Career Development Models for the 21st Century

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CAREER DEVELOPMENT MODELS
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

By Jon Schlesinger and Lauren Pasquarella Daley

A **Narrative Theory:** Narrative career theories are based around the concept of storytelling and making meaning from career stories.

B **Career Construction and Life-Design Theory:** A natural extension from the narrative theory, Career Construction also uses story, reflecting that people use stories to organize their lives, construct their identities, and make sense of their problems.

C **Planned Happenstance and Happenstance Learning Theory:** These are approaches that embrace the role of chance in career development.

D **Chaos Theory of Careers:** Chaos Theory of Careers is an approach to understanding career development describing both the content and the process of career development.

Time for a Change

Models of career development are important for practitioners, as they provide a roadmap and a framework for understanding the process of how careers are formed. Working with a model of career development helps us all better answer the question, "How do people come to select or acquire a career?" Working without a model is a bit like driving a car without using your GPS; you might end up where you want, but the GPS can provide better directions and multiple routes when unexpected roadblocks appear. Models of career development help us work more efficiently and better integrate services.

In the last several years, there have been increasing calls from the field to create more integrated ecosystems, communities, and focus on career networks within career centers (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). While we are reassessing the role of career services, we should also be examining the underlying career development models used to frame our conversations. Career development models have not always kept pace with actual careers or workers. The world of work and the demographics of workers has changed dramatically in the last several years. Millennials now make up the largest single share of the work force; in fact, "more than one-in-three American workers today are Millennials (adults ages 18 to 34 in 2015)" (Fry, 2014). This generation also includes the largest share of adults identifying as non-white (43 percent) (Fry, 2014). As we are becoming a more diversified, multiracial work force, we need career development theories that better account for people today and integrate diverse perspectives.

Career development theories for the 21st century need to be holistic, looking at career development and decision making for all individuals, and reflect the lifelong career development process. A holistic framework better aligns with today's emphasis on career communities, diverse students, and changing ways of working. Although there are other career development models that can address 21st century needs, here we outline four prominent models.

Four Models for Career Development

Narrative Theory

Narrative career theories are based around the concept of storytelling and making meaning from career stories.

From this perspective, "career" is seen as a story where students serve as active players, narrating the past, present, and future (Cochran, 1997). Narrative interventions revolve around making meaning from attending to, dissecting, and discussing the overall career story and all of the subsequent parts. These include, for example, the plot, the players/people involved, the settings/environments, the actions/experiences, the timeline/how and when events occurred, the instruments/one's abilities, values, or important detractors/helpers, and any wavering/changing paths (Cochran, 1997). In this model, when a career problem exists in a student's story, it often presents as indecision and is seen as positive, indicating that a student can explore and actively clarify where his or her story is going.

Cochran (1997) outlined a seven-step, episodic approach to address career concerns through a narrative lens that involves helping a student explore and make meaning in early episodes, take action in the middle episodes, and then crystallize/move forward with the story in later episodes.

In the early episodes of Cochran's (1997) approach, practitioners help to elaborate the career story, using assessments such as card sorts, interest inventories, collages, career genograms, autobiographies, or timelines. These help the student make meaning around the gap between where he or she is and wants to go, understand the role of his/her history in the career problem, and draw out where he/she wants the story to go into the future. This re-storying helps shape what actions to take to make the story a reality, trying out different roles or options, and crystallizing choices. Narrative theory facilitates practitioners in helping students try on multiple career roles and beliefs. All this is done to help the student move forward with career planning.

Many narrative interventions incorporate language from and use literary metaphors, which transcend cultures. Using narrative career theory in a career center works well for students in individual and group settings. Assessments and matching activities can play a role in narrative approaches, as they help students understand the influences, players, and plot. However, it is important to note that assessments are best used as conversation starters to help make meaning and re-story future narratives; other, more open-ended interventions assist with understanding where the story has come from to help move the narrative into the future.

While narrative approaches might seem to emphasize the past, they are focused on using a story to identify and understand the career problem. Shifting a focus to creating the future story allows the student to move into planning and take concrete actions. These active interventions include traditional activities such as taking internships, attending career events, and speaking with recruiters, all of which can be powerful tools for students trying on new roles. "Story" as a fundamental part of career learning has helped move theories that incorporate narratives into many practitioners' tool kits as an essential career development framework.

Career Construction and Life-Design Theory

A natural extension from the narrative theory, Career Construction also uses story, reflecting that "people use stories to organize their lives, construct their identities, and make sense of their problems" (Savickas, 2015, p. 9). Career Construction theory, advanced by Savickas (2005), approaches career
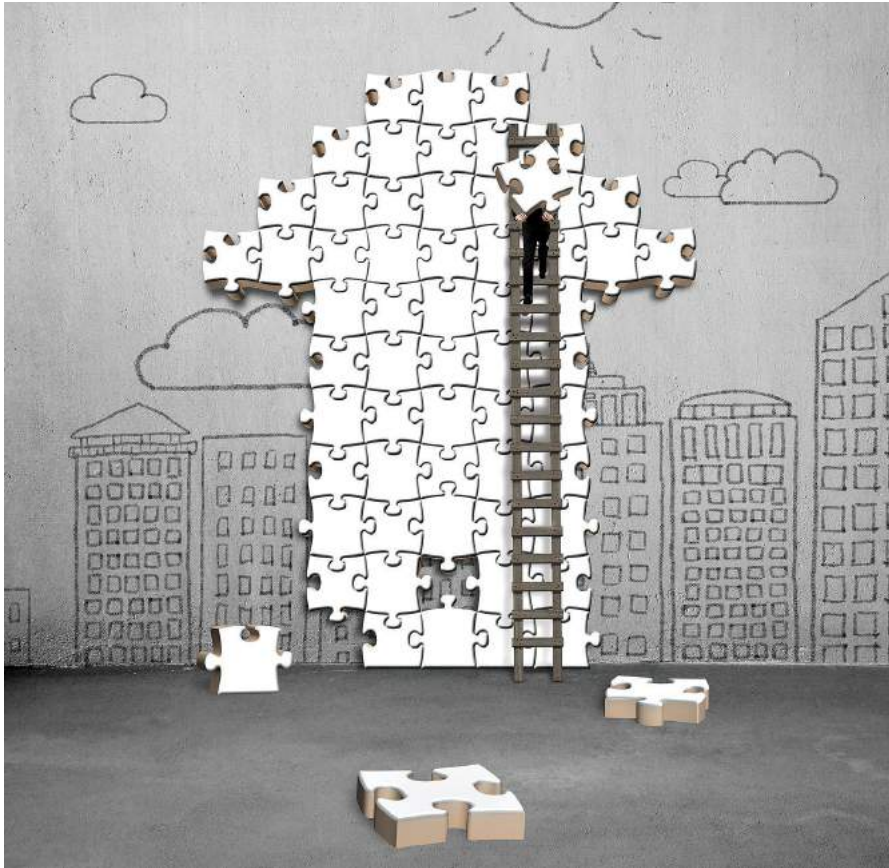
development by exploring the subjective patterns and meanings individuals create around work through story.

Building on established career development theories, Career Construction augments them to examine career development and decision making focused on the individual perspective. The three main elements of Career Construction theory are vocational personality, career adaptability, and life theme (Savickas, 2005).

Building on traditional career theories, Career Construction's vocational personality examines individuals' abilities, needs, values, and interests; in this sense, it resembles the RIASEC hexagon, but Career Construction also recognizes that this typology is socially constructed, with no reality outside the instrument (Savickas, 2005). Interests are recognized as dynamic—changing and shifting naturally—and rehearsed in a range of activities over time. As important as interests are, career adaptability explores how careers are developed by

IMPLEMENTING A NEW CAREER DEVELOPMENT THEORY: A CASE STUDY

While there is not just one right way to implement a new career development theory, we offer one example that demonstrates how a new theory (in this case, CTC) was implemented into a college career center.

In selecting the theory, we first spent time reflecting on how the theory might work with our population. We asked:

- How will this theory influence student learning outcomes and measures of success?
- What services or offerings would change?
- What services would more easily integrate into the new model, and which ones might prove more difficult?
- How can the theory be integrated into workshops, resources, events, and materials?
- What professional development activities will help staff support this theory?
- How would this theory impact other units in the career center?

Next, after selecting the theory, we established new student learning outcomes (SLOs) and measures of success. This, in turn, made it easier to review, create, and adapt services. In determining specific SLOs, we moved away from "made a career decision" as the successful outcome for individual services to "gained comfort with the uncertainty in the career process." As a result, this changed the foundation of student-focused activities to emphasize creating opportunities for chance events, taking action, and reframing the idea that career paths may inevitably shift as positive events.

Another piece of the implementation process was gaining buy-in from stakeholders external to the career center, including parents, faculty, administrators, recruiters, and advisers. This required a common language. Instead of discussing *chance, happenstance,* or *chaos,* we discussed the need for students to "create flexible plans" and "take action to put themselves in the path of opportunity." Demonstrating the applicability of the theory for today's students and employers also helped create buy-in campus-wide, and trainings and campus meetings designed to educate stakeholders helped to extend the common language across campus. In discussions with stakeholders, to illustrate the theory, we helped them

individuals through the stories they tell about how they are adapting and integrating their self-knowledge with their environment (Savickas, 2005). Adaptive individuals exhibit *concern* about their future as workers, increasing the *control* they have over their future, are *curious* about their future selves, and gain the *confidence* to pursue their aspirations (Savickas, 2005).

What makes Career Construction powerful in exploring both vocational personality and career adaptability together comes through examining an individual's life theme. The life theme is the story about why individuals make their choices and decisions; it is a story of the integration into a holistic self-constructed concept: "Career stories explain why individuals make the choices that they do and the private meaning that guides these choices" (Savickas, 2005). The Career Construction framework brings a narrative, holistic, and self-constructed emphasis to career development.

Building upon the work of Career Construction, Savickas and colleagues developed life-design counseling specifically to address 21st century needs of career development (Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, Van Esbroeck, van Vianen, 2009). Savickas (2015) makes the distinction that life design is not a theory or a model, but a discourse to describe how practitioners can use Career Construction theory. In laying out a manual, Savickas, et. al (2009) described the necessity for a new paradigm requiring shifts in thinking for practitioners. The most important shifts include the focus on the process of career not being a prescription, the individuals' subjective experiences, and the non-linear reality of work and individuals' experiences (Savickas, et. al, 2009). The process of life design reflects existing learning cycles, focusing on *constructing* narratives, *deconstructing* limited and false beliefs, *reconstructing* new narratives, and *co-constructing* a plan of action.

This concrete process and the Career Construction Interview (Savickas, 2015) moves Career Construction and life design from theory to practice with very tangible exercises.

Planned Happenstance and Happenstance Learning Theory

Planned Happenstance (Mitchell, Levin, and Krumboltz, 1999) and Happenstance Learning Theory (Krumboltz, 2009) are approaches that embrace the role of chance in career development. Both theories are evolutions of Social Learning Theory (Krumboltz, Mitchell, & Jones, 1976), in which career choice is based on genetic and environmental factors, combined with learning experiences around them. In other words, happenstance describes how individuals learn about careers and develop career interests through planned and unplanned events. (Note: Many of the traditional career development models sought to eliminate unplanned or chance events by focusing on a few narrow factors. The elimination of chance events in our lives is not possible in any practical sense, and attempting to do so would be to cut oneself off from all interaction.)

Moving social learning experiences forward, Krumboltz (2009) emphasizes four important propositions. The first is perhaps the most important: The goal in career work is to help students learn to take action, as opposed to make a singular decision (Krumboltz, 2009). Instead of teaching students to reduce chance, *Planned Happenstance* teaches them to embrace unplanned events as desirable and necessary. Helping students create and capitalize on this unpredictability is vital for today's careers—they need to learn how to make decisions and take action throughout their careers. The second proposition highlights that exploring values, interests, personality, and skills is helpful to understand choices, but should not be used to match individuals to specific careers (Krumboltz, 2009). Instead, students must push their exploration into action

understand how *complexity, chance,* and *change* impacted their own lives.

As we began to implement CTC, we recognized college students, in particular, needed a framework for understanding and interpreting their own career development through this new lens. Students and stakeholders were familiar with a traditional four-year plan; however, that rigid linear frame no longer fit from a CTC perspective. As a result, we developed a new framework and model for applying CTC in a college career center. The model, which we refer to as "EPSA" for simplicity, features four phases: 1) explore majors and careers, 2) prepare for an internship and job search, 3) start an internship and job search, and 4) adapt to a changing world (Schlesinger & Daley, 2016). To illustrate the nonlinear nature of the phases, the lack of true start and end points, and the continual movement students will undertake throughout their career development, we use a Mobius strip with the phases noted on it.

By not constraining the phases in traditional linear steps and keeping the model flexible, adaptable, and open to change, we were able to lessen students' career anxiety and meet the needs of our stakeholders. For example, using this model, we embraced students interacting with the career center at any point of their development. The EPSA framework allowed students to understand that their career planning is a process with no beginning or end, and that they are never too late to take steps forward at any point, knowing they can adapt their path if new opportunities arise. As a result of our planning, we were able to incorporate the framework into our services and resources, creating an integrated program with a 21st century career development model.

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by engaging in activities that help them recognize and capitalize on unplanned events. That is what is meant by Planned Happenstance—the idea that one is planning actions and open to recognizing opportunities, which occur in an unpredictable way, so one can benefit from them in a meaningful way throughout the career.

Happenstance Learning Theory frames five components for practitioners to put the theory into action, and offers a number of helpful questions to prompt student discussions (Krumboltz, 2009). Career centers and practitioners can find a number of ways to use happenstance as a career development model. As Dey and Cruzvergara (2014) noted, networks and communities, in addition to traditional career center activities—including networking, career events, and informational interviews—can support happenstance. For students, the ideas of chance and taking action to create career progress can be challenging and exciting. Often, students accept this idea only after discussing their experiences or after a new career success from a seemingly unplanned event.

Chaos Theory of Careers

Chaos Theory of Careers (CTC) is an approach to understanding career development describing both the content and the process of career development.

CTC has its roots in general systems theories arising out of math and science, linking career development to the functioning of the natural world (Pryor & Bright, 2014). Since 2003, Pryor and Bright have been extending and refining CTC through theory, research, and practice with high school and college students (Pryor & Bright, 2014).

CTC understands career development as a complex dynamical system characterized by complexity, interconnectedness, and susceptibility to change (Pryor & Bright, 2011). The complex dynamical system is a key element in the understanding of CTC; it accurately describes how individual systems produce large changes from seemingly small interactions (Pryor & Bright, 2011). The complex dynamical system in career development moves CTC toward a 21st century understanding of career. Career is framed at the outset as a system with multiple influences
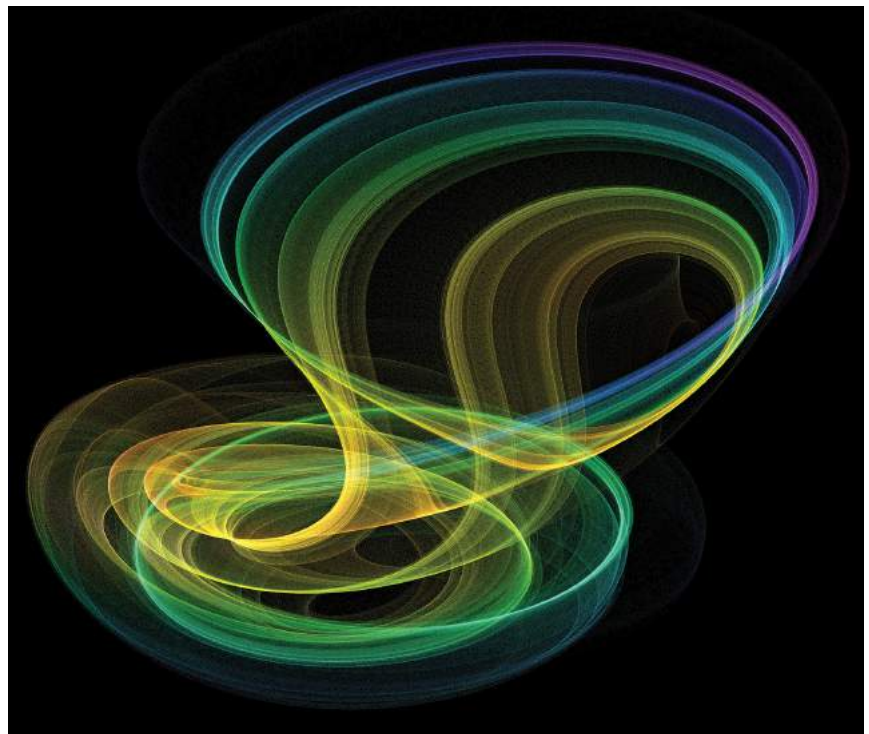
where change is continual. From this perspective, CTC provides a holistic model and creates a framework to help individuals understand and process their own career development.

The mathematical origin of chaos theory provides language to describe systems and their interplay with career development. Attractors define in psychological and career terms how individuals interact with systems and become bounded in patterns of feedback (Pryor & Bright, 2011). One attractor stands out as the best representation of reality and career development: the strange attractor, which describes an open system representing unpredictable events and individuals' reactions to them (Pryor & Bright, 2011). The motion of the strange attractor is complex, but not in exactly the same way each time so that it becomes sensitive to small changes and new emerging patterns (Pryor & Bright, 2014). The strange attractor is an important illustration of how logical, rational planning meets creativity and imagination in career development. In exploring the strange attractor in action, we see both complexity and patterns that are similar, but not exact repeats. Understanding past patterns of behavior is informative, but limiting in terms of long-term prediction. CTC emphasizes the limitations of prediction when it comes to career, and focuses on the patterns and themes in career development.

Providing a foundation for understanding CTC in action, Pryor & Bright (2011) discuss three C's— *complexity, chance,* and *change*—as overlapping elements that describe the situational factors, unplanned events, and continual changes in career development. For many practitioners, the three C's help move CTC from theory into practice. *Complexity* describes all the situational factors that will influence and alter an individual's career plans. Rather than focusing exclusively on values, interests, personality, and skills, CTC recognizes the vast number of

contextual influences at play in career development and decision making. As illustrated with happenstance, *chance* is an important aspect in any career development model. Embracing chance and actively seeking out new opportunities enables more open systems thinking. *Change* is one of the characteristics that makes CTC unique and purely modern; change is fundamental to careers, as interests, values, and any number of other factors will change over time. With CTC as a guide, practitioners work to help students become comfortable with change, better understand and explore how patterns of interest develop, and learn how to create new opportunities.

Choose One Model and Move Forward

Narrative, Career Construction, Happenstance Learning Theory, and Chaos Theory of Careers are a few theories that, to our thinking, better reflect the

current state of career development.

The models discussed here have a number of similarities. All move away from objective test-and-tell methods to focus on individual experiences. In addition, they are student-centric, allowing for much greater diversity of student experiences and backgrounds. These approaches also better reflect student preferences for individualized services.

While students benefit from individualized services, individualized or siloed career centers do not benefit anyone. Career centers should have an appropriate career development model so that all parts of the organization—mission, vision, learning outcomes, strategic planning, stakeholder relations, marketing, career and educational events, and so forth—can be aligned.

One theoretically aligned plan is more powerful at advancing the brand of career services and educating students. Choose one, and move forward. ↵

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