
Reader

Summary of:
**Career learning in a
changing world: The role
of emotions**

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This Reader is made for the benefit of the Leonardo project

Career Learning as a Success Factor for Lifelong Learning

510069-LLP-1-2010-1-NL-LEONARDO-LMP

“Career learning in a changing world: The role of emotions”

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(International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling 24, 2002)

Research of literature

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



*Existing theories of career learning do not adequately take into account the uncertain and rapidly changing conditions for careers in the modern world. In the existing theories emotions such as anxiety and uncertainty have no relevance for career learning and career identity construction. F. Meijers' model of identity construction examines **the role of emotions** in career learning and how such a view might change career counselling.*

The flexibilization of labour relations (e.g. temporary and on-call employment, multiple employability, disappearance of occupations with clear social roles and clear career paths, disappearance of lifetime employment, necessity to change occupations or functions, diminishing clarity over occupational requirements) has led to the fact that flexibility and the ability to keep learning have become more important than specific occupational knowledge and skills. Nowadays careers are less and less developing vertically. Individuals are subjected to more career risks and have to develop into competent career actors. Modern employees must become "reflective practitioners" to stay employable. They must develop the competence to continually explicate the meaning of what they do, both for the organization for which they work and in relation to their own life. This competency to identify with and actively to explore the world of work may be called the competence to construct career identity.

In the present situation one needs to be able to make career decisions that not only take into account a much wider range of possibilities, but also are founded in one's feelings and emotions. This fact is widely recognized and accepted in the practice of career guidance and counselling: methods making use of the expression of emotions and the reflections upon emotions take this fact into account (self-confrontation method, biographical methods, value based personality development) are increasingly popular.

Research shows that youth today are very conscious of the uncertainty of their future, that youth consider the future too uncertain to plan far in advance (Annotation: F. Meijers refers to research results from Germany, Netherlands, Belgium originally from the years 1995 to 2000). The knowledge that their future is uncertain triggers negative emotions among many young people. In post-modern society the acquisition of the competence to construct an identity has become a learning process that - for many young people - begins with uncertainty and the negative emotions that arise from such uncertainty. Because of changing demands young people nowadays can only make partial use of the experiences of previous generations. They are confronted by the large degree of uncertainty that is a consequence of rapidly changing social-cultural and social-economic relations. In spite of their insecurity young people are able to independently construct an identity that differs from that of their parents. Research shows that the great majority of young people feel, that they are the master of their own fate (Alsaker & Flammer, 1999), and they feel ready, willing and able to find their own identity in life.

Identity learning and emotions

"Identity learning" means the ongoing activity of trying to make sense of oneself and what one is doing and experiencing, of one's past, present and future. Identity is a relational concept: people define who they are within activities and institutions, and in negotiating their position, their style and their action-possibilities within them. Conscious and objectified identity conceptions make use of language concepts arranged into personality narratives. Identity is not something that happens, but something that an individual constructs with the help of culturally available building materials. Information obtains meaning for one's life, when it is assimilated into one's life story.



Identity learning is an intellectual and rational process, in which emotions have a key role. Identity formation is a process in which cognitions and emotions are balanced gradually, and in a dialogical way (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 2001).

Identity development based on life experiences can be understood as a learning process that starts with an experience, which is coupled with emotion - positive emotion, e.g. opportunity for growth or negative emotion, e.g. conflict, shortcoming, inability, or uncertainty. In both cases it is what Charlotte Bühler called “boundary experiences”: an experience, in which the individual experiences the boundary of his existing self-concept. To solve this conflict, the individual seeks and constructs a balance between emotions and cognitions by using concepts and shared meanings that are available in the social environment and by entering into an existing discourse.

The individual tries to understand, what is happening to him/her by finding – together with others – the concepts that give an explanation that is logically and emotionally satisfactory. Understanding a situation is not enough, the situation must make personal (emotional) sense for the individual, so that he/she is motivated and able to act (intuitive sense-giving). The emotions that were evoked by situations and that are initially not understood must be made transparent with the help of concepts.

Gendlin (1981) distinguishes six phases in this process:

1. Clearing the space in order to feel that which is creating a tension
2. Experiencing a felt sense for the problem (attention is turned toward feeling)
3. Getting a handle on it (a word or image must arise out of the “experienced feeling”)
4. Resonating the handle (one checks whether the word or image does indeed fit; it should bring a sense or relief)
5. Asking (What is it in the whole problem that determines this quality; the result is a shift, a perspective transformation)
6. Receiving (one considers this shift)

Expressing their experiences in symbols enables individuals to change their perspective. Metaphors help individuals from different backgrounds to intuitively understand something through the use of symbols and the power of imagination. Analogies make the similarities and differences between ideas clear and constitute an intermediate step between imaginative power and logical thinking.

SUMMARY: Identity construction is seen to be a circular learning process in which experiences and the self-concept are related through using concepts and endowing them with personal sense. Identifications with persons, roles, organisations, values are reinterpretation of the self and the situation. Identity is a configuration of meanings, but this configuration will change constantly when new elements are given a place and are related to experience.

To construct a career identity that enables the individual to find his/her way in turbulent and insecure labour relations at least three conditions must be fulfilled:

1. There must be an opportunity to undergo boundary experiences and to give them meaning with the help of culturally available array of meanings.
2. There must be opportunity and room for using the imagination to enable the individual to carry out the process of discursive meaning-giving and intuitive sense-giving in an adequate way, and thus to construct a career identity. Imagination enables the



individual to transcend the given reality and to build an insightful appreciation of how things might become and how one could play a role in this becoming.

3. There must be an emotionally “safe” environment that allows the individual to handle emotions (e.g. uncertainty) in a productive and creative way. If emotions are ever to become a functional part of learning process whereby a career identity may be constructed, emotions have to be valued, emotions should be treated with caution, and emotions demand respect / concentrated attention.