

Editorial

Editorial: East and West: Exploring New Concepts for Career Guidance (Special Issue).

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Guest Editors

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The central objective of the IAEVG-Jiva International conference held in October 2010 in Bangalore, India, was to draw the wisdom and experiences of different cultures together to consider both universal and specific principles for career guidance and counselling that are socially and economically relevant to contemporary challenges and issues. *Jiva* means “life” in many Indian and Asian languages. The Jiva conference was positioned on the understanding that a healthy career is dynamically connected to ways of living. This special issue of IJEVG, entitled “East and West: New Concepts for Career Guidance” is a symposium comprising papers presented at the Jiva conference. It aims at examining new concepts that have relevance to career guidance needs salient in today’s world.

The concept of a career emerged from within a Western cultural environment that was characterised by individualism and nurtured by a work ethic that promoted freedom of choice. While westernisation and industrialisation have influenced the culture of work, career development in Eastern contexts can progress in a manner quite different from the West. For example, freedom of choice may be subordinate to duties and obligations to the family; alternatively or in conjunction, freedom of choice can be severely restricted because of lowered career aspirations, reduced educational attainment, and poverty, linked to religio-cultural values as well as socio-economic structures.

Every culture has its own ways of schooling its young into the world of work. Within each culture there are differences in career- and more broadly life-related opportunities and constraints, depending on age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, urban-rural residence, and migrant or immigrant status (to name but a few). This symposium points to a fresh direction in the careers literature: a sensitivity to differences coupled with an interest in identifying unifying or universal concepts.

Career development and related needs are shaped out of differences that characterise (a) the person, (b) the contexts, and very importantly, (c) the transactions of the person-in-contexts. Contexts themselves have multiple levels ranging from the dyadic to the global. Sensitivity to differences entails an acknowledgement of one or more of these levels of differences. All papers in this symposium reflect such sensitivity to differences.

Frederick Leong and Marina Pearce emphasise the importance of considering culture in vocational psychology. They point out that models in general and vocational psychology are deficient with respect to cultural validity and relevance. Career intervention models are largely “imposed etic” models such that culture-specific assumptions (emic) are cast as etic and incorrectly applied to other cultures. Instead of simplistic and hegemonic importation of Western models to other cultures, Leong and Pearce recommend that we build indigenous models of vocational psychology. Indeed, they identify this new direction as compelling: indigenisation as a desideratum, something lacking but desired as essential.

In similar vein, Gideon Arulmani urges us to adopt culturally-resonant models for research and practice. By striking the culturally appropriate note, career counsellors can enhance the relevance of services to individuals and groups. He argues that social cognitive environments form and shape orientations to work and career. Sensitivity to culture also includes designing career interventions with content drawn from the particular cultural heritage of the target participants. He presents a case study of a careers programme based on

four constructs that undergird the Indian way of life and that closely relate to Indian orientations to work and career. His conceptualisation of the cultural preparedness framework provides a frame of reference within which culturally sensitive research and practice can be implemented.

The life- and work-related challenges of individuals and communities differ across types of occupations. In an industrialised and globalising world, the identity, longevity, advantage, and prestige of occupations, are being redefined continually. Careers work typically has tended to focus on urban white-collared workers rather than on craftspersons, artisans, or those engaged in agriculture. Anita Ratnam addresses this oversight and helps us reflect on the place and significance of traditional occupations in a modern world. Her paper invites career practitioners to find a new purpose: the interface of careers work with the building of inclusive and sustainable societies. Careers work must locate itself in “hybrid” worlds, guided by humanism, social equity, and respect for diversity of occupations and cultural products.

Patricia Flederman’s paper presents an account of an innovative national career helpline being developed in South Africa within a lifelong learning framework. The helpline has drawn ideas from helplines in more economically “developed” countries, but is reframing them in terms of the very different demographic, cultural and socio-political needs of South Africa. Compatible with Ratnam’s humanism, she explores important issues regarding the potential relationships between helplines and social equity, and the importance of moral purpose alongside political will in translating ideas into action.

Likewise, Sonali Nag reminds us that one-shoe-fits-all approaches tend to fall short when applied to varied individuals in varied contexts. Her paper simultaneously addresses equity by focusing on another historically under-served group in careers work: individuals with special needs. Blending normative career development tasks with the specific

challenges presented by special needs, Nag underscores the importance of using a more differentiated approach if the needs of those with non-normative requirements are to be served. She uses the Career Preparation Process Model to highlight the influence of the home-community-institution matrix and career beliefs on the self-efficacy of individuals with special needs, leading to either secure or insecure integration into the world of work.

Addressing Leong's and Arulmani's emphasis on both universals and particulars, Anuradha Bakshi brings a refreshingly new theoretical frame of reference within which to examine career development, namely, the human development literature. Developmental approaches to career guidance have largely taken a stagewise approach but, as Nag and Ratnam both point out, needs could present themselves in a non-normative manner. Bakshi presents the concept of plasticity, bringing to the fore the potential for ongoing change that can span an individual's lifetime. This is a construct that transcends East-West differences, offering a scaffolding upon which to examine universals and potentially to unite and build bridges between differences. Bakshi uses data from an Indian megapolis (Mumbai) to illustrate the idea that career guidance must move beyond normative career development crises of adolescence-early adulthood. By contrasting such crises across gender and privilege, she also is simultaneously sensitive to plurality of experiences and social equity.

The world of work has undergone immense changes in the last few years. The need is urgently felt for application-oriented theorising that can address career development needs across cultures. We have at hand Western approaches that emanate from empirical and individualistic epistemologies. We also have at hand the more intuitive, subjective and collectivistic orientations of the East. The opportunity that presents itself in this post-industrial, postmodern era, is not for the creation of an Eastern versus Western form of counselling. Instead, the imperative is to draw equanimously upon concepts and constructs from different traditions, with the objective of being more broadly relevant in a complex and

changing world. Change and diversity are themselves universals, as are concerns for equity, sustainability, and service to under-served groups. It is in diversity that we celebrate our oneness as living beings. We need to make more united efforts to build theory, research and practice that demonstrate respect for each other, valuing both our similarities and our differences. This symposium offers a step in that direction.

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