1 Introduction: framing the future of career

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Career has been a key notion in twentieth-century Western societies. Although 'career' is often used as a short-hand term for work histories and patterns, it has also served more significant purposes. Many in our complex and highly differentiated society use it to attribute coherence, continuity, and social meaning to their lives. By tying people to labour markets and employment in ways that are both personally meaningful and beneficial to work organisations and society, career is also part of the rhetoric that supports the ideologies of society and thereby contributes to its stability. Thus, the future of career has implications not only for individuals, including their personal identity and meaning, but also for groups and institutions, and for society itself.

Like so many words in the English language, 'career' is flexible and elastic, enabling it to adapt well to a variety of functions and contexts. This makes it a term of multi-layered richness and ambiguity, which is a 'major source of its power' (Watts, 1981, p. 214). As we shall discuss here and, indeed, encounter in the various chapters of this book, 'career' is used in various ways: as a concept, and as a construct in lay, professional, and academic discourses. It is the future of this overarching notion of career that is the subject of this book.

Whatever the specific context in, or function for which, career is used, to date it has involved a representation or construction of actions and events, and in some instances, the self, across time. Janus-like, career relates the past and present to the future, including our planning for and anticipation of the future, and also addresses how the future motivates action and the construction of meaning in the present. It makes a construction of the future possible. However, profound and widespread change is both anticipated and being realised; from today's perspective, the future looks very different from the past and present. Hence, the purpose of this book is to consider the future of career, for career, in part, constructs our futures.

The present interest in the future of career

Many in the lay, professional, and academic literature are also attempting to come to terms with formidable changes in many aspects of our world and their impact on work and career. Castells (1996, 1997, 1998) and others (e.g. Rifkin, 1995) point us to future changes, and also provide us with an understanding and interpretation of the present that will serve to construct the future. Castells has been particularly comprehensive in his analysis of a new world that is coming into being. He attributes it to the confluence of three independent processes: 'the information technology revolution; the economic crises of both capitalism and statism, and their subsequent restructuring; and the blooming of cultural and social movements, such as libertarianism, human rights, feminism, and environmentalism' (1998, p. 336). These processes have had profound effects on our society. According to Castells, they have brought into being 'a new social structure, the network society; a new economy, the informational global economy; and a new culture, the culture of real virtuality' (1998, p. 336). The changes he documents have converged in 'a historical redefinition of the relationship of production, power, and experience on which society is based' (1998, p. 340). We infer that this redefinition will be critically important to career. In particular, the capability of one's career to provide continuity is being challenged. Has career outlived its usefulness? It is a construct that grew up largely in industrial society and as that society has changed and continues to change in so many fundamental ways, perhaps it no longer offers a range of useful meanings with which to understand and interpret our own and others' experience and behaviour.

The initial impetus for this book was a symposium held at De Montfort University in 1993 (NICEC Bulletin, 1994), but we are not alone in asking about the future of career. Other recent publications that have also addressed it include, notably *The career is dead: Long live the career: A relational approach to careers*, by Hall and Associates (1996); Rifkin's (1995) *The end of work*; *Managing careers in 2000 and beyond* (Jackson, Arnold, Nicholson, & Watts, 1996); *The boundaryless career: A new employment principle for a new organizational era* (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996); and *The corrosion of character: The personal consequences of work in the new capitalism* (Sennett, 1998). In comparison to these, this book addresses what is happening to the overarching notion of career from a range of multi-disciplinary perspectives.

The range of meanings of career

Arthur, Hall, and Lawrence (1989) identified ten viewpoints on career each tied to a particular discipline. Thus in order to address the future of

this adaptive and flexible notion, we begin by clarifying some of its common and long-established meanings in the academic and professional literature and in lay usage.

In the abstract, as a concept, career can refer to the individual's movement through time and space. It can also focus on the intersection of individual biography and social structures. One way that the term 'career', or more specifically 'careers', is used in several chapters of this book is to refer to the patterns and sequences of occupations and positions occupied by people across their working lives. While this is a common meaning attributed to career in the academic and professional literature, it is even more so in lay understanding. Moreover, 'careers' and 'occupations' are often used synonymously.

Career is also used as a construct in academic, professional and lay discourse. By drawing on common understanding of individual and shared motivations and institutional and organisational practices, 'career' provides a prevailing discourse that allows both lay persons and professionals to create meaning.

The construct of career is also used in organisational and social rhetoric (e.g. Gutteridge, Leibowitz, & Shore, 1993). At times, its rhetorical use may disguise its ideological underpinnings. Career can be used to motivate and persuade employees. It has been used to refer to the work experiences of some groups of people and not others, and thus is considered to be an elitist term. Those excluded include those in occupations without the likelihood of promotions, in occupations that have excluded women and persons from some ethno-cultural groups, and those who do not participate in the paid labour force. Many occupations have undoubtedly offered elitist careers, having limited entry and selective progress along recognisable paths, in which the ascent of organisational ladders has also been restricted to a few. However, since the mid twentieth century, this in general has not been the message society has disseminated. Career has been a powerful symbol of a meritocratic and increasingly complex and differentiated industrial society, in which individual status no longer depends on ascription but could be achieved through education, effort, and social mobility achieved, epitomised in career. Although those without traditional careers or traditional career aspirations have been recognised in some branches of the literature, for example, Hearn's (1977) 'careerless', 'uncareerist', and 'non-careerist', the message to them that careers are normal and desirable has been a strong one. Watts (1981) following Wilensky (1968), indeed, suggests that the 'term [career] is sufficiently wedded to the work ethic to hold considerable potential for social control' (p. 214). Arthur and Lawrence (1984) suggest that 'the term ''career'' should be applicable to anyone who works, and to any succession of work roles that a person may hold' (p. 2). Further, in

order to improve their citizens' life-chances and work prospects, many governments provide career guidance and placement services directly or through the educational system. This encourages the view that, so powerful has been the rhetoric of career, even those who had been denied either access to certain occupations or progression within them may still aspire to having a career of some kind.

The rhetorical use of the construct of career has been particularly strong in bureaucratic organisations (Gowler & Legge, 1989). Their hierarchical structure has provided 'a potential career ladder and thus a reward mechanism for individuals' (Watson, 1980, p. 210). Thus, although the majority who started on the bottom rungs may have had no chance whatsoever of reaching the higher levels, this may not have been known by them until much later in their organisational life, perhaps on reaching a 'career plateau' (Ference, Stoner, & Warren, 1977). Many have been encouraged in this aspiration, and many organisations have used these career potentials as inducement to generate motivation, effort, and commitment. More recently, many large organisations have used their equal opportunities policies and practices to remove some of the barriers to their career ladders. However, not all forms of career are rooted in organisations. For example, Kanter (1989) identified the bureaucratic, professional, and entrepreneurial forms of career, some of which lie outside the organisations. Other careers, as we shall point out, are not related to occupations at all.

Career can embrace a longer period of the life span than membership in employing organisations. According to Hall (1976), career is 'the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviors associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the person's life' (p. 4). It weaves together the individual's occupational, professional, and organisational experiences with other strands of their life, as in Super's (1980) 'life-career rainbow'. Career is 'nothing narrower than certain significant relationships between the individual and work, and the individual, work and wider life over an extended period of time' (Hearn, 1977, p. 275). Smelser (1980, p. 10) equates 'personal career' with 'life history'. Career is 'coming to be used . . . in a broadened sense to any social strand of any person's course through life' (Goffman, 1959, p. 123). This is the kind of career of which Roth (1963) wrote in his classic study of the 'career' of the TB patient. It is movement through 'a series of situations which bestow identity on us' (Watson, 1980, p. 47). For people who 'do not have careers in the sense that professional and business people have them' (Becker & Strauss, 1968, p. 320), a career may be based on 'positional passage', not in employment, but in 'domestic, age, and other escalators'. Barley (1989) observed that sociologists in the

Chicago School, including Hughes, Becker, and Roth, used career as the basis for a wide range of studies other than those of occupational careers, including, for example, the careers of marijuana users.

Career also refers to more than objective pathways or movements. It can involve self-identity, and reflect individuals' sense of who they are, who they wish to be, and their hopes, dreams, fears, and frustrations. This is reflected in a foundational description of career given by Goffman (1959) when discussing the 'moral career of the mental patient': 'One value of the concept of career is its two-sidedness. One side is linked to internal matters held dearly and closely, such as image of self and felt identity; the other side concerns official positions, jural relations, and style of life, and is part of a publicly accessible institutional complex' (p. 123). This distinction between the 'objective' and the 'subjective' career is well established in the literature (e.g., Campbell & Moses, 1986; Stebbins, 1970). The subjective and objective careers are blended in the living of one's life, as Cochran (1991) noted, 'A career is a person's life, and in that usage, there is one career for every person' (p. 7).

Overall, career can be seen as an overarching construct that gives meaning to the individual's life. Young and Valach (1996) described it as a superordinate construct that allows people to construct connections among actions, to account for effort, plans, goals, and consequences, to frame internal cognitions and emotions, and to use feedback and feed-forward processes.

Issues and questions about the future of career

Because career is associated with work, among the factors that precipitated concern about the future of career are the changes in the world of work – career has been and is enmeshed in notions of work, employment, occupations, and jobs. It is difficult to overestimate the centrality of work in human life and society: Applebaum (1992) describes it as a condition of life. Notwithstanding that the rhetoric of career was useful for some members of society, many have viewed their jobs as a means of making money for subsistence, consumption, and leisure, rather than providing intrinsic satisfaction and fulfillment. Major studies in the early 1970s reported many people's overall dissatisfaction with their occupational roles (e.g. O'Toole *et al.*, 1973; Terkel, 1972). However, it was not their dissatisfaction that has led to what Rifkin (1995) has suggested is the end of work and the beginning of a jobless society. His specific hypothesis is that the effects of information technology will be massive unemployment. Clearly information technology is one of the most salient factors in the change in work – a shift that several observers have noted is from

industrialism to informationalism. What is critical from Castells's (1996) perspective is that the revolution in information technology has made possible the globalisation of the economy, and hence he calls this new era 'informationalism' rather than 'post-industrialism.' The premise of informationalism, as Castells speculates, is that the source of productivity and growth lies in the generation of knowledge and extends 'to all realms of economic activity through information processing' (p. 203) – production will be organised by maximising 'knowledge-based productivity'. In turn, knowledge-based productivity is itself maximised through human resources, and hence has implications for career.

Ericson and Haggerty (1997) provide an excellent example of how informationalism has effected changes in policing, including the activity of policing, the careers of police, and police organisations. They argue that the police now spend relatively little time dealing directly with crime. Notwithstanding the media image of the police as crime fighters, Ericson and Haggerty consider them as knowledge workers in a complex system of embedded communication formats and technologies. The purpose of this system is to provide institutions and individuals with information and knowledge about risk in areas relevant to the police's jurisdiction. They also contend that the effect of this shift on the occupational culture and the self is to undermine individual autonomy and discretion.

Informationalism raises several questions related to the future of career. The first is whether an information society will result in proportionately more information-rich occupations (managers, professionals, technicians) or whether, as in the case of the police cited above, the nature of particular occupations change. At the same time in an information society, there may be real growth in unskilled and semiskilled jobs so that an increasingly polarised social structure could result were the middle of the occupational structure to give way to the poles. If so, career, by being attributed to people at only one pole of this social structure, could assume the 'elite' connotation described earlier. Irrespective of whether the hypothesis of increased polarisation of the occupational structure is eventually supported by the data, we seem to be facing a world in which occupation and employment will not serve to grade and group people to the extent, or in the same way, that was possible under industrialism.

Informationalism also suggests a scenario in which future societies may have to address both massive unemployment and sharp divisions between the employed and unemployed/occasional workers. Moreover, it implies a redefinition of work and employment, involving a full restructuring of social and cultural values, as Castells suggests (1996). It is clear that career is one construct that connects social and cultural values and the

specifics of work and employment and thus is critical to both scenarios. As seriously as we should heed these predictions, we also need to be cognisant of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (1994, reported in Castells, 1996) employment projections for the United States, Japan, and the European Community as a net increase of over 38 million jobs to the year 2005. Moreover, Castells (1996) maintains 'that there is no systematic structural relationship between the diffusion of information technologies and the evolution of employment trends in the economy as a whole' (p. 263).

A further characteristic of change in the information society is that there will be greater opportunity for self-employment and flexible occupations and work (in terms of location, time of day, season, or longer time periods).

At another level, the information society has substantial implications for identity and the self. Castells (1997) refers to identity as 'the source of meaning and experience' (p. 6). Giddens (1991) suggested that, as a result of tradition losing its hold and the ensuing interplay between the local and the global, there is a greater need for reflexivity – that characteristic of the self that allows one 'to know . . . both what one is doing and why one is doing it' (p. 35). He pointed to reflexively organised life planning as a central feature of structuring self-identity and spoke of the need to 'negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options' (p. 32). Castells, in turn, suggested that the systemic disjunction between the local and the global is such for most individuals as to make reflexive life planning impossible. As career has been traditionally closely implicated in the issue of personal identity, the implications for career of both positions are substantial. At the same time, because of the close connection between personal identity and career, one cannot question the viability of the latter, as many of the contributors of this book do, without also challenging the construct of personal identity.

The issue of identity in the information society cannot be restricted to the identity that emerges from our engagement in occupation and work. Irrespective of our own particular occupations and work, our life career and identities are substantially influenced by informationalism. For example, as Ericson and Haggerty (1997) argue, information is the basis for categorising our life careers as employed or unemployed, patients or healthy, victims or survivors. Information also has the capacity to create population-based identities, as, for example, the police frequently use age-based, ethnic, and racial classifications.

At first glance, it appears that the future of career and the personal identity associated with it are driven by factors such as informationalism, globalisation, and technology. However, at the heart of the issue of

identity are philosophical questions. Among many other 'deaths' that have been announced recently, the alleged death of philosophy, which Heidegger proclaimed in 1966, assumes a particular salience for identity and the self, and, thus, for the issues addressed in this book. Heidegger's point, as recounted by Cahoone (1988), was that philosophy had been subsumed by modern science, that the work of philosophy had been relegated to an analysis of language and literary criticism. Taylor (1989) suggested that the 'disengaged, instrumental mode of life' (p. 499) that empties life of meaning is compounded by philosophy's inability to agree on what constitutes 'the good' in moral life. Cahoone comments that the 'death' of philosophy is evident in the 'subordination of communal-symbolic processes and socio-cultural activities to economic processes' (p. 227). The result, he observes, is that the technical–productive–administrative sector becomes regarded as the only source of benefit and value to society. The discussion of career in several chapters of this book reflects the tacit tension between career as an artefact of the technical–productive–administrative sector and as representative of broader social and moral processes. This tension, which is encapsulated in career, is at the heart of the modern dilemma of identity.

These issues culminate in the question of the extent to which our understanding and experience of career in the future will be continuous and discontinuous with our understanding and experience of it in the past and present. In his discussion of work in the new capitalism, Sennett (1998) identified several factors that contribute to the discontinuity endemic in the present context. These include the following experiences of importance from the career perspective: the experience of disjointed time, 'threatening the ability of people to form their characters into sustained narratives' (p. 31); the different and often conflicting directions of institutional change; the lack of sustained human relations and durable purposes; and the absence of a shared narrative of difficulty and a shared fate. Ultimately, there is a lack of guidance in how to conduct the ordinary life. Not being able to locate oneself in time and space, as discussed by Collin in chapter 6, also erodes the usefulness of the career construct.

The experience of discontinuity challenges the fundamental principles and standards on which career theory, research, and practice have stood. Discontinuity is also a common theme in the postmodern world of language, science, and practice, not the least of which is the decline of the idea of progress; an idea that itself is enmeshed with the expectations of industrialism, science, and technology. Legge (1995) epitomises the issues of continuity by asking the question, in reference to human resource management, whether it is a modernist project or a postmodern discourse. The same question could also be asked of career. Thus, we need to ask not

only whether career provides people with continuity of their experiences across a lifetime. We also need to ask, if the dire descriptions of the present are accurate, whether, and if so on what grounds, the notion of career can be revitalised to address the very problems that seem to be contributing to its demise. It must also be questioned whether the career experiences themselves which, in the ideal, have been assumed to be continuous, are now and can be expected to be increasingly discontinuous.

We need to know what the implications of the broader changes that are taking place in society are for career. We need to consider how to interpret what is happening, and the extent to which it calls into question our earlier conceptualisation of career. Will career lose – or change – its former significance to individuals, organisations, and society as a whole? Are we witnessing the virtual 'death' of career, or should we rather understand what is happening as 'transfiguration', a change of form or appearance? The contributors individually and jointly address these and the following questions:

- How is our understanding of the future of career informed by existing disciplines, theories, and constructions?
- In what way are the contexts of career changing?
- How are individuals experiencing career in these changing contexts and what interpretations can be made of these new experiences?
- What are the new challenges for policy, education, career counselling, and human resource development in light of these anticipated changes in career?
- What are the implications for research and theory? What new constructions of career are emerging?

In light of the above, what future does career have? What are the themes, issues, and implications that are likely to characterise it in the twenty-first century?

Overview

Several chapters of this book, notably the chapters by Maranda and Comeau (chapter 3), Savickas (chapter 4), Collin (chapter 11), Richardson (chapter 13), and Young and Valach (chapter 12), provide an overview of the relatively recent history of career. These chapters include references to the rise of career in concert with the industrial revolution, the influence of individualism, the period of the bureaucratic career, and the development of career guidance as a social movement. However, developments in the most recent past, including the loss of respect for authority,

the growth of the women's movement, the increased application and use of information technology, the emergence of capitalism as virtually the only world economic system, and globalisation of business and industry, are having profound effects on career. Against this backdrop, several chapters document how this history has engendered and influenced our understanding and use of career as a construct in research and practice. Other chapters address the present situation and the effects of the enormous changes that are occurring in society. Although the history of career is pertinent to the discussion herein, this book examines career from many different perspectives in order to understand how the varieties and patterns of practice and different discourses are articulated.

This articulation is critical to an appreciation of the future of career precisely because career has the range of meaning and usage we have identified. In this book, career discourse, conceptualisations, and practices are discussed. The book offers a range of perspectives from various disciplines and applied areas such as psychology, sociology, education, and career guidance. There are also discussions of organisational and multi-cultural contexts, women's careers, and the perspectives of counselling practice, management, education, and social policy. As well, chapters come from European, Australian, and North American contributors. This book includes both modernist and postmodernist viewpoints although exclusive categorisation of most chapters as one or the other is not possible. Thus, this book, rather than undertaking a homogenising or unifying stance, addresses the future of career in its diversity. It proposes a number of tentative and interrelated arguments for the nature and use of the career construct in the future. Notwithstanding this broad range of perspectives and specific references to globalisation, this book provides a largely Western view, which, of course, is prevalent in the construct itself.

Part 1 Changing contexts

Part 1 addresses the changing contexts of career by examining broad changes in both the economic and social environments and the academic and practitioner contexts. The initial chapter by Julie Storey (chapter 2) identifies current and emerging economic, social, and demographic changes that are creating 'fracture lines' in labour markets, organisations, and employment, disturbing this field. In doing so, she sets the stage for a more detailed examination of the historical and changing perspectives in two disciplines that have largely been involved in the study of career: sociology (Marie-France Maranda and Yvan Comeau), and vocational psychology (Wendy Patton and Mark Savickas in separate chapters).