

Second Edition



Career development
understandings
informing **myfuture**

Career

More than just a job



myfuture.edu.au

Mary McMahon

Peter Tatham

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To request copies of this publication or for
further information contact:

education.au limited

182 Fullarton Road
Dulwich SA 5065
Australia

p: + 61 8 8334 3210

f: + 61 8 8334 3211

e: inform@educationau.edu.au

w: educationau.edu.au

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About this Publication

In March 2000 the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs resolved to fund the development of an online National Career Information System (NCIS) to provide a single comprehensive and effective internet based career exploration service for all Australians. This NCIS, **myfuture**, has now been operating since 2002 and is the most important career information site in Australia, with a very broad audience. To assist in the design and development of this service the original edition of this publication was commissioned by the NCIS Steering Committee to provide a theoretical understanding of the current philosophies underpinning career development.

A strength of **myfuture** is its recognition of the complex, holistic nature of career development. In its next stage of development, **myfuture** faces the further challenge of informing an Australian population that is the most casualised labour market across all OECD countries, and is in a demographic transition both in terms of a decline in the growth of the labour market, an ageing workforce, increasing diversity and a shift in where the population is living.

In addition, the competition to provide career information is greater. New products are available that offer opportunities for interactivity. These range from online interactive sites such as myspace, second-life, facebook, and youtube to significant commercial job sites that offer career information of varying standards. At this stage none can compete with the accuracy of the data provided by **myfuture**, and none have the support of all education and training ministries. Indeed, **myfuture's**

ongoing commitment to accurate, up to date and reliable data will hold it in good stead as it adapts to new technology.

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Authors

Mary McMahon is a senior lecturer in the School of Education at The University of Queensland where she teaches in the guidance and counselling specialisation of the Master of Educational Studies program. Mary researches, writes and publishes in the field of career development.

Peter Tatham is Head of the University of Tasmania Career Development and Employment Service. He is a former President of the Career Industry Council of Australia, a fellow of the Career Development Association of Australia (CDAA) and a current member of the Australian Government's National Youth and Career Transitions Advisory Group and the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs Advisory Group on Career Development and Employment. He has represented Australia at three international symposia on Career Development and Public Policy.

Introduction

Career development services are a multi-faceted range of activities provided in diverse settings that assist individuals with their career decisions and to manage their life, learning and work (Canadian Career Development Foundation, 2002, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2004b). Originating in the early 1900s, career development work was largely viewed as an objective process whereby individuals could be matched to jobs. Essentially career decision-making was viewed almost as an equation whereby matching knowledge about self with knowledge about the world of work resulted in sound career choice. This matching approach, commonly known as the trait and factor approach, has remained dominant in career development work while at the same time being criticised for its over-simplification of career decision-making.

In recent years, significant challenges have been directed at the provision of career development services and the manner in which career development is conducted. These challenges have arisen from rapid and well documented changes in the world of work, more complex understanding about the nature of career development, new conceptualisations about the conduct of career development work with individuals, greater diversity of users accessing career development services, and increased acceptance of individuals being lifelong learners. In this complex world, it is predicted that individuals may access career development services several times, as they make repeated transitions between learning and work across the lifespan (e.g., Jarvis, 2003).

Individuals are being urged to become managers of their own careers (Savickas, 2000) and to regard themselves as being self-employed (Collin & Watts, 1996). Corresponding with these changes has been recognition of the need for individuals to have lifelong access to career development services and the role of national governments in facilitating its provision (OECD, 2004a, b; Watts, 2000). To this end, Australia has invested heavily in the development and provision of a multifaceted national system of career development services, of which the national career information and exploration service, **myfuture**, is an integral part.

This investment has been largely guided by the recommendations of an international review of career guidance and public policy conducted by the OECD in 2002 in which Australia participated (OECD, 2004b). A broader range of career development services is now in place and well utilised. Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners (Career Industry Council of Australia, CICA, 2006) are being implemented and the quality of service delivery is becoming more accountable. Guiding Principles for Career Development Services and Career Information Products have also been developed (CICA, 2007). Significantly, career development is now widely viewed as providing benefit not only to individuals but also to society and the achievement of social and economic policies (OECD, 2004b; Watts, 2000).

It is against this complex and dynamic background that **myfuture** provides its service to the community and that the revision of this document was commissioned by **education.au limited**,

a national ICT agency funded by all Australian governments and established to develop and manage online educational services and products. This revision attests to an ongoing commitment by **education.au limited** to ensure that **myfuture** remains consistent with current thinking about career development and the world of work. The widespread use of the original document since its first publication affirms the original decision to develop a document that describes the theoretical underpinnings of the National Career Information System.

This paper will present a brief overview of the theoretical background influencing career development work. In particular, shifts related to the areas of career and career development, career theory, the changing world of work, learning across the lifespan, career decision-making, career management, career development with individuals, career development and social justice, the provision of information in career development, the place of career guidance in the broader community, and career development and public policy will be outlined. Each of these areas will be discussed and for each, a set of key understandings will be presented.

Key Understandings about Career and Career Development

- > Career has increasingly broadened from a term that is synonymous with occupation or job, to one that represents the configuration of all facets and roles of an individual's life
- > All individuals have a career
- > Paid employment is one element of career
- > Career development is a lifelong process
- > Career development is a unique process for each individual
- > Career development is subject to a range of influences
- > Individuals have an active role to play in the construction of their careers.

The term career is variously understood. In many instances, the terms career, vocation and occupation are used synonymously as they have been since the time of Parsons (1909). Such a narrow view of career is problematic in that it is aligned only with paid employment. Thus, certain types of work have traditionally been valued more than others, for example, paid work is valued over unpaid work such as work in the home, voluntary work and care giving (Blustein, 2006). A follow-on from this is the assumption that only those in the paid workforce have careers. In addition, the term has been criticised as having a middle class bias in relation to its application to professional employment more than other forms of paid employment such as trades and unskilled work (Richardson, 1993, 1996, 2000).

Problems with such a narrow understanding of career have been recognised for many years, and writers began to expand the concept of career by including recognition of pre-occupational, occupational, and post-occupational roles (e.g., Super, 1980). Thus, there has been acknowledgment that individuals of all ages have careers. A reflection of the broadened understanding of career is to be found in Miller-Tiedeman's (1988) concept of "lifecareer" which reflects the integration of all aspects of an individual's life including, where applicable, paid employment.

For some time the subjective component of career has been acknowledged and represents a significant advance in thinking away from its objective origins. Career is now viewed as a creation or construction of an individual (Collin & Watts, 1996; Savickas, 2005) and many permutations



and combinations of life experiences, learning and work are possible in the construction of a career. Thus, careers are unique and individuals are now regarded as having an active role to play in their own career development (Savickas, 2005).

Reflecting this more recent thinking about career is a Canadian definition listed in the agreed terminology of the Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners. It describes a career as:

A lifestyle concept that involves the sequence of work, learning and leisure activities in which one engages throughout a lifetime. Careers are unique to each person and are dynamic... Careers include how persons balance their paid and unpaid work and personal life roles.

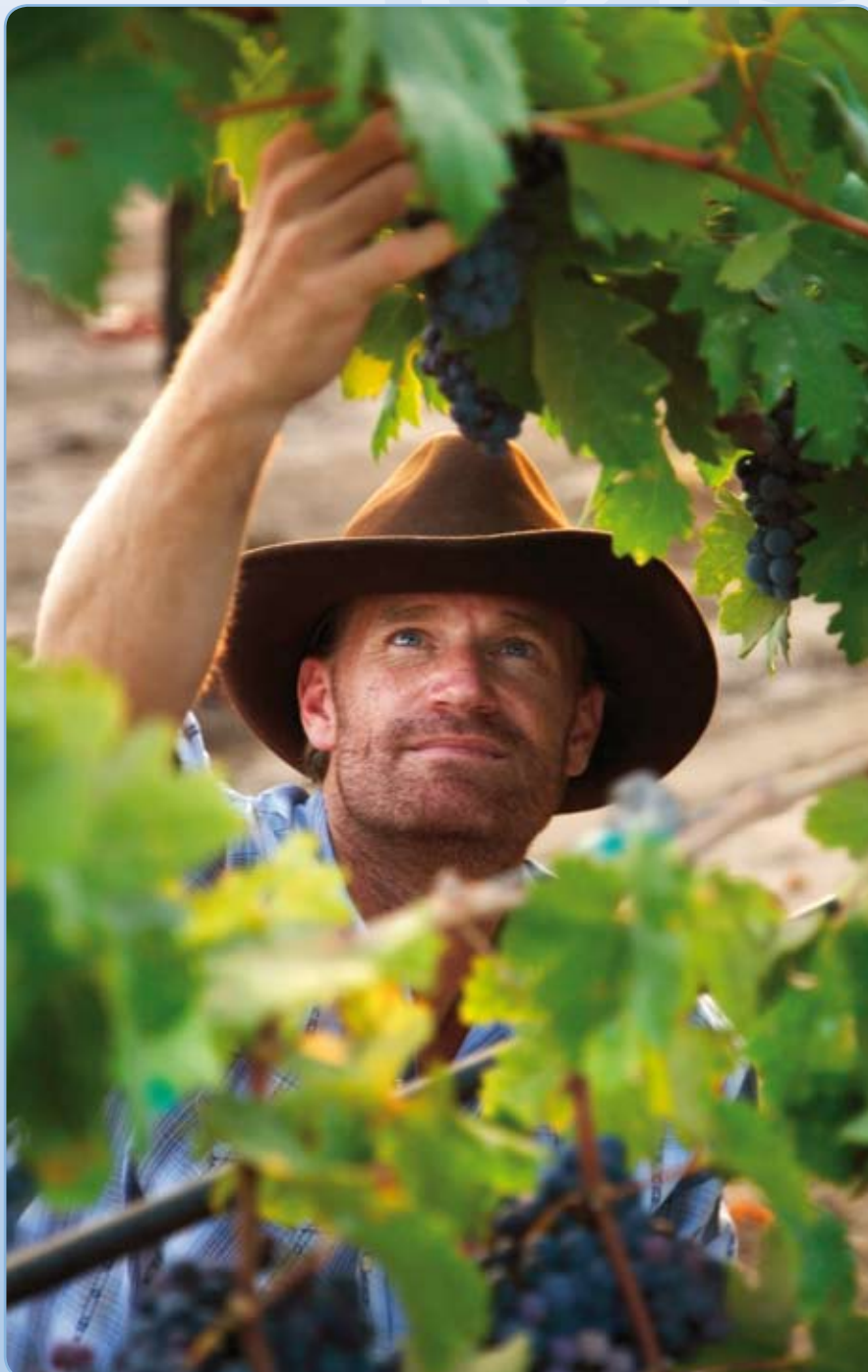
([Canadian] National Steering Committee for Career Development Guidelines and Standards, 2004).

Corresponding with changes in thinking about career, have been changes in thinking about career development. While the concept of career development is not new (e.g., Ginsberg, Ginzburg, Axelrad, & Herma, 1951), recognition that it is a lifelong process involving the whole of life and not just occupation occurred more recently (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006; Super, 1980). Career development is now considered in the context of a broad range of influences such as family, culture, community, school, socio-economic circumstances, geographic location, social policy and the labour market (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006; Super). Consequently, to engage in career decision-making without giving due consideration to life as a whole and its multiplicity of influences is over-simplistic.

The Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners has adopted a Canadian definition that describes career development as:

The lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure and transitions in order to move towards a personally determined and evolving future.

([Canadian] National Steering Committee for Career Development Guidelines and Standards, 2004).



Key Understandings about Career Theory

- > No single theory is adequate to explain the complexity that is career development
- > Traditional theories are being refined, and new theories are emerging
- > All theories contribute to our understanding of career development
- > Increasing emphasis has been placed on the process of career development, holism, connectedness, meaning-making and the active agency of individuals in the construction of their careers
- > The career development of an individual cannot be understood independently of its context
- > The subjectivity of career development related to personal meaning and life themes is becoming more widely accepted
- > There is a need to develop inclusive models of theory and practice that are context sensitive.

Career development may be explained by a number of theories, none of which on its own is adequate to explain the complexity of the field. In essence, career theories may be categorised according to their predominant focus, for example the content of career development, the process of career development or the content and process of career development. A review of theory necessarily involves a brief examination of these broad categories of theory.

Theories of content, derived from the trait and factor tradition, have played a useful role in elaborating influences on career development. For example, influences such as abilities, personality, interests, and values have received much attention. However, some content influences such as socio-economic status and geographic location have received little attention. Essentially, the trait and factor approach asserts that occupational choice can be made through a logical, objective and rational process of matching self-knowledge with occupational knowledge. One of the lasting legacies of the theories of content is the plethora of career assessment instruments that have been developed around particular influences such as personality. Thus the trait and factor approach has been described as a “test and tell” approach (Crites, 1981, p. 49), and is typified in the work of Holland (1973, 1997) who has been one of the most dominant theorists in the career field. Holland’s focus on vocational type and his career assessment instrument, the Self-Directed Search (SDS; 1985), have been influential in Australian career development work. In essence, the SDS provides individuals with a tool by which they can assess their vocational personality and match it with particular occupations.

Theories of process have in general been described as developmental theories. The work of Super (1980, 1990, 1992), also one of the dominant theorists in the field, is particularly noteworthy. As mentioned previously, Super was the first to acknowledge that career development does not conclude in early adulthood but rather continues throughout the lifespan of an individual. Central to the work of Super is the concept of self. His concept of self as a product of the interaction between an individual and his/her environment represents the first of two process concepts proposed by Super. The second, development or change over time, was conceptualised by Super as a series of stages through which individuals pass. Refinements of his theory proposed that individuals may recycle through stages more than once and assisted his theory to maintain relevance in a significantly changed world of work. More recently, Savickas (2002, 2005) has updated and advanced Super’s work in his theory of career construction. Savickas suggests that individuals construct their careers



through the meaning they impose on their experiences. The three key elements of Savickas's theory, vocational personality, career adaptability and life themes are reflective of the tenets of constructivism and social construction.

While Super is acknowledged as a developmental theorist, his theory could also be viewed as a theory of content and process as his archway model of career development identified a range of personal and situational determinants that influence career development (Super, 1990). Other examples of theories which attend to both theory and process include the social learning theory of career decision-making (Krumboltz, 1996; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1990) the developmental-contextual career theory (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986), and the more recent Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2002). These theories focus on the process of interaction between content variables. For example, Krumboltz (1996) proposed that individuals learn about themselves, their preferences and the world of work through direct and indirect learning experiences which they then synthesise and use to guide their career decisions and actions. Of particular importance in the work of Krumboltz is the emphasis he places on learning in the career development process. Although Super also discussed the place of learning in his theory, Krumboltz gave it more prominence in the career development process. SCCT (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2002) is particularly noteworthy, as it has amassed an extensive body of research in a comparatively short time span. It views individuals as active shapers of their lives within the constraints of personal and environmental factors. Learning features in

each of these theories and the concept of lifelong learning has become an important theme in current thinking about career and career development (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006; Watts & Van Esbroeck, 1998).

Career theory has been criticised for paying little attention to the career development of "groups other than white, western, able bodied, middle-class males" (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). Thus the career development of some groups such as women, people with disabilities, and racial and ethnic groups, has to date, not been adequately addressed. While some theories have been proffered to account for the career development of these groups (e.g., Arbona, 1990; Astin, 1984; Cook, Heppner & O'Brien, 2002), the development of a more inclusive theory base remains a challenge. Further, the applicability of predominantly American theories to other countries and cultures has been questioned and the challenge of developing new theories and practice relevant to particular contexts has been considered (e.g., Nicholas, Naidoo, & Pretorius, 2006; Watson & Stead, 2002). More recently, Australian career theorists (e.g., Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006; Pryor & Bright, 2003b) have advanced approaches that are more inclusive of diverse client groups from diverse cultures and contexts. Challenges related to inclusivity will be discussed further in the section on social justice.

The diversity of theories proposed to account for career development has received much attention, and the convergence or integration of theories and the need for a conceptual tool for bridging theories or an overarching framework of career development has



been debated (Savickas & Lent, 1994). A trend that has become widely accepted is for career development theories to become more holistic in nature. Central to this trend in career theory has been the constructivist worldview with its focus on holism, connectedness, and the active role of individuals in the construction of their careers. Thus the career development of individuals may only be understood in relation to their environments. The constructivist worldview is illustrated in the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) of career development, an Australian meta-theoretical framework which attempts to address the criticisms of career theory and suggests a way of unifying theory and practice through a focus on individuals and their system of influences. This framework illustrates knowledge acquisition as a qualitative rather than a quantitative process. Information is incorporated into an individual's existing frameworks of experience and knowledge in a relational and associative way through which new meaning and new knowledge is created. Other examples of recent theories emphasising holism, connectedness and the active role of individuals include the chaos theory of Pryor and Bright (2003a, b; Bright & Pryor, 2005) and the ecological model of Cook, Heppner and O'Brien (2002).

Key Understandings about the Changing World of Work

- > The world of work is dynamic and change is constant
- > Many permutations and combinations of paid employment exist
- > New work opportunities will evolve from new combinations of multi-disciplinary skills, knowledge, understandings and technologies
- > Individuals have responsibility for their own employability and career development
- > Individuals are expected to construct and manage their careers
- > Change brings with it associated stresses for individuals
- > Lifelong learning enables individuals to adapt to the rapidly changing society and to remain employable
- > Lifelong learning is an intrinsic part of the career development process.

In the context of globalisation, advances in technology, and a move to a knowledge economy, the world of work is in continuous and unrelenting change. New businesses, industries and jobs are emerging involving tasks, services and products that may not have existed previously.

In this world of work, individuals may experience a succession of jobs in a lifetime (Jarvis, 2003). The relationship between organisations and workers is also changing from one based on tenure and mutual loyalty to one based on economically driven short-term contracts (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Indeed, Australia has one of the most casualised labour markets in the developed world and this may impact on skill formation of workers and their conditions of employment (Nelson & Tonks, 2007). Paid employment may take many forms, for example short-term contracts, casual work, portfolio careers, or job-sharing. In addition, it is likely that individuals' careers will feature periods of underemployment and unemployment. Employability rather than employment is a key to success in this world of work (Watts, 2005) and an increasing number of individuals will be self-employed. In essence, employability is the capacity of individuals to possess the skills, knowledge and attitudes to engage and reengage in employment. Continuing to learn across the lifespan in formal and informal ways is crucial to the maintenance of such capacity.

The challenge then for individuals is how to manage their career development in order to remain employable. All Australians need to have a very clear understanding of the skills they have, their value, potential clients of their skills and how



they might be applied to particular issues and problems. In addition, they need to position themselves as lifelong learners.

Meeting the challenges of career management in this complex world of work will be enhanced if individuals have awareness of career management competencies. Eleven such competencies are described in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (ABCD) (Miles Morgan Australia, 2003). Awareness of the core employability skills (DEST, 2002) is also required. In addition, it has been suggested that resilience is a core survival skill of the future (Walz & Feller, 1996). Resilience, described as “the capacity to adapt to a changing situation while maintaining and nurturing one’s core self” (Miller, 1996, p.402), will clearly be enhanced if individuals position themselves as lifelong learners. Indeed, it has been suggested that careers in the 21st century will require “learning a living” (Mirvis & Hall, 1996, p.80) rather than simply earning a living; continuing to learn is essential to career management and employability.

Key Understandings about Learning across the Lifespan

- > Individuals need to know how to learn and take responsibility for their learning across their lifespan
- > Learning may be formal or informal and occurs in many settings
- > Learning is an holistic and continuous process that is grounded in experience
- > Lifelong learning is essential to successful career management.

Consideration needs to be given to the nature of learning. Learning occurs within individuals in an holistic process involving thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving that results in the creation of knowledge and meaning through the medium of language (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). Thus knowledge cannot be taught; rather its creation is a transformative process. Individuals are active participants in their learning and create new knowledge by constructing meaning and connecting new information or experience with their past experience, previous learning, and ongoing interaction in the world. Increasingly, individuals' capacity to engage and re-engage in learning across the lifespan is viewed as pivotal to successful career management (Commission of the European Communities, 2000).

Lifelong learning is now closely associated with career development. Lifelong learning enables individuals to acquire the skills and knowledge to remain employable in the rapidly changing world of work, and this in turn produces a flexible and adaptable workforce. Watts (2005) suggests that career development services are essential to the achievement of lifelong learning policies. Learning has traditionally been considered in terms of formal learning in settings such as schools, colleges, and universities. Further, the focus of learning has traditionally been on youth whereas lifelong learning implies that people of all ages engage in learning. There is now increased recognition that learning may occur formally and informally and in a range of settings and include service and citizenship-related activities. In this regard, Australia has witnessed the growth and importance of the adult and community education sector. Work-



based learning connects learning and experience in the workplace in formal and informal programs that enable individuals to develop understanding of the changing nature of the workplace, changing patterns of employment and to acquire and demonstrate employability skills (Miles Morgan Australia, 2003). In relation to lifelong learning, career development practitioners have responsibilities in two areas. Firstly, they have a responsibility to prepare clients to monitor and review their learning needs and to engage in appropriate learning. Secondly, they need to engage in learning experiences such as continuing professional development across their professional lifespans.

Key Understandings about Career Decision-Making

- > Career decision-making is subject to a range of influences
- > Career decision-making is not solely a rational and objective process, but rather one that touches the subjective and affective domains of the individual.

Throughout the history of career development, learning has been closely related to career decision-making. This is reflected in the “first conceptual framework for career decision making” (Brown, 2002, p.4) where learning about self and learning about the world of work are fundamental to career decision-making based on “true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts” (Parsons, 1909, p.5). While “true reasoning” is never fully explained, it implies rational, cognitive, analytical processes. The link between learning and career decision-making was also reflected in the seminal work of Law and

Watts (1977) in their DOTS model. First developed for schools, this model centres on learning about self, learning about opportunities (the world of work), learning about decision-making, and learning about transitions (implementing decisions).

More recently, the traditional portrayal of “autonomous and rational decision-making ... as the sole method for choosing” (Savickas, 2000, p.62) has been challenged. Firstly, it has been criticised for not taking into account the context in which the decision is being made and the many and varied influences that come to bear on the career decisions of individuals (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). Secondly, portraying career decision-making as a cognitive rational process does not take into account the emotional and subjective experiences of individuals involved in career decisions. For example, Phillips (1997) emphasised the need to investigate the role of intuition and ‘other-than-rational’ methods in career decision-making, and the role of chance in people’s careers has been discussed (e.g., Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999; Bright, Pryor & Harpham, 2005). Increasingly, the adequacy of the traditional linear three-step model of career decision-making has been questioned (e. g., Bright, Pryor & Harpham, 2005; Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999; Savickas, 2000), and the complexity of career decision-making acknowledged.



Key Understandings about Career Management

- > Individuals are expected to manage their own careers
- > Career management involves a set of non-occupational attitudes, skills and knowledge
- > Individuals may be assisted to develop the skills, knowledge and competencies necessary to successfully manage their careers.

In the complex and rapidly changing world of work, individuals are expected to transition between learning and work several times in their lifetime. In the context of globalisation and technological advancement, responsibility for career development has been increasingly divested from organisations to individuals. Thus, career management has become an important task for individuals as they navigate their way in the community and the new world of work. In this regard, McMahon, Patton and Tatham (2003) suggested that individuals require a set of “meta-competencies” related to learning, life management and communication that are transferable across all facets of life.

The Australian Blueprint for Career Development (ABCD) (Miles Morgan Australia, 2003) identifies 11 career management competencies under three headings – personal management, learning and work exploration, and career building. The 11 competencies that make up the ABCD are:

Area A: Personal Management

1. Build and maintain a positive self-image
2. Interact positively and effectively with others
3. Change and grow throughout life

Area B: Learning and Work Exploration

4. Participate in life-long learning supportive of career goals
5. Locate and effectively use career information
6. Understand the relationship between work, society and the economy

Area C: Career Building

7. Secure/create and maintain work
8. Make career enhancing decisions
9. Maintain balanced life and work roles
10. Understand the changing nature of life and work roles
11. Understand, engage in and manage the career-building process.

These competencies are reflective of the long-standing conceptual framework of knowledge about self, knowledge about the world of work and decision-making. Clearly, individuals are now expected to develop these and other related competencies in order to be active and effective managers of their careers. Importantly, the attainment of career management skills and competencies may be assisted through career development services such as career counselling, career programs or career education.



Key Understandings about Career Development with Individuals

- > Individuals may be assisted in their career development through interaction with career development practitioners
- > Learning is fundamental to career development work
- > The role of individuals in career development work is increasingly changing from that of passive recipient to that of active participant
- > The role of career development practitioners has increasingly shifted from that of expert to that of learning facilitator
- > The goal of career development work is to assist individuals develop the skills and knowledge to effectively manage their careers.

Career development with individuals, traditionally termed career guidance, may be viewed as an integral part of the lifelong learning and career management processes in which they are already engaged. As individuals move through life, they attempt to derive meaning from new information and experiences with which they constantly engage. For example, awareness of new opportunities, dissatisfaction with paid employment, or an imbalance between paid employment and family life may prompt individuals to review their career and seek changes. Change may also be prompted by external forces such as retrenchment or downsizing, or chance events such as accidents or natural disasters. It is predicted that individuals will access career development services such as career counselling, career assessment, career information or career programs several times in a lifetime. Career development practitioners may be viewed as one of many influences on an individual's career development.

Traditionally the goal of career development work was sound career choice, but in light of the changing nature of the world of work, more recent understandings

about career and career development, and a diverse range of clients and client issues, career development work has become more complex. Consequently, career development practitioners are being urged to rethink their roles and their work as questions have been raised about the capacity of the traditional “test and tell” approach to meet the needs of all individuals (Savickas, 2000). It has been suggested that the goal of career development work should be to “help people create satisfying lives for themselves” (Krumboltz, 1998, p.560). Thus a new emphasis in career development work is on enabling individuals to manage their own career development in a constantly changing world (McMahon & Patton, 2000). In this regard, career development work may be viewed as a learning process in which clients as lifelong learners are active participants and career development practitioners are learning facilitators (Patton & McMahon, 2006). The traditional approach which viewed career development practitioners as ‘experts’ and clients as passive responders may now be viewed as one of many approaches to career development work. Such a shift is also in keeping with changes in thinking about the nature of learning and knowledge.



Career development practitioners have traditionally come from a range of professional backgrounds including education, social work, psychology and rehabilitation. While such professional training provides a range of skills and knowledge relevant to career development work, concerns have been expressed that many career development practitioners are not appropriately trained in career development (OECD, 2004b). Consequently, Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners have been

developed (CICA, 2006) and detail entry-level qualifications, a code of ethics, core and specialist competency guidelines, and a requirement that practitioners engage in continuing professional development.

Possibly the most widely practised forms of career development work are career counselling, career assessment and the delivery of career programs. The influence of constructivism with its tenets of holism, meaning-making, and the active role of individuals is clearly observable (McMahon & Patton, 2000). For example, career counselling has increasingly been informed by narrative and storied approaches (e.g., Savickas, 2002, 2005) and qualitative career assessment has received more attention (e.g., McMahon, in press; McMahon & Patton 2002).

A feature of career counselling and career assessment has been their focus on one-on-one work with clients. As demand for career development services has increased, there is a need to place greater emphasis on career development programs. Such programs already have a place in schools and some organisations although the quality and provision of these programs is variable. It is hoped that career development programs will increasingly be informed by the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (Miles Morgan Australia, 2003).

Rapid advances in technology are widely acknowledged as having a transformational effect on career development work (Harris-Bowlsbey & Sampson, 2005; OECD, 2004b). For example, occupational databases, career assessment programs, and computer-assisted career counselling programs have the potential to increase access to those outside sites such as schools,

universities and large organisations that have traditionally provided career guidance (Watts, 2000). Further, technology and the digital revolution have broadened the range of services that may be offered such as telephone help lines, online services, SMS support, video conferencing, e-portfolios, and counselling by email.



Key Understandings about Career Development and Social Justice

- > Social justice is a value that has underpinned career development work since its inception
- > Social justice advocates access to resources and opportunity for all people
- > Socially just practice advocates that cultural and societal groups are involved in the development of services to meet their needs.

Social justice has underpinned career development work since it first began when Parsons (1909) viewed his work in the context of the political and economic reforms of his time. To this end, he was committed to all people achieving their potential. Socially just practice advocates for equal access to resources and full and equal participation of all groups (Bell, 1997; O'Brien, 2001) and, in so doing, contributes to the advancement of society.

Globalisation and rapid societal and workplace change have contributed to increasing diversity. However, career development has not adequately addressed the needs of some groups such as people with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse people, indigenous people and people with mental illness. For example, The Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005 – 2008 paper (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, MCEETYA, 2006) noted that while most education systems have special support in place for indigenous students, these generally do not provide specialised career advice. The paper emphasised a need for high quality, culturally appropriate intervention strategies

that address academic self-concept, motivation and career advice for indigenous students. Further, career development has tended to focus on career as it applies to the better educated and more affluent for whom work is meaningful and satisfying, and it has paid less attention to those for whom work is a means of survival and satisfaction is derived from making enough money to live (Blustein, 2006).

Clearly, the field of career development, social policies and the world of work have to be more responsive to the needs of such groups. Input from such groups could assist in better understanding their needs and encouraging the development of cultural and context-sensitive services. It has also been suggested that career development practitioners need to be informed about social action roles and interventions beyond those with individuals. For example, they may need to engage in systemic interventions such as those with employers, institutions or organisations (Arthur, 2005). Such interventions may also require career development practitioners to assume roles such as advocacy in order to achieve socially just outcomes for their clients.



Key Understandings about the Provision of Career Information in Career Development

- > Career information is viewed as part of a process, not merely as a destination
- > Career information should be accurate, current, relevant, specific, understandable, comprehensive, unbiased, and comparable
- > Career information should reflect the reality of the world of work in which individuals are participating
- > In an environment where career information is easily and readily accessible, career development practitioners need to consider carefully the use of career information with clients.

The provision of information has traditionally had an important role to play in career guidance. Career information is defined as “information (print, electronic, personal contacts and other resources) that assists the process of career development” and includes “occupational and industry information, educational and training information and social information related to the world of work” (Miles Morgan Australia, 2003).

Advances in technology have enabled a rapid growth in the quantity of career information available to individuals who need to develop the competencies to be effective and discerning users of career and occupational information. Grubb (2002) cautions that more information is not necessarily better if individuals do not know how to use it properly. Similarly, Gysbers, Heppner and Johnston (2003) suggest that career development practitioners should accurately identify client information needs and consider why, how and when information is best used. They suggest that career information may be educational or motivational. Career development practitioners have an ethical responsibility to provide reliable, accurate and current information and to make it accessible to their clients. Such responsibility requires practitioners to be discerning and critical users of career and occupational information both in terms of client needs and the information itself which may come from formal sources or informal sources such as wikis and blogs.

Occupational information gathering is regarded as a competency necessary for effective career decision-making (Miles Morgan Australia, 2003). It has been suggested that finding meaning in information is most important to information seekers. However, there seems to be a gap between the world of work portrayed in traditional sources of occupational information and the world

of work experienced by individuals. For example, new jobs are constantly being created and functions under the same job title are changing rapidly as flexibility in the workforce is embedded. In turn, static occupational information can provide a very general indication or point-in-time snapshot. Developing an accurate picture of any occupation now requires a multi-pronged approach involving passive and active research.

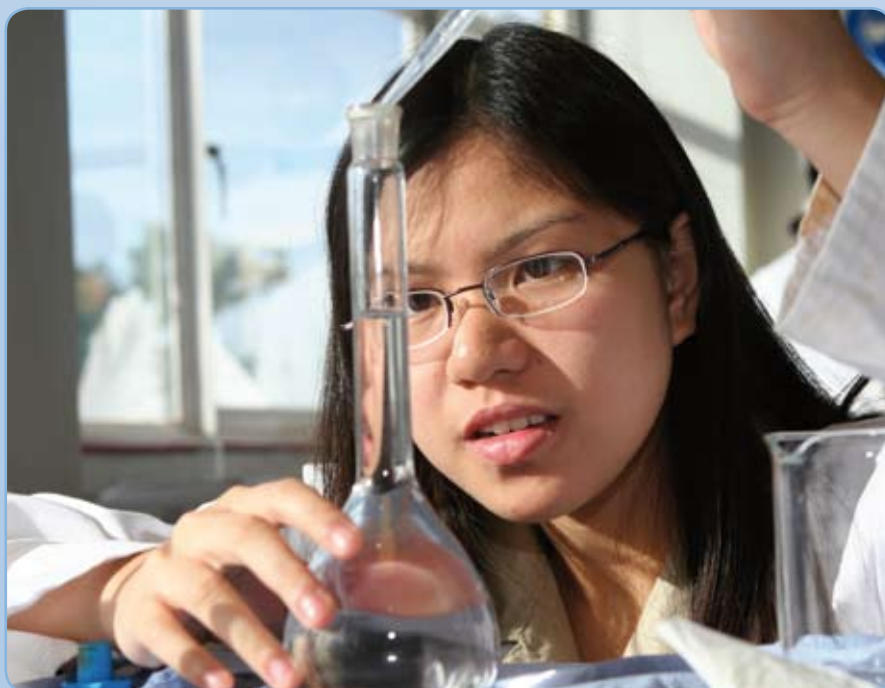
Meyers' (2000) plea that career practitioners “look from within the individual and from the world around the individual” (p.33) is equally relevant to the developers of career information. Static provision of information without setting it into the context of the world of work may mislead clients and may misrepresent the reality. The workforce is now being asked to be flexible and information providers need to aim at mirroring that flexibility (Sennett, 1998). Information providers who continue to portray the world of work in a way that is increasingly less related to the experience of the information seekers run the risk of becoming less relevant and less used. Individuals must be prepared for the world of work they are entering. If nothing else, information may broaden their options and give them permission to engage in employment other than full-time, permanent paid employment which for many years was regarded as a measure of success and is now becoming less available. The development and provision of career information that is reflective of, and responsive to, the constantly changing world of work remains a major challenge in the career field. More recently, Guiding Principles for Career Development Services and Career Information Products have been developed in Australia (CICA, 2007). As a government-sponsored online service, **myfuture** has the capacity and licence to be authoritative, accurate, reliable and current and therefore trusted by users.

Key Understandings about the Place of Career Guidance in the Broader Community

- > The provision of development services, including career information, has benefits for society as well as individuals
- > Increasingly, policy makers are responding to the need for, and benefits of, career development by investment in its provision
- > There is a need to conduct research that strengthens the evidence base of career development.

While the value of career development services for individuals is unquestioned, increasingly there has been recognition and acceptance of its social and economic importance to nations (OECD, 2004b; Watts, 2000). This has corresponded with increasingly flexible labour markets and recognition that more support structures need to be made available for individuals (Watts, 2000). It has been claimed that national strategies are required to ensure that individuals have lifelong access to career services to support their lifelong career development (Watts, 2000). Thus policy makers are taking a more active role in the provision of career development services for their citizens. In Australia, over a number of years there has been evidence of commitment at a national level to the provision of career development services to Australian citizens. The development and ongoing maintenance of the National Career Information System, **myfuture**, represents an example of this commitment.

It is widely recognised that individuals may access career services several times in a lifetime. Traditionally, career development services have been provided predominantly to school leavers and unemployed people. Such limited service provision is no longer adequate and the career field has been challenged to expand access and services for people across the lifespan (e.g., Watts & Sultana, 2004) and to transform provision to include more diverse methods and sources of delivery (OECD, 2004b). Corresponding with this expansion of services is the need to develop an evidence base in career development (OECD, 2004b). In this regard, there is a growing body of empirical evidence that attests to the positive effects of career development on short-term learning outcomes such as decision-making skills, self-awareness and opportunity-knowledge, and medium term outcomes such as educational achievement or welfare dependency (OECD, 2004b). However, further research is needed, particularly in relation to the long-term benefits of career guidance, and the effectiveness of services.



Key Understandings about Career Development and Public Policy

- > Career development services contribute to lifelong learning, labour market efficiency and social equity goals
- > Policies involving career development recognise that the individual is the beneficiary of career development services
- > Well organised career development services contribute to the effective operation of Australian education and training systems
- > A challenge for career development practitioners and policy makers is to work more closely together.

While career development practitioners have largely focused on providing a service of benefit to individuals, it has been increasingly recognised that career development work also has economic and social benefits for nations (Savickas, van Esbroeck, & Herr, 2005; Watts, 2000). The link between the socio-political context and career development has been recognised throughout the history of career development (e.g., Parsons, 1909). Since then governments have funded career programs and services to achieve a variety of national goals particularly in relation to learning, labour market and social equity goals (OECD, 2004).

So important is career development to public policy that the OECD, World Bank and European Commission have now conducted reviews of career guidance and public policy across more than 50 countries including Australia. The recommendations of this review have largely guided the development of a national career development strategy in Australia. Further, the OECD produced a handbook for policy makers to assist them in designing career development strategies (OECD, 2004).



Policy-makers in Australia are recognising that career development services are an essential and inevitable part of a society and economy that is open and flexible, that offers wide opportunities to its citizens, that encourages them to make the best use of their talents, and that supports choice and self reliance (Sweet, 2007). A challenge for career development practitioners and policy makers is to work more closely together.

In this regard, in 2006, Australia hosted the third International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy. The symposium recognised that career development is a significant contributor to the development of human capital, as an important engine for economic growth and social cohesion. The symposium communiqué stated that:

Career development services can play an important role in helping governments to:

- a. improve labour supply;
- b. address skill shortages;
- c. raise the level of human capital;
- d. improve the quality of human capital;

and that career development is critical to workforce development in three respects, specifically:

1. Workforce preparation - supporting the career development of young people prior to entering the labour market
2. Workforce adaptability and sustainability - supporting the career development of employed workers
3. Workforce reintegration - supporting the career development of adults in and out of the labour market, and between jobs in different enterprises.

The symposium communiqué highlights the shared responsibility of career development between individuals and governments (Third International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy, 2006).

In Australia, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) and its various committees have been a catalyst in the facilitation of many important national career development initiatives. Other career initiatives related to vocational education are considered through the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE).

Representing major career associations and career practitioners at the policy level is the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA). The Council consists of representatives of both national and state-based associations. CICA aims to promote a career development culture within the Australian community and it works with government and other stakeholders to achieve this outcome.

Clearly, there are further significant steps to be made in the relationship between career development and public policy, particularly related to the strengthening of a national career development system that attempts to cater for a whole-of-life approach to career development. Beyond the delivery of career development as a public service, it is the wider benefits that flow from career development that are of specific interest to governments around the world. Increasingly, career development is seen as a bridge between economic

and social development. In this role it is estimated that there is an economic return on investment equivalent to five times expenditure on career services (DZT Consulting and Research, 2007). This benefit accrues by:

- > reducing barriers to participation;
- > equipping young people, especially those in disadvantaged communities, with a healthy approach to life that includes the realisation of their values and ambitions;
- > improving awareness of opportunities for a better quality of life;
- > supporting lifelong learning; and
- > improving awareness of emerging jobs that encourage the sustainable use of the environment.

The further development of Australia's human capital is likely to be maximised through ensuring access to high quality career services.

To ensure consistency in quality, many countries have established structures to undertake research to build an evidence base for the provision of career services. Currently, most career development services in Australia are underpinned and informed by research from other countries. The evidence base for career development services in Australia is often weak and needs to be strengthened to match the aims of government in strengthening human capital, meeting the needs and expectations of individuals and reflecting the cultural differences of Australian society.

Increasingly, career development services are being viewed as a mainstream strategy of governments and organisations to achieve outcomes for individuals and as a catalyst to achieve policy and organisational objectives. It is likely that issues of national concern, such as a decline in the growth of the Australian labour force, an ageing workforce, and the proportion of young people not engaged in learning or work, will intensify national and individual interest in a more robust and effective national career development system in which **myfuture** is of critical importance.

The stimulus for writing the first edition of this document was to ground the National Career Information System, **myfuture**, in career development theory and to respond to a need for closer links between theory and practice. Since that time, the document has been widely used by career development practitioners, policy makers and the general public. The establishment of **myfuture**, Australia's career information and exploration service, has proved to be a resounding success that demonstrates the social and economic benefits that result from investment in a national career development strategy.

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