

## **The Manifestation of Career**

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Work, occupation, and career development are themes that are fundamental to a wide range of human activities and relevant in some way across all cultures. Our focus is not “a” career, but “career” as a form of work. The manner in which career manifests itself is a complex phenomenon, influenced by a wide variety of factors. All through its evolution, large-scale factors, operating at the macro level—such as industrialization, modernization, colonization, Westernization and, today, globalization—have shaped and formed human orientations to work. There are very few cultures and contexts (perhaps none) that have not been influenced by these forces in some way.

An important milestone in the evolution of work in Western society was the Industrial Revolution. Coupled with the Protestant Reformation, a new work atmosphere was created wherein traditional practices of occupational role allocation were no longer as applicable as in earlier times when work role allocation was mainly based on one’s social class. During those times, occupations and trades ran in families/close-knit groups, and expertise related to professions was transmitted from the adult to the young within the family or through guilds of professionals. In economies that came under the influence of the Industrial Revolution and the Reformation, the nature of work was no longer typified by a specific set of activities that one engaged in for a lifetime, in order to earn a living. Work now presented prospects for change and advancement. People began to approach work as a means for achieving growth and personal development, as also for changing their class or position in society. Thus was born the concept of career, which tends in a Western context to be described as a personal engagement with the world of work characterized by the exercise of volition and the identification of personal suitability, requiring preparation and specialization for ongoing, lifelong development.

As new occupations emerged, the issue of matching people to jobs surfaced as a question that needed an urgent answer. On the one hand, industry demanded workers with certain combinations of qualities, abilities and skills; on the other, the would-be worker needed guidance toward jobs for which he or she was most capable. It was at this point in the evolution of work that vocational guidance emerged as a method to support the new industrial work order. Accordingly, systems were developed whereby people could be matched for jobs on the basis of their traits, abilities, and talents. This systematization of methods to support and facilitate career choice and decision making marks a notable landmark in the history of work. During earlier times when the allocation of work roles was led by social and cultural norms, there was possibly little or no need for career counselling and guidance. Today, in some cultures and economies, the individual has before him/her a wide assortment of occupational possibilities and prospects. In these cultures, individuals (based of course, on their qualifications and education) are relatively more free to select and follow the career of their choice. It is in the interface between the burgeoning of opportunities and the freedom of choice that career guidance and counselling finds its relevance. And since its inception more than a century ago, the field has grown and prospered, addressing, supporting, and facilitating individuals' engagement with the world of work.

But not all cultures and economies came *directly* under the influences of the Industrial Revolution and the Protestant Reformation. In other societies, human engagement with work progressed as it had for centuries earlier. Even today, all one has to do is to step a few miles outside the cities of economically developing countries to enter a world of work that is characterized by preindustrial features, where work is linked to the marshalling of resources to secure basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. Career as it has been described earlier in this writing barely exists in these cultures and economies. Nonetheless, global forces have had and continue to have an impact on work behaviour in almost all contexts. In

virtually all societies, work has changed from being simply linked to survival needs to something far more complex, requiring increasing amounts of specialization and training. Accordingly, the notion of a personal career has made its appearance in many more parts of the world.

Although historically the notion of career was born in a Western, individualistic, industrialized context, and was nurtured by a work ethic that promoted freedom of choice, global forces over the years have transported it also to many other cultural and economic locations. It seems, therefore, that the manifestation of career can be seen in two broad contexts: contexts to which career is indigenous and contexts where it is, in many respects, culturally alien. In the former, the manifestation of career would be spontaneous and culturally congruent; in the latter, its manifestation could be the result of exigency induced by global transformations. It could thus be hypothesized that the delineation of career from work lies along a continuum. At one end is “career” in its fully developed form, as it has been described above; at the other end is a complete absence of this notion of career; and along the continuum are various manifestations of the idea of career. We further propose that this manifestation is strongly influenced by local social, cultural, economic, and psychological factors. Hence, the meaning of career for a middle-class, urban Indian might be very different from his/her middle-class German counterpart: the German, for example, may be relatively more accepting of a vocationally-oriented, blue collar career, while to the middle-class Indian, given prevailing culturally-mediated occupational prestige attributions, blue collar professions may not even be considered as a potential career path! At another level, a work day in the life of an illiterate paddy farmer with a small holding would be dictated by multiple requirements that range from weeding and pest management to harvesting and finding the best buyer for his crop: the topic of selecting an occupation for his children based on their interests and talents would be almost alien for him. The point we are

making is that the notion of career is becoming more and more universal, as is the necessity of having to develop systems that would optimize individuals' engagement with career development.

However, what it means, how it is manifested, and how the individual engages with career, can vary from one context to another. In one setting, the focus of career guidance may be to help an individual discover whether he/she should take up law, business studies, or product design. In another, it may be to help an individual gain contemporary skills to manage his/her traditional, rural occupation more efficiently. Keeping these multiple orientations to work in view, career guidance could be described as a service that aims, at helping the individual optimise personal potentials through the effective realisation of his or her social and economic role as a “worker” for lifelong development of personal wellbeing as well as the prosperity of the immediate community and society at large. To be effective, career guidance must be informed by a culturally-resonant interpretation of social, behavioural and pedagogical sciences.

An examination of the literature pertaining to career development, counselling, and guidance that has developed over the last 60 years reveals the following:

- Theorizing and model building have been largely dominated by Western epistemologies. This is quite as might have been expected because the conception of career emerged in these contexts. The development of the field in Western contexts has been robust and has led to the advancement of a wide range of theories and methods for practice. The emergence of controversies, debates, and calls for improvement and expansion, are signs of the good health of the discipline of career guidance in these contexts. This began perhaps with the quantitatively oriented trait-and-factor approaches and today the qualitatively-oriented constructivist approaches are illustrative of new paradigms and conceptualizations of people's work lives.

- Some of the largest workforces in the world lie in the developing world—a world to which the notion of career is not indigenous. At the same time, career guidance is rapidly emerging as a strongly felt need in these contexts. Yet, very little attention has been directed toward understanding orientations to work and the manifestation of career in these environments. Instead, career guidance in these contexts is driven by definitions of career that have been transposed upon these cultures. As a result, those involved in workforce and career development in these contexts learn about constructs and ideas that do not equip them to effectively address felt needs.

It seems, therefore, that two pathways open up in relation to the advancement of career guidance research, theory, and practice. One leads toward the addressing of issues linked to *already established* forms of career development as it occurs in contexts to which career is indigenous. But given the reality that career now exists outside the setting in which it was born, the other pathway requires the breaking of *new ground*. The latter pathway is a less trodden one. For contexts in which career is not indigenous this may have to begin even with a redefinition of what career means in these environments. Career guidance theories and practices that emerge from such context-resonant definitions of career would be relevant to workers irrespective of their cultural backgrounds.