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Mid-career construction counselling to instill spiritual awareness and allay fear

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This article reports on the value of career construction counselling for a black man facing a career crossroads. The participant was purposefully selected from a number of people participating in a career construction counselling course who had sought career counselling. An intrinsic, single-case study design was implemented and a qualitative, interpretive paradigm was adopted as the framework for the research. Data were collected using the Career Construction Interview (CCI). The findings suggest that the intervention enabled the participant to regain his sense of purpose and direction and also inspired others to deal with the apprehension and fear in their own lives. Future research should investigate the use of the CCI with people in diverse settings to establish its trustworthiness in non-traditional contexts.

Keywords: black man; Career Construction Interview; mid-career construction counselling; single-case study; spiritual awareness

Introduction

The world is changing rapidly, and the world of work is following suit. This leaves many workers feeling alienated, frustrated, and incompetent – feelings exacerbated by the impact of information communication technology and the need to disseminate information across the globe with increasing speed (Schwab, 2016). People then often begin to doubt whether they have made the ‘right’ career choices (e.g. regarding a particular field of study or job) and find it difficult to recall why they made these choices in the first place (Lease, 2004). While some of them continue in their chosen careers or jobs despite experiencing frustration, unhappiness, and lack of ‘job satisfaction’ resulting from inadequate self- and career construction (Guichard, 2009; Savickas, 2011), others seek the help of career counsellors (Stringer, Kerpelman & Skorikov, 2011) for guidance.

People facing transitions in their careers predictably experience career indecision (Guay, Sénécal, Gauthier & Fernet, 2003) and often believe they lack the degree of career control needed to deal with such transitions (Savickas, 2010). People with career indecision tend to display symptoms such as distress, self-doubt, insecurity, a diminished sense of self, sadness, anger, and feelings of having ‘lost control’ of their situation (Maree, 2013, 2016). Various techniques, strategies, and interventions are used by career counsellors to help these clients resolve their indecision. While the use of a predominantly ‘positivist’ (quantitative) approach to this problem is still common in developing countries in particular, I believe that a qualitative approach offers career counsellors another means to assist clients and is gaining traction in developing cultures.

One qualitative assessment that is increasingly being utilised is called the Career Construction Interview (CCI). The conceptual framework and interpretive lens that guided this intervention and data-gathering process consists of two closely associated constructs, namely career construction (Savickas, 2011, 2015a) and self-construction (Guichard, 2005, 2009), aimed at facilitating career adaptability, and, ultimately, life and career design (Collin & Guichard, 2011).

Theory of Life Design

The rapid changes in the world of work, including new non-standard and non-traditional work opportunities such as contractual work and time-limited work – a phenomenon Gelatt (1993:10) refers to as “white water change” – pose challenges to researchers, theoreticians, and practitioners in career counselling. Many authors have written about current developments in the world of work such as the disappearance of traditional jobs, the so-called ‘precarisation’ of work (the notion that work has become more unstable and insecure), and fewer guarantees in work contexts today (Kumar & Arulmani, 2014). Workers’ prospects of finding lifetime employment in the same corporation have greatly reduced, as has their willingness to make personal sacrifices in the service of the corporation. The nature and value of the (implied) psychological contract between the individual and the organisation have changed irrevocably. As a result, career counsellors have to respond appropriately and timeously to the disappearance of traditional jobs in particular and to changing views of what it means to work.

Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, Van Esbroeck and Van Vianen (2009) argue that the changes in the world of work are disrupting the lives of workers and contributing to unpredictability in work contexts in general. Modern-day workers are finding it increasingly difficult not only to choose careers and/or find employment but, more importantly, to find meaning and a sense of purpose and fulfilment (self-actualisation or self-construction) in their work. A paradigm shift can be seen in the move towards complementing ‘quantitative’ career counselling and the traditional positivist approach by emphasising the subjective aspects of career counselling. The acceptance and implementation of self-construction and career construction counselling theory and practice have moved the field forward significantly. In addition, life design

counselling (regarded as the first coordinated counselling theory) represents a significant advancement on the work of Holland (1997) and Super's (1990) theories of vocational behaviour and development (ML Savickas, pers. comm.).

The paradigm of life design emphasises the importance of facilitating career adaptability in people to help them deal with transitions in the world of work, become employable, and discover a sense of meaning in what they do. The latter is also linked with identity (narrative) as an adaptive process. Whereas identity gives people an idea of when it is time to change, their adaptability sheds light on their capacity to change (Savickas, 2011).

Career adaptability

Broadly speaking, career adaptability comprises the coping mechanisms people use to manage career-related developmental tasks and to negotiate career-related changes and transitions. Put differently, career adaptability relates to the manner in which workers deal with repeated career-related crossroads and changes in their career-lives (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Career adaptability dimensions

The main aim of career counselling is to bolster people's ability to adapt to rapidly changing work contexts and to improve their adaptive behaviour in general, which partly explains the current emphasis on enhancing their career adaptability.

Hartung (2011), Savickas (2015a, 2015b), and Savickas and Porfeli (2012) distinguish between four different but strongly interrelated dimensions of adaptability. These are *career concern*, *career control*, *career curiosity*, and *career confidence*. *Career control* in particular concerns people's ability to apply self-regulation in career decision-making and to accept and take responsibility for their own future. In other words, it relates to people's sense of self-direction and subjective ownership of their future. People lacking career control tend to be indecisive, uncommitted, and hesitant about their future (Hartung & Taber, 2015). Conversely, people with adequate *career control* tend to be decisive and able to advise themselves and make appropriate decisions on their career-related pursuits.

Hartung and Cadaret (2017) argue that *career control* denotes an increase in people's self-regulation when making decisions about their careers. It implies also an increased willingness to take responsibility for their future, an improved sense of knowing where they are headed, greater personal ownership of their future, and enhanced capacity to take decisions regarding educational and career goals. Decision-making interventions then need to be tailored to the needs of individuals to help them improve their sense of *career control* by helping them improve their sense of self,

helping them reduce their decision-making anxiety, and enabling them to manage the conflicting or inappropriate expectations and attitudes of significant others such as parents, spouses, and children.

Savickas et al. (2009) argue that people's personal career-life stories contain idiosyncratic scripts that they can use when circumstances impose the need to shift repeatedly from work-related assignment to assignment, from job to job, or from occupation to occupation. It is the task of career counsellors to enable clients to narrate, and not merely passively remember, their career-life stories and to actively listen to and learn from these stories (narratability) by providing safe spaces where their clients feel comfortable enough to share these poignant stories that subconsciously relate to their current doubts, fears, and uncertainties. These stories have the potential to encourage and promote action by their authors. In recounting and being informed by their stories, the authors can reconstruct not only past stories and events but, most importantly, also construct new stories built on trust, increased self-knowledge, and an enhanced sense of self. They are enabled to reflect on their stories, reflect on their own reflections and, in doing so, equip themselves with the skills needed to transcend the typical hesitation that often precedes transformation (Savickas, 2005). Seen from this perspective, people's career-life stories, which usually contain a number of microplots that signify the twists and turns in their career-life journeys, have the potential to facilitate action and forward movement. They can contain the building blocks for the construction of future stories filled with hope that can help their authors resolve their career indecision (Savickas, 2008).

Rationale for the Study

There is insufficient evidence confirming that career construction counselling is the type of counselling that addresses the needs and concerns listed above (Maree, 2016). While this form of counselling is becoming utilised and adopted internationally, there is still little research to analyse its effectiveness for promoting career adaptability in minority populations. Fouad and Byars-Winston (2005) emphasise the salience of cultural differences, which often manifest during career counselling. Research is therefore needed on the influence of cultural differences on the effectiveness of career construction in particular. Very little research has been conducted and reported on career construction counselling for black people in particular – irrespective of their age or the career phase in which they find themselves. Blustein (2011), Eshelman and Rottinghaus (2015), and Maree (2016) have urged researchers to address this gap in the research. I personally have encountered large numbers of students of all races

with career indecision (often stemming from spiritual issues and fear of the unknown) who are desperate for help. Having experienced the inadequacies of using a quantitative (positivist) approach alone to career counselling, I have over time found that using a qualitative (storied) approach to career indecision yields highly satisfactory results (Maree, 2016). The dearth of publications on this topic prompted my decision to report on the implementation of career construction counselling in this specific case study.

Purpose of the Study

The study on which this article is based sought answers to the following questions.

- a. What are the career-life themes of a mid-career black man in search of spiritual wellbeing?
- b. To what extent was the CCI able to meet the man's career counselling needs?

Method

Participant and Context

The participant was a purposefully selected 43-year-old Southern Sesotho-speaking unmarried black man (Samuel – a pseudonym). According to Advameg (2017) Southern Sotho people are generally regarded as polite, well-educated, principled people who display a strong desire and inclination to serve others. Samuel and a number of other participants volunteered to act as the 'client' during a live demonstration of the administration of the CCI. The interview was conducted live in front of a small audience (the demonstration formed part of a continuing professional development course in career construction counselling in 2016). A convenience sampling style (with an element of randomness) was used. The volunteers submitted their names on small pieces of paper that were thrown into a hat. Samuel's name was (randomly) drawn by a female participant who was unwilling to reveal her name.

Currently enrolled for an MA in the Employee Assistance Programme in the Department of Social Work and Criminology of the University of Pretoria, Samuel (an ordained priest) holds a Bachelor of Theology (BTheology) degree as well as an Honours degree in Psychology. He took up a post as a police chaplain in the South African Police Service (SAPS) some seven years ago. After having been in his post for seven years, he felt a need to equip himself better for his task although (due to external factors) he had lost some of his passion for his work in the SAPS. Superficially, he appeared merely unsure about his future in the SAPS, but, at a deeper level, his insecurity seemed to stem from a profound sense of fear of the unknown.

Mode of Inquiry

I used a single, explorative, descriptive, intrinsic case study design for this particular research.

Single case studies are conducted when there is no previous research on a given topic and I was not aware of other cases that I could replicate.

Data-Gathering Strategy

The Career Construction Interview (CCI) (Savickas, 2011) was used to gather the data, and the question "How can I be useful to you?" (Savickas, 2015b) was used to initiate the conversation. Responses to this question reveal what clients hope to gain from the session(s). The CCI also comprises five other questions: whom did you admire when you were young; what is your favourite a) magazine, b) TV programme, and c) website; what is your favourite book or movie; and what are your three favourite quotations? These questions uncover clients' self-concepts and central life goals, the environments that fit clients' lifestyles and that clients prefer, characters who faced the same challenge as the clients and show how the characters solved the problem, as well as clients' advice to themselves, while the fifth question (what are your three earliest recollections?) reveals the key challenges they face (preoccupations), as well as their advice to themselves.

Rigour of the Study

I ensured peer review by collaborating with an impartial colleague, while participant review was ensured by allowing Samuel to indicate whether he agreed or disagreed with the results and inferences. I gave Samuel feedback during all phases of the research and asked him to authorise each stage of the intervention. I avoided selective use of data, meticulously documented the methods used and the decisions reached during the study, and reflected critically on my methods in order to enhance the depth and weight of the data collection and analysis. I reported the data in as much detail as possible, maintained an audit and decision trail by carefully recording all communications, and spoke to Samuel only in English. Lastly, since my subjective interpretation of the participant's responses could be considered a limitation, the services of an external coder (interrater) were acquired to enhance its trustworthiness and credibility (Bohart, Tallman, Byock & Mackrill, 2011).

Career-Life Story Assessment and Intervention

Savickas' (2011) rationale and guidelines served as the guideline for analysing the research participant's (Samuel's) responses and narratives.

Procedure

The intervention consisted of two consecutive individual career construction counselling sessions. The CCI was administered during the first session (which lasted approximately 90 minutes). In Session 2 (approximately 110 minutes), Samuel

and I discussed his responses to the questions asked during the CCI. We then discussed the way forward for him and agreed on a number of action steps. We also communicated by email a few times after the initial sessions. In a few instances, to expedite matters, I discreetly inquired whether my emails had reached him.

Ethical Issues

The research proposal went through the institutional review board at the university. Samuel was not charged for the counselling. Informed consent and written permission were obtained from him for the anonymous publication of the case study, and confidentiality was guaranteed and maintained. The other participants were also repeatedly alerted to the ethical aspects of the CCI demonstration and were allowed to ask questions, but Samuel was free either to respond or not to respond to them. The participants were not permitted to discuss the 'case' outside of the lecture venue. In addition, at the conclusion of the session, three participants were allowed to tell Samuel what listening to his career-life story meant to them personally. At the end of such a live demonstration, three attendees are customarily invited to inform the other workshop attendees (the 'audience') what the participant's career-life story and courage meant to them individually.

Samuel's welfare was ensured throughout the intervention, and care was taken to make sure that he understood all the comments. He was given ample time to clarify any questions or uncertainties.

Responses to Questions in the CCI

- a. Responding to the first question, "How can I be useful to you today?" Samuel responded:
"I am very passionate about psychology, but currently I am only doing pastoral care. I want to find a way to combine psychological and spiritual counselling. [looks upwards contemplatively] I do not have the guts to take that leap of faith to bring the two together so I can help people." In essence, this response relates to a career adaptability (career confidence) problem: The client wonders "Can I do it?"

Role models

- a. *"My parents.ⁱⁱ Mother kept our family together while my father was working on the mines. She raised us as best she could despite having to make multiple sacrifices. She would go without things she needed to make sure we got the education we needed and grew up to become who we are today. She gave us all the support and love she could with my father in the mines. He made many sacrifices to ensure that we could enjoy the basics of life."*
- b. *"My grandma. She brought me up. She was a tough woman; a strict disciplinarian. At the time, I thought she was cruel because she would even beat me up for having made little mistakes. [smiles faintly] She instilled discipline in me, as well as*

commitment to my work and to strive to do things right."

- c. *"A local priest. He was a deeply committed, devout Christian. He would go into villages, visiting the sick. I admired his simplicity, his care for those who are on the margins of society; the rejected, the sick, the outcast, the lonely [looks up, gazes into the distance. Turns his head to the left.] Thinking about that now, I believe that maybe that is why I became a Catholic priest. I deeply respected his selflessness, resilience and commitment and the sacrifices he made for his people."*

a. Favourite magazine, b. television show, and c. website

- a. [Closes his eyes slightly] *"Destiny man. It deals with black men who had made it in life. In many spheres in life – some in the mining industry and in construction. In addition, they give back to society (so society can have good role models) and help others achieve their own dreams."*
- b. *"Muvhango. It is a story of a king in a rural area. He had two wives; one here in the city and the other one in a rural region. When I watch it, I in my mind's eye return to rural life where life is simple, unlike here in the city. People in cities forget where they came from; never go back home. That reminds me that I must never, ever forget my roots."*
- c. *"Google. It opens the world to me. Answers to my questions are there at my fingertips; makes life easy. More particularly, I love visiting websites that deal with peace and tranquility."*

Favourite book or movie

"A new heaven and a new earth. The author explains that instead of focusing on the hereafter only, we should create a new earth in which we strive to help each other. It is about caring for and about others and through our influence allowing others to also care about us while we are still alive."

Favourite sayings or mottoes

[looks up] *"The golden rule: Treat others as we would like them to treat us. Not becoming bitter when we are treated unfairly."*

"Love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. [stops talking] To me, this means that God is love and that all of us are children of God. We should not have or make enemies but, instead, love people regardless of how they treat us."

"Motho ke motho kabatho ba bang. (We are what we are because of other people. We need others around us). These are the sayings that I try to live by."

Samuel's earliest recollections

Perseverance converts the (seemingly) impossible into the possible.

"Some background: I had polio and people thought I was never going to walk. At home one day, at the age of two, I slowly and agonisingly pulled myself up until I was able to stand on my own legs and began to walk forward instead of crawl. Having been led to believe that I would never walk

properly, understandably, my parents were relieved and overjoyed to witness my progress. Even though it was severe it was very, very difficult to walk, I persisted. Yes; that incident when I gave my first steps and made progress stands out in my memory."

Emotions associated with the story: Sadness for his parents but also happiness and deep gratefulness that things had changed for the better.

Acceptance, love, and caring guidance transcend loneliness and discomfort.

"At the age of six, on my first day at school, I had a terrifying experience. Without my mother, I felt 'lost' among the large number of people; overwhelmed. I went home straight after attending assembly. Remember, there were no crèches at the time to prepare me for school. [gesticulates aimlessly] Nobody to guide me. I went back home. Fortunately, my loving mother comforted me and brought me back [...] it was very tough, very, very tough and uncomfortable. [smiles sadly] Mother's loving acceptance of me, her caring guidance helped me to 'survive' on that day and in the difficult days after that."

Emotions associated with the story: Anger, pride, enjoyment, sadness about the plight of vulnerable children.

Objectifying and disrespecting others cause profound hurt and anger:

*"At the age of 11, I met **that** [speaks louder] teacher. We were given homework, and I must have forgotten to do all my homework. When she asked for our exercise books, I did not take mine out. She suddenly and inexplicably became very angry and beat me. That was the beginning of troubles, sorrow, pain, and rejection. [puts his hands in his pocket] Whether I did right or wrong, I got the same harsh treatment. At home they thought that I was at school, but I would always wait in the veld until the afternoon came (my mother never checked my books). I survived in this way for a couple of months. It was a very ugly event when the truth eventually emerged and I left school. All my friends were left behind. In the new school, I had to make new friends."*

Emotions associated with the story: Anger, anger, anger, and fear.

Requested to provide an overall heading for the three recollections, Samuel first gestured silently, then said: "Good things came out of all stories. I made it against all the odds [pauses for a moment] by persevering." He then proposed the following heading: Perseverance enables challenged youngster to succeed against all odds. Samuel's career concern is "Can I do it?" and his response to himself is "Yes, I can!"

Analysing Samuel's career-life story

Samuel's response to the introductory question sheds light on the challenge he is currently facing and also reveals a possible course of action for dealing with the challenge. He is no longer satisfied with providing 'pastoral care' only to his clients in

the SAPS. He wants to understand their underlying psychological motivations and rationale more fully, so as to better equip himself for his work, but also to help him understand himself better. His response also points to fear of the unknown, which is somewhat paradoxical as he had generally always shown himself to be comfortable with the mysterious and the unknowable. Facing a crossroads, he seeks guidance on how to regain control of his work situation and also his spiritual life.

Samuel's earliest recollections enabled us to establish his central life themes (challenges or concerns).

Samuel's **first memory** provides the background for his entire career-life story. Contracting polio as very young child presented serious challenges and put him at a major disadvantage. Against great odds, he surprised everybody by managing to walk. He has learned that anything is indeed possible to those who believe and who persist and persevere in their efforts to overcome major challenges (**a central life theme**).

Samuel's **first verb** is "*pulled [myself] up*". (Auto-)biographicity (autobiographical reasoning) (Alheit & Daussien, 1999) was facilitated in the sense that Samuel was enabled to draw on his own career-life story for advice. He assures himself that he can extricate himself from seemingly impossible situations through his own efforts. While he was recounting his stories, I repeated a number of the important words, phrases, and terms he used (such as "*pull up*", "*able to stand on my own legs*", "*walk instead of crawl*", "*it was severe (very difficult) but I persisted*", and "*progress*") and asked him to clarify their meaning. In doing so, I encouraged him not only to recount his life story (narratability) (Savickas, 2005) but, equally importantly, also to listen to and hear what he was saying to himself.

Samuel's **second story** confirms his belief that acceptance, love, and caring guidance can help people transcend loneliness and discomfort.

"A big crisis. Could only go to Catholic school; my friends went to a different school. Had to make new friends. [moves his hands agitatedly] experienced anger, asking myself: Why did they bring me here? However, I experienced feelings of happiness and pride and enjoyment once I settled in and began to enjoy my studies. For once, I felt important and bigger than the others; somehow became a role model to my siblings, who subsequently also wanted to come to school. [scratches his neck] Children have to be respected, helped, seen; not as objects but just as children."

Samuel reflected dejectedly on his **third story**. "*See, we were Roman Catholic and we could not go to an Anglican school which would result in our ex-communication. As a result of my parents taking me to a Protestant school, we were indeed ex-communicated. In the end, the whole family was impacted negatively. It was a big crisis. In our community, one had to go to a Catholic school.*

[sighs deeply] *I believe no child deserves to be treated like that* [puts his hands in his pockets].

By selecting the stories he needs to hear right now, Samuel constantly reminds himself that objectifying and disrespecting others can cause profound hurt and anger. In his current working environment, he often experiences situations similar to the one described in his third story. He realises that he cannot end the unfair treatment of people in the SAPS in his current position, which is why he is seeking a different environment where he will be able to help others by providing loving guidance, care, understanding, and acceptance. He can now choose to stay on in his current job or acquire the skills needed to find a position where he can really be who he wants to be and do what he really wants to do.

As part of the co-construction process, I informed Samuel that his story reminded me of the axiomatic “three c’s of life: choices, chances, and changes: you must make a choice to take a chance or your life will never change.”

Samuel’s role models reveal a great deal about his own traits and also confirm his key **life goals** and his proposed solutions to the challenges he is facing. He is prepared to make sacrifices to achieve his educational and life goals. He wants to give others all the support and love they need but also to instil discipline in them. As a deeply committed Christian, it is his passion to take care of the sick, the hungry, the needy, the rejected, and the lonely – outcasts on the fringes of society.

Samuel’s favourite magazine, TV programme, and website reveal his desire to be a role model for other black males. He wants to set a good personal example and to inspire them to work hard to succeed in life and to give back to society. He wants also to return to his roots and enjoy the simple things in life.

Samuel’s favourite book deals with a problem similar to the one he is facing and suggests a way to solve the problem. *A new heaven and a new earth* is about creating a world where people genuinely care about one another. Samuel, too, believes that we should strive to create such a world (‘a new earth’) while we are still alive instead of focusing our thoughts on what we believe will happen in the hereafter.

Samuel draws on his favourite quotations to give himself the advice he needs at this time. Obeying the golden rule is important to him, namely treating other people the way you would like them to treat you. He believes also that he should not be bitter about his earlier unfair treatment and that he should love his enemies, and pray for those who were unkind to him.

Next, we discussed possible courses of action that Samuel could take. First, we agreed that he should continue working in his current job while

completing his doctoral studies in social work. The title of his thesis could perhaps be changed to something like *Integrating psychological and spiritual counselling to help SAPS healthcare professionals mediate the impact of trauma*. Or *Examining the influence of trauma on SAPS healthcare professionals qualitatively and quantitatively*.

Over weekends, in his free time, he could preach to people in impoverished rural communities in particular. He could also enrol for short courses in, for example, individual and group-based spiritual, pastoral, and trauma counselling (and guidance), and family counselling. In the longer term, he could consider joining a congregation of his choice after completing his studies. He should begin investigating the latter possibility while still employed full-time by the SAPS.

Another option would be to enrol for a Master’s degree in Counselling Psychology once he had completed his doctoral studies in social work. As a counselling psychologist, he could do what he really wanted to do, namely combine psychological and spiritual counselling to heal people and, in the process, heal himself.

Samuel was assured that his fear of the unknown was quite normal. He was discreetly reminded, though, that he had always been comfortable with the unknown and the unknowable. By converting his fear into a higher level of faith, he would be better equipped to help other people cope with their deepest fears. In fact, he was already doing this in his work with members of the SAPS and their families; people often plagued by fear on a daily basis. His task would be to help others realise that they could use **their** spiritual faith to cope with their fears and anxieties.

Lastly, I asked Samuel how he had experienced the session. He thought for a while, then frowned faintly and answered: *“It is especially moving and inspiring if you hear your own voice. I thank you for allowing me to share so much about myself; to learn from myself.* [moves his hands; smiles softly and continues] *I found the experience highly inspiring. It confirmed to me that people already know what their passion is; they are already doing it, they just need confirmation. I learnt from this experience that it is possible to enable and allow clients to open up to their counsellor. The experience has helped me understand my own strengths and appreciate and deal with my current fears. It is true; we are healing at the same time as we are healing others.”*

I then suggested that he return home, consider possible options for dealing with the challenges confronting him, and report back to me if and when he so desired.

Follow-Up Session

Four months after the initial session, Samuel reported as follows: *“The intervention was excellent and I benefited greatly from it. Since our last session, things have changed a lot. I finally took a leap of faith in regard to establishing my own practice. I have finally registered with all the relevant agencies that allow me to practise as trauma counsellor. Business cards and business flyers are at the printers. Since the first session, I am focusing on making the counselling practice work. The name is Compassionate Care. My practice caters for people from all spheres of life. In a few weeks, I am going to start marketing around a huge urban area. The need for counselling is huge. The practice will cover various areas of counselling, including trauma and grief/bereavement counselling, pre-marital/marriage/relationship/relationship enrichment and pastoral counselling, career counselling, an employee assistance program, and assisting people who experience life stage-related challenges.”*

Discussion

This study concerned the career counselling needs of a mid-career black man in search of spiritual wellbeing. Career construction counselling was administered to assess its value in a non-traditional context. The results reveal that the strategy was successfully implemented to help a mid-career man manage challenges related to his specific career phase and to enable him to advise himself on his future career trajectory. The participant demonstrated greatly enhanced capacity to narrate and draw on his unique career-life story to transition from insecurity to certainty, from hopelessness to hopefulness, and from fearing the unknown to using his religion-based faith to challenge and dispel his fears and concerns. He was reminded that his task was to exhibit a level of spirituality that would inspire his clients in the SAPS to develop their own idiosyncratic way of using their faith to engage with their deepest fears. It was not his task to find solutions for them.

The approach followed in the study supports Dik and Duffy's (2009:441) view that “[o]nce clients have addressed the broad level of life purpose or meaning, a next step is for counsellors to help clients connect what they view as their life purpose or role in the larger society with their activity within the work role.” The goal in this process is helping clients align work-related pursuits in a manner that is consistent with, or that contributes to, their larger sense of life purpose or meaningfulness.

The value of the present intervention supports the views presented by Savickas et al. (2009) that professionals should assess the effectiveness of their career counselling interventions by the degree to which they can be shown to produce notable

changes in people's career-life stories (Soresi, Nota, Ferrari & Solberg, 2008).

It has often been stated that a holistic approach to interventions in healthcare settings should include the three facets of body, mind, and spirit but that, in practice, this aim is rarely achieved (WHOQOL SRPB Group, 2006). Likewise, in career counselling, the aspect of spirituality has not received sufficient attention, which is strange when one considers the powerful association between spiritual and mental health and people's careers (Maree, 2016). Career counselling and therapy overlap and can therefore not be viewed in isolation. In this regard, Niles and Pate (1989) maintain: a) that the distinction generally drawn between career counselling and mental health is artificial at best; and b) that very few aspects of human life are more personal than career counselling-related choices and interventions. Sadly, though, assessing concomitant mental health issues in career counselling is uncommon. This, despite the fact that career-related challenges (e.g. career indecision) are frequently intimately interconnected with mental health challenges (Blustein, 2011; Blustein & Spengler, 1995; Lenz, Peterson, Reardon & Saunders, 2010; Swanson, 2002).

The counselling strategy and style advocated in this article can help career counselling practitioners address the disparity between career counselling practice and theory. It shows that the integration of psychodynamic (narrative), differential, and developmental factors presents career counsellors with a theoretically sound conceptual framework (Savickas, 2015a) for the design and implementation of a career counselling practice whose success can easily be measured. In addition, it confirms the earlier research findings of Hartung and Taber (2015), Heppner, Lee, Heppner, McKinnon, Multon and Gysbers (2004), and Masdonati, Massoudi and Rossier (2009), who found that individual career counselling of this kind can help solve career counselling and choice-related problems (Heppner, Multon, Gysbers, Ellis & Zook, 1998). It also confirms Peng and Chen's (2014) views on the role of spirituality in career indecision. The authors argue that people's career indecision is moderated once they obtain clarity regarding their spiritual beliefs, their purpose in life and what constitutes meaning in life.

Limitations

I took trouble to create a safe space for the participant to share his most intimate thoughts openly and freely. However, given the context of the study, the participant may, whether consciously or subconsciously, have been hesitant to share some of his deepest thoughts. I readily admit my bias towards people who have suffered in life and my subjective immersion in the research. Lastly, despite my having taken all reasonable steps to

ensure that the study complied with the methodological rigours established for case study research, other researchers may well have interpreted the findings differently and reached different conclusions.

Advice to Others Who May Wish to Conduct This Type of Intervention and Analysis

First, they need to understand and accept the rationale for the implementation of a narrative approach to career counselling. Second, training in this counselling modality is essential. Third, the successful implementation of this approach in cross-cultural contexts requires training in the basic elements of cross-cultural (career) counselling. Fourth, advice given to clients should be limited to a minimum.

Recommendations for Future Research

First, the approach advocated here should be administered in group contexts with full reporting of the findings. Second, the long-term effect of this approach should be examined. Third, the technique should be carried out with clients in diverse contexts to establish its trustworthiness in non-traditional contexts. Fourth, the development and use of a spirituality scale to identify people's deep-seated themes and motives, in addition to the CCI, should receive attention.

Conclusion

The participant's willingness and capacity to reflect on several career-life stories during and also for an extended period after the intervention, and to work towards bringing about substantial changes to his career-life, were demonstrated in the study. The approach and strategy highlighted here can be used to help people generally and people in specific career phases especially (in this case, a black man facing a career crossroads) negotiate their search for career counselling generally and spiritual wellbeing specifically. Clarifying and understanding his initial hurt and making the most of his new-found insight helped the participant re-devise his career-life, actively master what he had passively suffered (Freud, 1963; Savickas, 2011), and 'hold' himself and others (Winnicott, 1971). Assessing the participant and providing career counselling as well as psychotherapy thus occurred seamlessly and naturally. The assessment and therapy discussed here indicates how career counselling assessment, intervention, and therapy can be integrated for the benefit of clients facing career challenges in general and challenges of a spiritual nature in particular, negotiating career transitions, and redesigning their career-life stories.

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Notes

- i. Samuel's verbatim responses have been edited only lightly to conserve their authenticity.
- ii. Guiding lines rather than role models.
- iii. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.

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