experientially re-affirmed.

Helpfulness Rating Scale
In the Helpful Aspects of Therapy questionnaire, participants were asked to rate the helpfulness of a particular experience. As revealed in the interpretative phenomenological analysis, the participants identified the reading and interpretation process as the most helpful, with others summarising the reflective experience as the most helpful. The median score for the helpfulness of the experiences was 8, with scores ranging from 8 to 9; which is indicative of greatly helpful on the Likert scale. Although not rated as hindering by the participants, the compatibility matrix was highlighted for its complexity in procedure. This result aligns with those derived from the interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Participant Reactions
The participants’ positive and negative reactions to My Career Chapter are summarised respectively in Tables 1 and 2 (see Table 3 in the Appendix for individual participant’s scores). The median scores for each item of the Client Reactions System indicate that the participants felt positive about the experience of completing My Career Chapter. Moreover, the median score for the items on the negative scale indicated that there was no evidence of a general negative reaction to the procedure. The higher individual scores on items pertaining to being confused, having a lack of direction, or feeling stuck, were clarified with individuals and attributed to concerns with the instructions and guidelines, as revealed in the interpretative phenomenological analysis. All scores for feeling worse fell within the neutral to strongly disagree range; clearly indicative of no emotional deterioration as a result of the procedure. The one participant who endorsed feeling scared attributed this to her concerns about revealing her personal life to the counsellor, but was able to confirm that this was an initial reaction of apprehension, rather than a serious problem with the experience overall.

DISCUSSION
This study sought to explore adult clients’ experiences of My Career Chapter, inclusive of the writing, reading, and interpretation processes. As such, this study contributes to the literature on clients’ experience of career assessment and counselling, particularly in reference to process variables identified by Heppner and Heppner (2003) and the critical ingredients of written exercises and individualised interpretation (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000). The study found that participants enjoyed most aspects of completing My Career Chapter and derived a personal experience with respect to enhancing or developing their self-awareness of careers. This study again revealed the need to revisit the instructions and the guidelines for completing My Career Chapter, with the aim of making them clearer and simpler; a result consistent with the opinions of counsellors revealed in previous research (McIlveen, 2007a; McIlveen, Patton, & Hoare, 2007). As with research into the pilot version (McIlveen, Ford, & Dun, 2005), participants’ reactions to the procedure did not raise significant concerns in relation to its being experienced as threatening, distressing, or harmful. This is an important research outcome, as together the two studies—quantitative and qualitative—assure with some confidence that My Career Chapter is not clinically dangerous, and that it may be applied, with due caution, for counselling or research purposes. Although no compelling negative effects upon clients were revealed in this study, it methodologically contributes to a relatively limited literature on the negative effects of career assessment and counselling (see Whiston & Oliver, 2005) through the specific application of the Client Reactions Systems
questionnaire, the Helpful Aspects of Therapy form, and searching questions within the semi-structured interview. With this study as a case example (although we make no claim on its generalisability), we argue that new career assessment and counselling procedures should be subject to an investigation of their potential to distress or harm—not just their potential for enjoyment and clinical good.

**Implications for Practice and Research**
This study provided some evidence of *My Career Chapter’s* utility as a tool for facilitating clients’ writing an autobiography in relation to the Systems Theory Framework of career (Patton & McMahon, 2006), which includes proximal and distal interpersonal, social, and societal influences. In addition to affirming the value of written exercises and individual interpretation, this outcome pertains to the finding by Brown and Ryan Krane (2000) that building support within social networks forms an important component of the career counselling experience. Accordingly, clients who have been made more aware of the broader social influences of career may be in a better psychological position to engage in social processes of career development, such as networking under the guidance of the counsellor.

**Table 1: Scores for Positive Reactions on the Client Reactions System (N = 7)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understood</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeful</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relief</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of negative thoughts/behaviours</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better self-understanding</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of feelings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstuck</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>New perspective</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educated</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>New ways to behave</td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenged</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
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**Table 2: Scores for Negative Reactions on the Client Reactions System (N = 7)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<td>Lack of direction</td>
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<td>Confused</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstood</td>
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<tr>
<td>No reaction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>
Participants’ hearing their stories was a significant highlight for them personally. Whilst these results affirm the value of the reading and hearing procedure of My Career Chapter, they also implicate the importance of the client-counsellor working alliance, and the clinical sensitivity required in this approach to career assessment and counselling—which is a crucial process identified by Heppner and Heppner (2003) and other scholars (e.g., Meara & Patton, 1994; Whiston & Oliver, 2005). In accordance with research indicating that the involvement of a counsellor in an intervention significantly adds to its effectiveness (Whiston, Brecheisen, & Stephens, 2003), this study highlights the importance of the co-construction in interpretation and, therefore, the crucial role of the counsellor. Furthermore, the nexus of contemplating-writing-reading-hearing-reflecting being experienced by client-users as effective, gives tentative evidence toward the claim by Heppner and Heppner (2003) that career counselling could be conceptualised as a learning process.

Limitations and Future Research

Although there is limited evidence of difference in the outcome of career counselling when gender is considered (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Whiston & Oliver, 2005), the disproportion of gender may be considered a limitation of this research study. However, the current study did not seek to investigate the differences between males’ and females’ experience of My Career Chapter. After all, purposive selection of participants stipulated age, education, and language ability as the primary selection criteria. Nevertheless, the study may be criticised for not fully explicating a gender-balanced view in its recruitment of relatively fewer males. Whilst methodologically such a criticism is unwarranted—with respect to the interpretative phenomenological analysis requirement for purposive selection—it is an enticing prospect to consider that women and men may differ in how they experience the procedure, particularly the expressive phase in the reading and interpretation with a counsellor.

Whilst there is more work to be done to understand the process of My Career Chapter with respect to clients’ and counsellors’ experience of it in action (e.g., investigating client and counsellor self-talk), future research should investigate its outcomes on empirical criteria (e.g., career-decidedness and confidence) with respect to client change/improvement, and in comparison to related procedures such as the My System of Career Influences.

Summary and Conclusion

Given the dearth of empirical studies pertaining to narrative career assessment and counselling procedures, this study makes a contribution to the literature with respect to evaluating a theoretically-informed narrative procedure in the field, and for gaining an understanding of its process and its short-term impact felt by adult clients. We make no claims on the generalisability of this study and My Career Chapter’s applicability to a broad population of clients; indeed there is much research to be done to explore its wider utility and administration. We do claim, however, that in combination with previous research, by using a QAUL+quan research design with qualitative data in combination with supplementary quantitative data, this study provides further evidence that My Career Chapter is a career assessment and counselling procedure which is potentially useful and enjoyable for adult clients seeking a narrative exploration experience, and one that may assist in the generation of insightful understanding of career.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Table 3: Individual scores for Helpful Aspects of Therapy and Client Reactions System

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Participant</th>
<th>A</th>
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</table>

AUTHORS

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Theory and Practice

This section is designed as a brief professional review of the article. It provides relevant study questions and answers for readers to test their knowledge of the article.

What is one application of My Career Chapter in career counselling?

Answer: My Career Chapter is a useful tool for the narrative approach to career counselling because it facilitates a client writing an autobiographical account of his or her career; it takes a comprehensive view of career through the Systems Theory Framework; it engenders dialogue between the counsellor and client, and between the client’s own I-positions as a dialogical self.

What value does interpretative phenomenological analysis offer for research into narrative career counselling?

Answer: Narrative career counselling holds meaning as central to the counselling process and outcome. As a hermeneutic research method, interpretative phenomenological analysis provides a useful means by which researchers can derive meaning from the talk and text of counselling.
CAREER COUNSELLING IS THE SINGLE MOST EFFECTIVE CAREER INTERVENTION THAT PRODUCES THE GREATEST GAINS FOR CLIENTS IN THE SHORTEST TIME (OLIVER & SPAKONE, 1988; WHISTON, 2000). THE SUPERIORITY OF CAREER COUNSELLING OVER MORE CONSTRAINED APPROACHES SUCH AS WORKSHOPS, CLASSES AND COMPUTER PROGRAMS IS DUE IN NO SMALL PART TO THE FLEXIBLE, CONTINGENT AND PERSONAL NATURE OF THE COUNSELLING PROCESS. DESPITE THIS, MANY OF THE THEORIES, PROCEDURES AND TOOLS DESIGNED FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT EMPHASISE STABILITY AND CHARACTERISE CAREER DEVELOPMENT AS A PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED, RATHER THAN CAREER DEVELOPMENT AS AN ONGOING PROCESS.

APPROACHES THAT EMPHASISE CERTAINTY AND HOLD OUT THE PROMISE OF PROVIDING NEAT ANSWERS ARE ATTRACTIVE TO PEOPLE CONFRONTED BY THE UNCERTAINTIES AND COMPLEXITIES OF THEIR LIVES. IT IS THEREFORE NOT SURPRISING TO DISCOVER THAT CLIENTS SEEK OUT CERTAINTY IN CAREER COUNSELLING AND PREFER THAT COUNSELLORS GIVE ADVICE, OPINIONS AND ANSWERS (GALASSI, CRACE, MARTIN, JAMES, & WALLACE, 1992). THIS PRESENTS A CHALLENGE BECAUSE WE LIVE IN A WORLD THAT IS NOT SIMPLE, CERTAIN AND PREDICTABLE, AND A WORLD THAT IS POPULATED BY PEOPLE WHO ARE COMPLEX, CHANGING AND INHERENTLY UNPREDICTABLE. THIS WORLD IS CHARACTERISED BY TALEB (2007) WHO POSED THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

LOOK INTO YOUR OWN EXISTENCE. COUNT THE SIGNIFICANT EVENTS, THE TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES, AND THE INVENTIONS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN OUR ENVIRONMENT SINCE YOU WERE BORN AND COMPARE THEM TO WHAT WAS EXPECTED BEFORE THEIR ADVENT. HOW MANY OF THEM CAME ON SCHEDULE?

LOOK INTO YOUR OWN PERSONAL LIFE, TO YOUR CHOICE OF PROFESSION SAY, OR MEETING YOUR MATE, YOUR EXILE FROM YOUR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, THE BETRAYALS YOU FACED, YOUR SUDDEN ENRICHMENT OR IMPOVERISHMENT. HOW OFTEN DID THESE THINGS OCCUR ACCORDING TO PLAN? (P. XIX)

SHIFTWORK: A CHAOS THEORY OF CAREERS

AGENDA FOR CHANGE IN CAREER COUNSELLING

JIM E. H. BRIGHT AND ROBERT G. L. PRYOR
Australian Catholic University

This paper presents the implications of the Chaos Theory of Careers for career counselling in the form of Shiftwork. Shiftwork represents an expanded paradigm of career counselling based on complexity, change and uncertainty. Eleven paradigm shifts for careers counselling are outlined to incorporate into contemporary practice pattern making, an emphasis on planning, openness, flexibility, risk, possibility thinking, mattering and meaning, transforming information, scalable reasoning, emergence and trust as faith.

CAREER COUNSELLING IS THE SINGLE MOST EFFECTIVE CAREER INTERVENTION THAT PRODUCES THE GREATEST GAINS FOR CLIENTS IN THE SHORTEST TIME (OLIVER & SPAKONE, 1988; WHISTON, 2000). THE SUPERIORITY OF CAREER COUNSELLING OVER MORE CONSTRAINED APPROACHES SUCH AS WORKSHOPS, CLASSES AND COMPUTER PROGRAMS IS DUE IN NO SMALL PART TO THE FLEXIBLE, CONTINGENT AND PERSONAL NATURE OF THE COUNSELLING PROCESS. DESPITE THIS, MANY OF THE THEORIES, PROCEDURES AND TOOLS DESIGNED FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT EMPHASISE STABILITY AND CHARACTERISE CAREER DEVELOPMENT AS A PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED, RATHER THAN CAREER DEVELOPMENT AS AN ONGOING PROCESS.

APPROACHES THAT EMPHASISE CERTAINTY AND HOLD OUT THE PROMISE OF PROVIDING NEAT ANSWERS ARE ATTRACTIVE TO PEOPLE CONFRONTED BY THE UNCERTAINTIES AND COMPLEXITIES OF THEIR LIVES. IT IS THEREFORE NOT SURPRISING TO DISCOVER THAT CLIENTS SEEK OUT CERTAINTY IN CAREER COUNSELLING AND PREFER THAT COUNSELLORS GIVE ADVICE, OPINIONS AND ANSWERS (GALASSI, CRACE, MARTIN, JAMES, & WALLACE, 1992). THIS PRESENTS A CHALLENGE BECAUSE WE LIVE IN A WORLD THAT IS NOT SIMPLE, CERTAIN AND PREDICTABLE, AND A WORLD THAT IS POPULATED BY PEOPLE WHO ARE COMPLEX, CHANGING AND INHERENTLY UNPREDICTABLE. THIS WORLD IS CHARACTERISED BY TALEB (2007) WHO POSED THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

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Things and people change, shift happens (Bright, 2008) but many of our methods, our training and our clients’ expectations tend to privilege certainty over uncertainty. Taleb (2007) argued that all the shifts that have really mattered in life have shared three characteristics: (a) they are outliers that fall outside the realm of regular expectations; (b) they have an extreme impact; and (c) that ‘human nature makes us concoct explanations for [their] occurrence after the fact, making [them] explainable and predictable’ (p. xviii). Taleb called these effects ‘Black Swans’ because to the inhabitants of the old world the existence of black swans fell outside their experience.

The observation that we live in exponential times seems to be increasingly accepted. Ulrich (2008) has estimated that 95% of what we know about the human brain has been discovered in the last 20 years. If we consider our own discipline of career development, we can see clear evidence of exponential shifts in knowledge. A PsycLit database search on articles relating to ‘careers’ indicates the first listed in the database was published in the 1890s, but that just about half (49%) of the total output have been published in the last three decades. The results for papers on ‘career change’ are even more dramatic (see Figure 1), with 93% of them having been published in the last 30 years. While it may not seem surprising now that there is such a focus on change, would we have predicted this in the 1960s? It appears that Black Swans are alive and well in our own discipline.

This dramatic, unprecedented change demands that we reconsider our methods, models and practices. Shiftwork has been suggested as a label to describe the essence of our methods, models and practices. As career counsellors, there are some cornerstones to Shiftwork that we must embrace if we want continue to provide clients with the greatest gains (Whiston, 2000). We have identified the first 11 shifts that we may need to embrace (if we are not already doing so). It would be an oversimplification to interpret these shifts as meaning an abandonment of current practices in favour of new ones and nor are we suggesting these shifts represent movement along a continuum. Both concepts are variants of pendulum attractor closed systems thinking (Pryor & Bright, 2007). Rather, these shifts are characterised as a move from a more simplistic approach to a more sophisticated and complex approach consonant with the realities of contemporary work and the gloriously complicated dimensions of being human.

Shiftwork as a concept derives from chaos theory (Lorenz, 1993). Chaos theorists have observed that change can occur in systems either gradually or very quickly. However, the effect of change is to reconfigure the system. This is usually called a ‘phase shift’, after which the system functions in a way different from its former operational configuration. The classic physical example of this is the proverbial sand tipping into a single pile forming a pyramid shape on a flat surface. At some point only one additional grain of sand is required for the existing pile to bifurcate into two poles—a new configuration of the system. The changes and uncertainties of human experience show similar analogous reconfigurations through the slow advances of age or the dramatic impact of trauma or job loss. Such effects can be internal to the person, such as disease, or external, such as technological change. The Chaos Theory of Careers (Bright & Pryor, 2005, 2007; Pryor & Bright, 2003, 2007) explicitly incorporates the concept of ‘phase shift’ in its account of careers in terms of complex dynamical systems.

As career counsellors, there are some cornerstones to Shiftwork that we must embrace if we want continue to provide clients with the greatest gains (Whiston, 2000). We have identified the first 11 shifts that we may need to embrace (if we are not already doing so). It would be an oversimplification to interpret these shifts as meaning an abandonment of current practices in favour of new ones and nor are we suggesting these shifts represent movement along a continuum. Both concepts are variants of pendulum attractor closed systems thinking (Pryor & Bright, 2007). Rather, these shifts are characterised as a move from a more simplistic approach to a more sophisticated and complex approach consonant with the realities of contemporary work and the gloriously complicated dimensions of being human. Shifting perspectives or paradigms of career counseling is mandatory if counsellors’ work is to remain relevant to and effective for the ongoing development of the work and life experiences of their clients. It is not that traditional approaches to career development have failed miserably—they have not—however, complex dynamical people and economies demand that we as practitioners also shift. Indeed, think of the proposed approach as pressing the ‘shift’ key on a
Figure 1: The rolling average number of journal articles published per decade related to the topic of career change

Note: Because at the time of writing there are still 18 months remaining in the current decade, the figures for the current decade have been corrected upwards by 15% (18 months/120 months)

computer keyboard. Doing so dramatically increases the possibilities, and increases our flexibility without abandoning the still useful un-shifted keystrokes.

**Shift 1: From Prediction to Prediction and Pattern Making**

'It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future' is a saying variously attributed to commentators as varied as Mark Twain, physicist Niels Bohr and Danish artist Storm P. (Pors, 2007). Career counselling is generally future-focused in a way that other forms of counselling are not.

Savickas (1997) suggested that 'the career counselor’s job is to see life prospectively, to extend a life theme into the future’ (p. 14.) Whereas in personal counselling the goal may be to overcome past and current negative feelings or behaviours, very often in career counselling clients demand to know 'what they will become'.

The most commonly used approach to predicting a client’s future is the use of interest inventories, and with good reason. As Savickas and Spokane (1999) pointed out, 'the long-term stability of vocational interests in group data was established in a compelling manner in the late 1960s...a finding that has never been refuted.’ (p. 7). However they also acknowledged that changes of interests occur for some individuals and that accentuation of interests, changing careers and contexts all need to be considered more than they have in the past.

The limits of prediction in career development occur in psychology and economics for pretty much the same reasons: complexity, change (including personal inconsistency), chance and the misplaced assumption of rationality in decision-making (Ariely, 2008; Pryor & Bright, 2007). If we can learn to step back and avoid focusing on just a few influences on our situation, we may be able to discern patterns in both our behaviour and our environment, which could constitute the recognition of persisting problems to be redressed and of opportunities and possibilities to be developed and utilised. One of the best ways of learning how to
see patterns is to start with what we are perhaps most familiar with, the patterns that have emerged in the life we have personally lived. Not only is the subject matter familiar, but also learning to see our patterns in all their complexity will present strategies to confront, cope with and capitalise on future changes in our lives.

There are now many different techniques available to analyse patterns in people’s lives including the Career Style Questionnaire (Savickas, 1997), CareerScope for high school students (Amundson, Poehnell, & Pattern, 2005) and Guiding Circles for Indigenous peoples (McCormick, Amundson, & Poehnell, 2006), narratives (Bujold, 2004; Cochran, 1997), archetypal plots (Pryor & Bright, 2008), circles of influence (Bright & Pryor, 2003), My Systems of Career Influence (Watson & McMahon, 2006) and the Pattern Identification Exercise (Amundson, 2003).

**Shift 2: From Plans to Plans and Planning**

Shiftwork is an ongoing process. A plan is to planning what a change is to changing. In the same way that a single change rarely suffices longer than the short term before more changes are required, similarly plans rarely stand the test of time without modification. Yet there is still widespread emphasis on developing ‘a plan’. School systems around the world commonly have a process to develop a school-to-work plan for each student, yet relatively little time appears to be devoted to teaching the next generation the skills of planning. Furthermore, such systems are often based on unwarranted assumptions about the power of logical processes to supply a winning formula. Why is it that relatively few adults have written long-term career plans akin to school-to-work plans despite many adults having had to produce one at school? What does this widespread failure say about the utility and validity of such approaches? How come there is little or no evidence of the long-term validity or success of such approaches? If we can learn to step back and avoid focusing on just a few influences on our situation, we may be able to discern patterns in both our behaviour and our environment, which could constitute the recognition of persisting problems to be redressed and of opportunities and possibilities to be developed and utilised.

The appropriate response from a Shiftwork perspective is not to abandon plans, but to support and counsel clients in the development, redevelopment, deployment, and occasionally abandonment of plans. Shiftwork encourages creativity and dexterity in the use of plans, and encourages a perspective where plans are not seen as having met all future challenges, or as the answer to the problem of career development. In a personal communication, John Krumboltz, the originator of the social learning theory of careers, suggested that the career counsellor–client relationship should be viewed like that of a dentist to patient. Emergency services are provided as necessary, but ongoing checkups, minor modifications and treatments, using improved technologies and responses to changing conditions are also part of a continuing service and relationship. To extend the analogy further, at present career counsellors tend to operate as midwives delivering the plan for immediate action rather than as dentists offering ongoing assistance over an extended period, in the dynamical processes of career development and change.

**Shift 3: From Narrowing Down to Being Focused on Openness**

Both career counsellors and their clients typically see the successful outcome of their interaction to be in terms of moving from undecisiveness to decisiveness. Individuals are often called upon to choose at various points in their education and working lives. Such a process is understood as narrowing down options to a single best choice. The academic and self-help literature of the last 25 years has relatively uncritically espoused the benefits of being focused, setting goals and objectives (Tubbs, 1986) but there has been less focus on the limitations of goal setting as career development strategy until recently (Bright & Pryor, 2005; Shapiro, 2006). The reality of human decision-making is that it virtually always occurs in circumstances of limited knowledge of outcomes (Butz, 1997). As a result it is rarely possible to know at the time of choice which option is incontrovertibly going to be the best one.

In terms of job search, fostering imaginative strategies such as creating work opportunities or combining different forms of work to meet a complex range of needs and desires is a good example of Shiftwork. Encouraging clients to consider the advantages of undecisiveness and the openness to opportunity that can be the reward for such an approach is another example of Shiftwork, particularly in an environment that is in a state of flux and/or when individuals have the opportunity to keep their options open.
**Shift 4: From Control to Controlled Flexibility**

Control is related to the need for predictability and it is also related to anxiety and occupational stress. Perceptions of being in control are one of the best predictors of stress reactions in employees (e.g., Jones & Bright, 2001; Jones, Bright, Searle, & Cooper, 1998). Seeking to control our environment and destiny is therefore understandable, but one of the great individual developmental challenges is to appreciate the limitations of personal control.

Flexibility in Shiftwork terms relates to notions such as Luck Readiness (Neault, 2002; Bright & Pryor, 2007) and planned happenstance (Mitchell, Levin & Krumboltz, 1999). Developing strategies, optimism, self-efficacy, curiosity, persistence, and risk-taking as well as seeing yourself as lucky are effective ways to encourage personal exploration and flexibility in career development.

Flexibility of individuals and workforces is increasingly prized by employees who are confronting the need to re-invent themselves regularly as well as operating in complex, inter-connected global economic markets that are also inherently unpredictable (Taleb, 2007).

**Shift 5: From Risk as Failure to Risk as Endeavour**

Why are we so reluctant to confront uncertainty? Why does it unsettle us so much? Why does it take traumas and other dramatic life events to shake us out of our complacency or even fear? Fear of failure is a well recognised barrier to action, implicated in a range of self-limiting behaviours such as sporting achievement (Sagar, Lavallee, & Spray, 2007), parenting (Sideridis & Kafetsios, 2008) and vocational aspirations (Tseng & Carter, 1970). The Shiftwork approach characterises failure as a marker of action and endeavour, and recognises that error is an essential ingredient in exploratory learning. A willingness to accept failure is a legitimate part of an individual’s or an organisation’s way to develop and expand.

Peat (2002) addressed this issue thus: ‘many people fear chaos because for them it means a lack of control’ (p. 134). However, we never have enough control to eradicate the possibility of failure. Acting under conditions of uncertainty as we inevitably are obliged to do does not obviate our personal responsibility for action. However a Shiftwork approach to counselling clients or employees discourages a punitive approach to failure, and encourages a learning and endeavour approach.

Mistakes are viewed as possible solutions tested and learnt from, as a basis for further experimentation. Many of the triumphs of human endeavour only come after a history of unsuccessfully trying many other possibilities (Moore, 2002). While not advocating thoughtless recklessness in career decision-making, the Shiftwork approach sees strategic attempts which end up proving unsuccessful but from which insight is gained, not as wasted effort but as ‘successful failures’.

**Shift 6: From Probabilities to Probable Possibilities**

The traditional approaches to career decision-making typically seek to identify the probable options as the best ones to consider. Using the Chaos Theory of Careers as a theoretical framework, Pryor, Amundson and Bright (2008) argued for a broader career counselling process that includes both probability and possibility thinking. The convergent or probabilistic approach seeks to converge on a single choice option (or a limited number) through logical and rational approaches such as weighing evidence, focussing on few variables and maximising certainty. The possibility or emergent approach (Bright & Pryor, 2007) seeks to generate patterns by crafting (Amundson, 2003) or constructing (Savickas, 1997) new options through processes such as taking risks, learning from failure, pursuing passions, listening to your intuitive approach and searching for new and enlightening knowledge.

The Shiftwork perspective incorporates both probability and possibility thinking as valuable strategies for action. An overly exclusive focus on the probable career options risks self-perpetuating self-limiting futures and may underestimate the impact of change on the individual and their options. However, focusing excessively on possibilities may lead to frustration and hesitation, as well as overwhelming the individual. Both approaches are required for good Shiftwork.

*A Shiftwork approach to counselling clients or employees discourages a punitive approach to failure, and encourages a learning and endeavour approach.*
Shift 7: From Goals, Roles and Routines to Meaning, Mattering and Black Swans

The temptation to reduce a complex world or choice to the simplest possible terms can be irresistible, and it can also be very effective. Such an approach is likely to be effective if there is a high degree of clarity, a lot of available information, low costs associated with changing course, no long term implications or a pressing need to decide. However many career decisions do not conform to this prescription. Often the options are many, vague or complex, information may be incomplete or inaccurate, costs associated with changing course may be perceived or in reality be high, or there may be no pressing need to decide immediately. Under conditions of change, complexity and chance attempts to think about career decisions in closed systems (i.e., simplified) terms are less likely to be effective and run the risk of lulling the individual into a false sense of certainty, or limiting the individual to an unnecessarily constrained and unimaginative range of choices.

In Chaos Theory of Careers terms, this would amount to clients being trapped into Point (Goal), Pendulum (Role) or Torus (Routine) attractors (Bright & Pryor, 2005; Pryor & Bright, 2007). Such approaches are likely to be ineffective in assisting the client to confront the realities of change that is sometimes dramatic. Such approaches run the risk that change will be under-estimated and humility will be replaced with complacency (Taleb, 2007).

Shiftwork involves recognising the usefulness of closed-system thinking under certain constrained conditions, while at the same time recognising that in the longer term, the open systems reality of the chaotic strange attractor is a more useful way of understanding self and the world. In counselling terms, this means encouraging and supporting clients in developing strategies to explore uncertainty, and to develop opportunity awareness. It encourages an attitude of acknowledging the unplanned as inevitable and welcoming it as providing creative possibilities.

Adopting an open-system approach should not be mistaken for abandoning any form or structure in career development. Within the Chaos Theory of Careers the strange attractor has an emergent stable and recognisable form, but this form is subject to continual change which is sometimes dramatic. The Shiftwork approach does not encourage trusting to dumb luck, random, fatalistic or incoherent approaches to career development.

Understanding what matters to an individual and searching for meaning through work and more generally through social contribution (Savickas, 1997) is central to the Shiftwork approach. Indeed the form and shape of each person’s strange attractor can be thought of in terms of their systems of values, meaning and beliefs (Pryor & Bright, 2004). Hence within this approach, meaning, mattering and awareness of the ever-present Black Swans (non-linear unplanned events) are central to the career counselling enterprise.

Shift 8: From Informing to Informing and Transforming

The Information Age means there is unprecedented, democratised access to information. In an era where many universities around the world have made their staff’s lectures available to all through iTunes and other web-based applications and where interest inventories, job analysis tools, classifications of occupations, videos, blogs and twitters are all available to anyone on the planet and often at no cost, the role of the careers counsellor needs to shift. In the career development discipline there are examples of free electronic access to career experts such as Savickas and Glavin’s Vocopher (Savickas & Glavin, 2008) project, or the Bright and Associates Factory Podcast (Bright, 2008b).

The emphasis on providing information is now under challenge from the sheer volume of information available. Those professionals who pride themselves on being information portals are becoming overloaded and defeated by the exponential growth in occupational information. The shift in practice away from information provision needs to be towards assisting clients to reform and transform the information into personally relevant and practical strategies for action. The Chaos Theory of Careers highlights that no matter how much information we have, we can never be sure that we have the full picture at the time individuals have to choose. Therefore they can never be totally confident about the outcome of whatever decision is made.

Career information continues to be a vital element in career development, however career information is merely an ingredient in career transformation. Shiftwork eschews reifying information and recognises how new information technologies can free us up to be more effective. The counselling process itself can also benefit from the use of information technology.
and some such as Lewis and Coursol (2007), Chester and Glass (2006) and Gredge (2008) report on already developed effective models that harness podcasting and email in career counselling. Social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook and YouTube are already being used by job hunters to advance their credentials, and possibilities exist using these technologies and others such as Voice Over Internet Protocols to develop internet-based individual and group counselling sessions for minimal costs. Such approaches may overcome some of the cost and distance barriers to accessing affordable and effective career counselling.

**SHIFT 9: FROM NORMATIVE THINKING TO NORMATIVE AND SCALABLE THINKING**

Many career counsellors and social scientists in general, are trained to accept a perhaps unconsidered or uncritical appreciation of the bell-shaped curve. The normal or bell-shaped curve assumes that the occurrence of natural phenomena takes the characteristic form of high frequencies around the average, and decreasing frequencies as scores move away from the average in a characteristically bell shape. This encourages both counsellors and their clients to believe that ‘other than typical or average’ occurrences are always highly unlikely.

Taleb (2007) argues persuasively that there are severe limitations manifest in applying the normal curve to complex systems. The normal curve fails to account for non-linearity or scalability. The fact is that events which are out of all proportion with what went before can and do happen. They happen all the time. Oil crises occur. Terrorists attack. Tsunamis inundate coastlines. Viruses spread. People get injured and sick. Actors are discovered overnight and become famous, successful and rich. Fortunes are made and lost on the stock market or through mergers and acquisitions. Girls meet princes in pubs and become Danish Royalty. The impact of events both positive and negative is immense and we need to be aware that they will happen. It points to the limits of our control, but also to the need to understand complex systems as continually shifting, interconnected and subject to sudden change. The Chaos Theory of Careers and the Shiftwork approach recognises both the utility of using the normal curve where appropriate, but also the opportunities and threats associated with living in a complex, interconnected and scalable world.

**SHIFT 10: FROM KNOWING IN ADVANCE TO LIVING WITH EMERGENCE**

Given the inherent uncertainties that comprise and surround us, the need to know in advance becomes even less plausible or desirable. It becomes a recipe for stagnation, stalling, prevarication because one can never know for sure in advance. This does not prevent clients from attempting to impose the expectation of foresight on beleaguered counsellors.

The Shiftwork approach is to recognise that action is a way of gathering information that may inform future strategies. Consequently, in this approach actively engaging with the environment in an ongoing way is as important as off-line career strategising. This engagement may be purposeful and result in planned outcomes and desired knowledge but equally it may well result in serendipitous discoveries and personal transformations. Such an approach may require the counsellor working on strategies to boost the client’s self-efficacy or tolerance of ambiguity when engaged in activities that may not yield any clear pattern or direction immediately. Furthermore, developing a strong sense of purpose will assist in directing engaged effort toward activities that are more likely to bear fruit, while at the same time recognising that there are no guarantees.

**SHIFT 11: FROM TRUST AS CONTROL TO TRUST AS FAITH**

Trust is central to a career counselling relationship and is often alluded to by proxy with terms such as ‘rapport’, ‘confidence’, ‘putting the client at ease’. In career counselling, there are at least two meanings of the word trust. The first usage may be termed a closed system view of trust as being related to control and predictability. Trust in this sense is based upon the assumption that only a limited set of carefully considered outcomes could eventuate, and that the client having considered all the possibilities is comfortable with any of them eventuating. This is trust as control. From this perspective, trust is the level of confidence individuals have in the strategy of limiting options to a manageable (and hence predictable) response set.

However, the Shiftwork approach and Chaos Theory of Careers generally reminds us that rarely are situations so completely predictable, and hence those that confer trust because they think they know what could happen are labouring under a misapprehension. This applies
not only to the client, but also to the counsellor. Sadly it is not unheard of for counsellors to encourage clients to trust them by mistakenly over-estimating the degree of control that the counsellor has over proceedings. A common example is the promise to a client of complete confidentiality in situations where the counselor has legal obligations to disclose information to others such as supervisors, colleagues or courts.

Trust as faith is a deeper, more complete sense of trust that recognises the limits of our knowledge and foresight, and instead invests trust as faith that the counsellor will act in an ethical and responsible manner which generally will be in our best interests. The Shiftwork approach is to establish trust as faith as the basis for counselling rather than trust as control. This involves open and regular discussions about the possibilities of outcomes that may not necessarily be comfortable for the client, but at all times strives to create conditions of informed consent for the client.

Beyond the immediate ethical considerations, trust as faith means encouraging the client to have faith in their own abilities (Betz, 2004), and to develop luck readiness (Pryor & Bright, 2005). Ultimately, trust as faith involves encouraging clients to overcome their fears through courage.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Shiftwork represents a mindset, a toolkit and an agenda for change in career counselling based firmly within the Chaos Theory of Careers framework. Shiftwork does not represent any more of a radical departure from current practice, than engaging the shift-key on a keyboard represents a departure from the default keyset. A more inclusive paradigm of career counseling which supplements the matching process with the further realities of complexity, non-linearity, emergence and phase shift, which confront the career decision-making process with the neglected challenges of chance, uncertainty and human limitations on knowledge and control.

Shiftwork and the Chaos Theory of Careers represent powerful new explanatory frameworks that locate and honour tried and true practices, embrace changes that enhance the delivery of our services and face up squarely to the exciting and exciting opportunities of twenty-first century career development.

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THEORY AND PRACTICE

This section is designed as a brief professional review of the article. It provides relevant study questions and answers for readers to test their knowledge of the article.

What do you understand by the notion of Shiftwork as defined in this article?
Answer: Shiftwork can be defined as all those activities in which career counsellors engage to assist their clients to develop the skills of adaptation and resilience required to negotiate and use productively the fluctuating fortunes of their careers. It includes assisting clients to reinvent themselves continually, to identify opportunities, to recover from setbacks, to find meaningful work that matters to them and to others and to capitalise on chance. Hence Shiftwork covers the major developmental tasks in 21st century career development.

What are the recommended 11 shifts in career counselling practice?
Answer:
Shift 1: From Prediction To Prediction And Pattern Making
Shift 2: From Plans To Plans And Planning
Shift 3: From Narrowing Down To Being Focused On Openness
Shift 4: From Control To Controlled Flexibility
Shift 5: From Risk As Failure To Risk As Endeavour
Shift 6: From Probabilities To Probable Possibilities
Shift 7: From Goals, Roles And Routines To Meaning, Mattering, And Black Swans
Shift 8: From Informing To Informing And Transforming
Shift 9: From Normative Thinking To Normative And Scalable Thinking
Shift 10: From Knowing In Advance To Living With Emergence
Shift 11: From Trust As Control To Trust As Faith

What do you know for sure you will be doing in five years time?
Answer: Who knows!
BOOK REVIEW

CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE
Vladimar B. Skorikov and Wendy Patton (Eds.) (2007)
The Netherlands: Sense Publishers. 360 pp US$49.00

This is a very welcome book to the precious field of career development in childhood and adolescence. It contains 18 chapters presented by a combination of 26 authors who are leading experts in the career development field in their respective eight countries.

The scene is set in the introductory group of chapters, which are written (either individually or in collaboration with other international experts), by leading Australian writers, Jim Anathansou, Wendy Patton and Mary McMahon. The high quality of these chapters really establishes an in-depth tone for the book.

The first part of the book focuses on both childhood and adolescence, the second part focuses on mainly adolescence and the third part focuses on specific contexts. Intersecting with these themes is a specific concentration on issues such as: assessment—in terms of both person/environment fit and constructivist theories, a life-span learning perspective, career interests and perceived competence, aspirations, work values, entrepreneurial interests, attitudes and behaviour, vocational identity, adolescents’ relationships, decision theory, decision-making and choice making processes, career maturity, adjustment, paid work, co-constructing careers with parents, adaptability, transitions and disadvantage. Each issue gets substantial airplay.

Like me, you might feel a little overwhelmed just by reading this list, let alone the chapters themselves. Each is extremely comprehensive as it reviews both the empirical and theoretical literature relevant and focuses on cutting edge thinking in that particular topic area.

A real strength of the book is the presentation of a repository of current research and thinking which could be used to back up, validate and confirm strategies, programs and activities you might have already have in place or would want to introduce in your own setting. For example, there is an overwhelming collection of evidence for undertaking a developmental approach to career education, such as in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development. Likewise, there is the validation of the strong link between career development and self-efficacy and the consequent implications of this.

The book reminds me that many of our fundamental building blocks in career development are steeped in theory and research which is not contemporary. Where is the next Super, Ginsberg, or Parsons coming from? Will one of these authors be standing up? Current research and review is consistently comprehensive but not revolutionary. Can we begin to address recent issues such as generational developments, economic influences, helicopter parents, outcome-based activity and quality assurance measures?

The book does alert us to issues like the dependence of much of the material on children and adolescents coming from research using adults; the need for more
longitudinal research; the current focus on descriptive rather than explanatory analysis; and the absence of an interconnectedness with fundamental theory and research on social, emotional, physical, cognitive and career development. A stronger summary of implications for practice and some attention to implications for policy would have been a delightful bonus.

The book does provide us with compelling evidence and it comprehensively addresses many of the issues we are dealing with in some way or another in our career worlds. This is extremely important in an environment where quick fixes, one shot interventions, reductionist and minimalist approaches that don’t meet requirements, and financial and personnel considerations rather than the needs of children and adolescents, are becoming the norm. I am confident this material will assist considerably in slowing and maybe even halting this slide. It is essential for any practitioner, manager or policy maker helping to provide much, much more than just a solid base for current practice.

Col McCowan
Cromach Careers
CAREERS FORUM

ON THE DEATH OF THE INFORMAL ORGANISATION: SOME COMMENTS FROM A MOURNER (WITH APOLOGIES TO MAYO, 1946 AND KRASNER, 1976)

GREGORY C. MURPHY & CHRISTOPHER PETERSON
La Trobe University

A mourner comments (in the form of a eulogy) on the perceived demise of the informal organisation:

Preamble: Within the fields of organisational psychology and organisational sociology the term ‘informal organisation’ has been used for over half a century to refer to the patterns of social relations that develop between organisational members and which are based on friendship groups or other common interests, beyond the work relationships based on positions as described in an enterprise’s formal organisational chart. The informal organisation facilitates access to information and other resources that may be beyond those available to an organisational member based on his or her formal position within the organisation.

The sad death of the ‘informal organisation’ (see Scott, 1961) is the occasion for a brief eulogy from a mourner.¹ To fully appreciate both the sadness and the social significance of this event, it is necessary to carefully, albeit briefly, examine the birth, life history and causes and consequences of the demise of that engaging construct, the ‘informal organisation’. Among the mourners are those realists who recognise that in its² coffin lie merely two English words, informal and organisation, brought to prominence by human-relations–oriented organisational behaviour researchers and theorists such as Mayo (1946) and Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939), and reified by both admirers and sceptics alike.

The date of its birth is still controversial, and much depends on the interpretation one gives to its life. Was it merely a useful post-hoc explanatory construct, or did it serve as a framework to guide research programs that systematically investigated variables associated with its development and impact on organisational concerns such as individual productivity, and employee morale?

Was its legitimisation based on narrow organisational structure theory or on broader principles of administrative science and/or social psychology? Was it really the illegitimate son of classical organisational theorists such as Weber and Taylor who emphasised the bureaucratic and rational aspects of organisational structure and function?

Some contend that it did have illustrious forebears and contemporary peers, formerly honourable terms such as the ‘Hawthorne effect’ and the ‘human relations movement’. Can its lineage be traced to the theories and applied research efforts of illustrious departed, real-life people such as Mayo, or more generally, Homans; or did it have its origins in basic human affiliation and socialisation needs as proposed by Murray and Maslow—needs which no longer will be regularly satisfied within work organisations?

Some day, the rumours, confusions, and paradoxes about its origin, essence and effects may be clarified. Indeed this must be done to fully comprehend what its existence represented in the history of organisational member. Such analysis must await the proper perspective that only the passage of time will give.

It is dead, but why did it die?

Rumours abound. Some say it was ‘done in’ by its own friends; others clearly attribute blame to the foul play of a multitude of enemies such as ‘economic rationalism’ or ‘managerialism’. Some mourners would
even say it had to die so that its brother terms such as ‘outsourcing’, ‘core business’, ‘downsizing’, ‘precarious employment’, ‘shareholder return on investment’, ‘non-core functions’ and ‘virtual organisation’ could live and grow. It had outlived its usefulness and was only dragging down the efficiency of Western business enterprises who were at a disadvantage in a globalised business world.

It is strongly argued by some that it was destroyed by its own success in life. This is not an unusual historical phenomenon for similar social movements. In fact, success may destroy a movement more quickly than failure. It might even be argued that its life did much to emphasise the notion that employee attitudes are important in influencing the behaviour of organisational members and must be part of the set of indices for evaluating the success of an organisation, as well as specifying criteria by which success could be properly measured. But a funeral is not the time for such broad philosophical musings.

It is ironic to note that others attribute its death not to success but to failure. They argue that, somehow, much of its apparently impressive data, when carefully reanalysed, fails to demonstrate effectiveness when compared with the effects of its rivals or even with ubiquitous chance.

Still others attribute its death to both success and failure—the failure being in its inability to communicate to both friend and foe what its life really meant. Its life, these mourners argue, represented a revolution in the way in which organisational behaviour could be conceptualised. Its insistence on the importance of satisfying personal relationships between organisational members opened the door to improved communication within the organisation and, consequently, to more effective organisations. Higher rates of organisational citizenship behaviour were displayed, which flowed through to such positive organisational outputs as improved individual productivity, reduced rates of separation of higher-performing staff and increased retention of those with better corporate memories and more industry-specific knowledge.

Many of its followers never fully understood its philosophy and were co-opted by its real enemy known by various aliases of which ‘work–life balance’ is currently the most popular. Some of the more bitter mourners go so far as to attribute its death to such factors as the rivalries, cults, exaggerated claims, and general malfeasance among job satisfaction researchers who, nominally, were among its followers (see, for example, Taylor and Weiss, 1972).

As solace to heartbroken mourners, it is clear that its death will not bring about a domino effect affecting the lives of other reified terms often confused with it, or of journals or organisations created to glorify it or publicise it. Most of its adherents had the foresight to avoid invoking its name in the title of any national organisation or journal.

The demise of the ‘informal organisation’ will free the growth of the usage of words and word combinations such as ‘management by walking around’, ‘effective teamwork’, ‘quality circles’, ‘enhanced management information systems’ and many others. Let a thousand brand names grow.

Ironically, its death should also help the growth and development of new ideas and the emergence of new behaviours on the part of its most avid disciples. The third law of nature has been recently promulgated to indicate that once a concept (or term) has become reified, then its very existence as a fixed entity impedes change and the development of new ideas and applications.

Finally, there is a small group of mourners who see nothing unusual in its death. It lived a short, eventful and happy life. It did what it had to do, and, having done it, passed on. It lived about as long as any slogan in these rapidly changing times. Honour its life they say, but do not overly mourn its passing.

But, of our dearly departed, the present mourner asks, ‘Can it honestly be said ‘Requiescat in pace’?’

NOTES
1 This paper is largely devoid of references, quotations and proper names. In a personal note of mourning, the usual signs of scholarship do not seem appropriate.
2 For exposition purposes, the neutral pronoun ‘it’ is used to refer to informal organisation.
3 The wording of this ‘law’ as presented by Krasner (1976) is: ‘reify concept, deify concept, pervert concept’.

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*Australian Journal of Career Development Volume 17, Number 3, Spring 2008*
Australian Journal of Career Development

The Australian Journal of Career Development is a refereed, professional journal focusing on current theory, practice and policy relating to the career and work education field. The journal provides a national forum for sharing, disseminating and debating current careers research, practice and policy.

The audience for the journal includes professionals in educational and academic settings, community and government agencies, business and industrial settings. Therefore, topics should be presented with implications for practice. Authors of research reports and theoretical discussions should relate their conclusions to the realm of practical applications.

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

General Principles
Material will be considered for submission if it meets one or more of the following criteria:
- it expands the body of knowledge;
- it informs in a manner that will develop people’s professional understanding or help in their understanding;
- it provides concrete assistance in professional practice;
- it raises philosophical questions related to the field of careers practice; or
- it opens a new frontier of knowledge and ideas related to professional practice.

Sections of the Journal

1 Case Studies
Case studies concerning innovative programs and individual work may be submitted. They should be both descriptive and analytical, providing the merits and shortcomings of the situation. Concise presentations are preferred.

2 Articles
Research articles are invited dealing with career development, planning, guidance and education, labour market and training issues, vocational education and training, occupational information, career management policy, practice and programs. Normally they should be a maximum of 4500 words.

3 Research Reports
Recently completed research relevant to careers practitioners is invited. This provides scope for shorter research reports and dissemination of findings and outcomes.

4 Practice Application Brief
This section comprises a review and summary of practical applications and techniques in the area of career development, guidance, placement or counselling services. It offers a concise, coherent and easy-to-read summary of a relevant topic for practitioners, or it raises philosophical questions related to the field of careers practice; or it opens a new frontier of knowledge and ideas related to professional practice.

5 Reviews
Books, reports, packages, computer programs or any other material relevant to career practitioners are reviewed in this section.

6 Careers Forum
This is the place in the journal for news, trends and comments on relevant issues to stimulate discussion and debate. Comments may relate to material in earlier editions of the Journal or to issues you are facing in your day-to-day work. Brief reports of relevant conferences, seminars and events may also be included.

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Article and Case Study submissions should be preceded by an abstract of 100–150 words. Tables should be typed on separate pages with approximate location indicated in the text. References are given at the end of the text and only references cited in the text should appear in the reference list. Spelling should conform to the Macquarie Dictionary and language should be gender inclusive. Authors should keep a copy, as manuscripts will not be returned.

More detailed information on style can be found in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th ed.).

Each article should be accompanied by: (a) a brief biographical note about the author(s) and a black-white high-resolution passport-sized photograph, saved as a JPG file. Upon acceptance authors will be asked to submit a short Theory and Practice section at the conclusion of the article, which will be boxed. This will contain around 3–5 questions and answers from the paper for practitioners and will highlight the professional practice implications of the paper.

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James A Athanasou, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Technology, Sydney, is the editor of the Australian Journal of Career Development (ACER).

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