Enhancing group self- and career construction counselling: A review of outcome research

Jacobus G. Maree *** ,** University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education, Pretoria, South Africa. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9492-8445

Abstract.

This article reviews the outcomes of five purposely selected group career construction research projects conducted in a developing country context. Thematic data analysis was done on the results of these projects to identify qualitatively the strengths and areas for development (weaknesses) of the approach followed in these projects. The findings demonstrated the value of career constructing in contexts that differed substantially from the context in which the career construction counselling was originally developed. Overall, the quantitative findings in regard to career adaptability revealed that the women benefited more from the intervention than the men. The findings in regard to career decision-making difficulties also uncovered gender differences. The qualitative outcomes revealed that the participants' psychological self as an autobiographical author benefited more from the intervention than either the social actor or the motivated agent. Future research should focus on the application of group career construction counselling with larger groups, using instruments based on career construction counselling theory developed locally. Moreover, given current developments (including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on employment), special emphasis should be placed on research among the unemployed.

Keywords: psychological self, integrative group career construction, Global South, unemployment

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* ADDRESS OF CORRESPONDENCE: Jacobus G. Maree, University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education, Pretoria, South Africa.
Email address: kobus.maree@up.ac.za

Introduction

Fundamental changes in the occupational world during the past 120 years or so have traumatised many workers and given rise to escalating insecurity, uncertainty, discontinuity, alienation, and disruption in the workplace. the entire global economy (including job security). Workers worldwide, especially vulnerable workers, are experiencing major financial and emotional challenges. Kelly (2020) maintains that the Covid-19 pandemic will trigger a rise in unemployment, shifts in occupational trends, and changes in work content globally.

To meet the occupational needs of people in post-corporate, post-traditional societies, an innovative approach to career counselling is needed. Such an approach should include the development of new strategies and interventions, including narrative as well as positivist questionnaires. Savickas (2019a) maintains that the shift from traditional careers to customised, personalised careers has inspired a fundamental life-history passage. Today, more than ever before, people have to respond effectively to fundamental challenges by attaining defining self-identities. The degree of fluidity and uncertainty in today's world has increased the need to enable workers to draw on their autobiographies to help them navigate numerous work-related transitions. Workers are not guaranteed either psychological or material wellbeing and now need to acquire adaptability and identity (twin meta-competencies) to help them "address restraints that may both precede and exceed them" (Savickas (2019a, n.p.).

For the above reasons, my co-researchers' and my research draws primarily on career construction to guide our attempts to understand vocational and career behaviour in these troubling times and consequently plan and guide our intervention strategies to help people first write and then enact their idiosyncratic life stories.

Career Construction Theory (CCT)

I used Savickas' (2019b) career construction theory (CCT) as the theoretical and conceptual framework to gather, analyze, and interpret data in all five of the research studies examined in the current research. In the first place, CCT helps career counsellors facilitate the changes in people's lives that make their lives more meaningful. In the second place, CCT reinforces people's self-construction. CCT thus comprises an element of self-construction..This framework merges personal (private) meanings relating to earlier memories, present experiences, and future intentions into ever-evolving, key life themes. It advances the idea of the subjective career to promote critical (self-)reflection and also encompasses biographical reflexivity, which is uncovered through conversation and implemented through work behaviour. Career counsellors and clients jointly construct, deconstruct, reconstruct, and co-construct (interweave) clients' micro-stories into such a macro-story. Drawing on career self- and construction counselling helps realise the two aims

Self-Construction Theory (SCT)

Like CCT, self- construction theory (SCT) (Guichard, 2005) promotes the elicitation of people's career life-stories, linking them to feasible career-life projects. SCT also helps people reconstruct their shifting life identities and acquire more stable and 'true' identities that can enhance their ability to live purposeful lives. These newly established identities manifest in explicit as well as implicit or less explicit responses to the questions: "Who and where am I?", "Where am I headed?", and "Why do I live (and work)?" or "What does my life mean and what is its purpose?" Savickas (Mark Savickas, personal communication, 16 September, 2015) explains that the life

design counselling (LDC) paradigm is a comprehensive theory that draws on CCT (Savickas, 2019b) as well as dialogical SCC (Guichard, 2009).

Savickas et al.'s (2009) Model of Life Design Counselling

According to Collin and Guichard (2011), life design counselling (LDC) has three aims. First, LDC helps people elucidate and understand their central life themes. Second, it enables them to clarify the role of work and what it means to them. Third, LDC enables people to access viewpoints that can help them experience meaning in their lives, (re-)ignite their sense of hope, and eventually experience purpose-filled lives. The following constructs lie at the heart of LDC: i. The construct of (clarifying) one's (self-)identity, ii. the notion of narratability (recounting) and drawing on one's life story (autobiography), and iii. the idea of intentionality (Savickas, 2019a) or enacting one's key life themes by taking purposeful action to enhance the experience of 'working' (Lent, 2012), which includes making social contributions.

Need for Innovative Group Career Construction Counselling

Over the past three decades, the value of using one-on-one career construction counselling to re-instill in people a sense of emotional wellbeing and to help them construct and use (auto-)biographical bridges to (re-)construct their damaged sense of self and move forward in harmony with an ever-changing world has been shown in numerous studies. Researchers such as Taber, et al. (2011), Del Corso et al. (2011), Maree, (2020), and Taber and Briddick (2011) also demonstrated the value of one-on-one career construction counselling in individual contexts as well as in "matters pertaining to motivation, performance, stress, and overall life satisfaction" (Klehe, et al., 2021, p. 7).

Van der Horst and Klehe (2019) state that few scholars agree on how best to meet the career counselling needs of large groups of people, for instance, structured interventions (Oliver & Spokane, 1988), counselling in group format (Brown & Krane, 2000), or interventions based on information communication technology In the latest meta-analysis of the effect of career interventions overall, Whiston et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis of the value and impact of group career counselling for employable or work-age people uncovered nine (quantitative) research projects involving this specific population. What research has been conducted has been done mostly by a handful of researchers who have demonstrated the value of the approach, particularly with people from marginalised and minority communities. This research includes the work of Albien (2019), Maree (2019), Maree, et al. (2018), Sethlare, et al. (2017), and Watson (2013).. Likewise, very little research on the value and feasibility of life design-related interventions has been conducted in other African or Global South developing countries generally.

Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to identify qualitatively the strengths and areas for development (weaknesses) of the approach followed in these projects. Specific research questions were:

i.   What were the most and least pertinent quantitative outcomes of the integrative group career construction counselling interventions revealed in these projects?

ii.   What were the most and least salient qualitative outcomes of the integrative group career construction counselling interventions revealed in these projects?

iii.   How can the value of similar projects in the future be enhanced?

Methodology

Participants and contexts

Five different groups of participants participated in the interventions discussed in this article (for more details, see Table 1).

Mode of Inquiry and Research Method

This article reviews (meta-analyses) the outcomes of five purposely selected integrative qualitative-quantitative group career construction counselling research projects that differed in terms of the context where the interventions took place as well as the demographics, mother tongue, and level of training of the participants. The two research hypotheses that guided the five research projects were the following: The integrative group intervention i. will increase the post-intervention *CAAS* total and subscale scores of the participants, and ii. will decrease their post-intervention scores on the *CDDQ*. Like Cardoso et al. (2019), I took my cue from Stiles' (2007) notion of theory-building case studies. Stiles (2007) proposes that researchers should draw on related case studies to develop further 'general' theory (and practice) by examining and building on the idiosyncratic characteristics of each case individually and all cases collectively. Even research that yields null or 'negative' outcomes tells an important story. In a similar vein, Cardoso et al. (2019) contend that "[i]f a diversity of cases fit a particular theory, then our confidence in the theory increases. If a case challenges a theory, an opportunity arises to adjust, revise, or reject it" (p. 195).

Data were gathered by carefully analysing a number of these projects until data saturation was reached (Booth, 2002). The intervention comprised three broad phases informed by career construction counselling (Cardoso et al, 2019; Savickas, 2020, 2021). (1) People are encouraged people to recount (construct) their micro or small (life) stories ((listening to and hearing themselves (critical self-reflection)) and facilitating meta-reflection. (2) The 'small' stories are deconstructed and reconstructed jointly by counsellors and participants into larger stories (the stories are then authorised or validated). (3) Hope-filled future stories are co-constructed. Strategies for bringing about action and forward movement are designed, 'contracted', and implemented to effect change in participants' lives. The time frames involved in each phase are flexible and depend on the "flow of the relationship between [participant] and counselor" (Cardoso et al. 2019, p. 190).

More particularly, the review covered the extent to which the intervention enhanced what is described as the psychological self (PS) (McAdams, 2013). It also covered the fundamental differences between guidance, education, and counselling as distinct career interventions for people as social actors, motivated agents, and autobiographical authors (Savickas, 2019a, b).

Adapted Action Research

Limited progress has been made in tailoring the approach advocated here for developing countries, and it is clear that additional research is needed in a broad array of Global South contexts before any claims about achieving 'definitive outcomes' can be made. My research colleagues and I therefore implemented an adapted action research approach to administering a group career construction intervention in a developing country context. Our aim was to examine the extent and nature of the change achieved by the intervention discussed here (Ferrance, 2000).

More specifically, we wanted to heighten awareness of the power of career constructing and promote (social) change transformation, emancipation, and empowerment in the participants (Wink, 2005) (see Maree 2018, for more details).

Data-Gathering Sources

All the data were obtained from the reported outcomes of the five research projects listed in Table 2.

Qualitative assessment*. The *Career Interest Profile* (*CIP,* Version 6; Maree, 2017a) was used during the intervention to elicit self-designing as well as career construction-related information. Premised on CCT, the *CIP* was developed predominantly from the storied but also the developmental perspectives on career counselling in diverse (South) African contexts. It was used to elicit life themes, career interests, strengths and areas for development, and to bolster narratability, autobiographicity, self-reflection, and reflexivity. The trustworthiness of the first three parts of the *CIP* has been demonstrated in numerous studies (Di Fabio & Maree, 2013), and the fourth part has exhibited satisfactory test-retest reliability and construct validity.

Quantitative assessment*.* The *Maree Career Matrix* (*MCM;* Maree, 2017b, Maree & Taylor, 2016) was used to assess the participants' career interests and confidence in their aptitude to do well in certain career categories. The *MCM* is premised on trait-and-factor (Parsons, 1909), developmental (Super, 1957), and social cognitive career theories (Lent et al., 1994). In the current study, the *MCM* exhibited good psychometric properties, including test-retest reliability, and good reliability generally (all categories yielded reliability coefficients >.70). Rasch analysis confirmed that all 19 interest and confidence scales measured a single construct.

Outcome Measures

Career adaptability. The *Career Adapt-Abilities Scale-South Africa* (*CAAS-SA)* (Maree, 2012) was used to measure career adaptability and, in doing so, demonstrated good psychometric properties.

Career decision-making difficulties. The *Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire* (*CDDQ*; Gati, 2011) was used to measure career decision-making difficulties. It has three major career decision-making difficulties subscales, namely Lack of Readiness (Readiness), Lack of Information (Lack of Info), and Inconsistent Information (InInfo). Each major subscale has specific difficulties subcategories. Readiness comprises Lack of Motivation (RM), General Indecisiveness (RI), and Dysfunctional Beliefs (RD). Lack of Info comprises the Career Decision-Making Process (LP), the Self (LS), Occupations (LO), and Ways of Obtaining Information (LA). Lastly, IncInfo comprises Unreliable Information (IU), Internal Conflicts (II), and External Conflicts (IE) (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996).

Intervention

The broad approach summarized in Table 1 was followed in all the group projects. The approach was flexible, with the unique needs of the participants and other stakeholders taking precedence over other concerns. Due to space constraints, interested readers are referred to, for instance, Maree (2018) and Maree (2020) for detailed information about the intervention.

Table 1: Summarised explanation of how *MCM* and *CIP* online responses ('reports') can be integrated

Phase	Step	Detailed explanation.
1. Eliciting the life story		Biographical information is obtained first, whereafter assessment is done online. Participants first complete the *MCM* and then the *CIP*. The *MCM* and *CIP* online reports are released online immediately after completion of each instrument.
2. Authorising (validating) the life story)		*The CIP* and *MCM* online 'reports' are analysed and interpreted in accordance with broad guidelines that enhance reflection and reflexivity. This phase comprises a three-step strategy to help participants integrate all career-related information into a feasible career map or plan.
	i	Participants' responses are presented and reflected on.
	ii	'Dots' are connected to make sense of participants' reflections.
	iii	Participants' mission and vision statements are written.
3. Designing action plans to generate action and forward movement		Participants are provided guidelines on how to conduct job analysis in a way that promotes forward movement in their life stories.
4. Obtaining feedback		Participants' return home. They are asked to reflect on their reflections, note how they experienced the intervention, and provide feedback to the career counsellor regularly. The information yielded during feedback helps counsellors monitor participants' progress and provide further support as and when needed. Feedback is also important information regarding what changes should be made to the intervention to improve its value and quality. This step also shows counsellors' concern for participants.

Data Analysis

A marginally adapted version of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was used to extract, analyse, and report themes and subthemes across the five data sets. In Step 1, I familiarised myself with the data. In Step 2, I read and re-read the data. Preliminary codes were generated systematically. I organised the codes into possible themes and subthemes in Step 3, reviewed these in Step 4, and defined and labelled them in Step 5. In Step 6, I wrote the article.

Due to space constraints, no verbatim comments (participant appraisals of and reflections on the intervention) are given in the article. However, all the qualitative themes and subthemes reported (see Table 3) are based primarily on these comments.

Inductive Data Analysis Approach

An inductive approach was followed in the data analysis (allowing themes and subthemes to emerge free of any preconceived notions).

Results

Quantitative results

Although mixed results were obtained, a number of patterns and trends could be discerned (see Table 1 below).

Table 2: Projects and project time frames

	Project	Participants	Time frames	Assessment instruments used	Presentation mode	Outcome variables	Research outcomes
1	Junior Tukkie (JT project)	116 promising, disadvantaged black (and also a small percentage of white) learners attending a six-day long 'winter school'.	June-July (2018 2019)	*MCM/CIP/ CAAS/CDDQ*	Blended and synchronous (online assessment followed by in-person feedback in the physical workshop venue).	**Quantitative** Decreased career adaptability and career decision-making difficulties. **Qualitative** Enhanced narratability, autobiographicity, reflection, and reflexivity.	**Career adaptability** While only the boys' Concern scores showed significant improvement, the girls' post-test scores on Concern, Control (very small), Curiosity, and *CAAS* total showed practically meaningful improvement. **Career decision-making difficulties** i. Readiness The decrease in both the boys' and girls' career decision-making difficulties was practically meaningful in the specific difficulties category Dysfunctional Beliefs (RD). ii. Lack of Information Both the boys' and girls' career decision-making difficulties decreased practically meaningfully in all the difficulties subcategories. It is important to note that the improvement in the boys' post-scores was practically more meaningful than that of the girls). iii. Inconsistent Information (IncInfo). Both the boys' and girls' career difficulties decreased in the specific difficulties category Internal Conflicts (II). In the specific category Unreliable Information (IU), the girls' difficulties decreased practically meaningfully. In the specific category External Conflicts (IE), the boys' difficulties decreased practically meaningfully.

| 2 | Good Work Foundation (GWF project) | 31 unemployed people from a resource-scarce, deep rural region of South Africa who were unable to find any form of decent work or to be accepted for further study on account of their poor marks at the end of Grade 12 enrolled at the Good Work Foundation Digital Learning Centre (Hazyview). | 2017 (March-September)

 2018 (March-September)

 2019 (April-September) | *MCM/CIP/ CAAS/CDDQ* | Ditto | Ditto | **Career adaptability**

 While the men's scores showed no meaningful improvement, the women's Concern, Control, Confidence, and overall career adaptability increased practically meaningfully.

 Career decision-making difficulties

 i. Readiness

 The men's career decision-making difficulties showed a practically meaningful decrease in the specific category Ri (General Indecisiveness). The women's career decision-making difficulties in RM (Lack of Motivation) decreased practically meaningfully.

 ii. Lack of Information.

 The men's post-scores in the specific category La (Ways to Obtain Additional Information) decreased practically meaningfully. The women's post-scores in Ls (Self) showed a practically meaningful decrease.

 iii. Inconsistent Information (IncInfo).

 The men's post-scores showed decreased difficulties in the specific category Internal Conflicts (Ii). The women's post-scores showed decreased difficulties in the specific category Ie (External Conflicts) only. |
| 3 | Independent secondary school project | 57 participants attending an independent school in a rural part of South Africa. | 2017 | *MCM/CIP/ CAAS* | Ditto | **Quantitative**

 Decreased career adaptability.

 Qualitative

 Enhanced narratability, autobiographicity, | The boys' and girls' career adaptability improved meaningfully in all the *CAAS* subscales. No gender-based differences were found. |

						reflection, and reflexivity.
4	i. South African Association of Career Development (SACDA) (Correctional Services project)	72 participants in a correctional services manufacturing workshop (33 officials, 39 inmates). In-person (first part only)	2019 (February-March)	*MCM/CIP/ CAAS*	Ditto	Ditto	The participants' Concern, Curiosity, and Confidence, and overall career adaptability increased. The effect sizes were small.
	ii.	85 participants in a deep rural area.	2020 (September-October)	*MCM*/CIP/ CAAS/ CDDQ	Ditto	Ditto	Neither the male nor female participants' Concern, Control, Curiosity, Confidence, or overall career adaptability increased statistically significantly. However, careful analysis of the effect sizes revealed that the increase in the women's post-scores in the Curiosity, Confidence, and total *CAAS* scores was larger than the effect sizes of the improvement in the men's post-scores in those fields.

Career Adaptability

The main themes that emerged from the findings (Table 1) were that the women consistently showed more practically meaningful differences between pre- and post-scores in general than the men. More specifically, the women's sense of control over their circumstances especially appeared to have been bolstered to a larger extent than in the case of the men.

Career Decision-Making Difficulties

Generally speaking, in Projects 1 and 2, both genders appear to have benefited from the intervention. A number of gender-based differences also emerged from the findings.

Qualitative Outcomes

The inductively identified themes and subthemes are shown in Table 1 (below).

Table 3: Inductively derived themes and subthemes

Themes	Subtheme(s)
1. Narratability (competence to express deepest needs and feelings)	
	i. Enacting personal authorship
	ii. Narrating the self-identity into being by enacting personal authorship
	ii. Self-discovery (enhanced sense of self)
2. Autobiographicity (relying on own story to navigate transitions)	
	i. Self-advising (embracing the value of following one's own advice)
	ii. Constructing and using biographical bridge (drawing on the past to design a hope-filled future)
	iii. Enhanced sense of self- and career identity (acquiring a 'new' sense of who person is)
	iv. Central life themes (gaining insight into central life themes)
	v. Life story as facilitator (employing the Australian aborigines' perspective – born into 'songlines' but only grasping part of that songline (Chatwin, 1987))
3. Reflecting (contemplating own life story)	
	i. Self-reflection (taking a step back and contemplating one's earlier thoughts and actions)
	ii. Meta-reflection (reflecting on reflections)
	iii. Enlightenment (connecting conscious self-knowledge (overt) with subconscious insight (covert)
	iv. Reflexivity (drawing on self-reflections to plan the future)

4. Emancipation and empowerment (freeing oneself from tolerating 'difficulties' to converting them into themes of hope and inspiration)

    i. Critical consciousness sense (mindfulness of strengths and opportunities)

    ii. Change readiness (readiness to enact change in the life story)

    iii. Self-determination (moving from enduring 'hurt' passively to embracing it actively and converting it into hope)

    iv. Self-efficacy (rekindled sense of inner strength)

5. Making meaning (actively pursuing meaning in actions previously regarded as uninteresting and meaningless)

6. Mattering consciousness (eagerness to 'hold' others and make social contributions)

7. Actionality (active pursuance of opportunities)

    i. Taking and enacting first action steps to promote forward movement)

    ii. Navigating contextual challenges (devising new strategies to deal with contextual difficulties)

    iii. Self-design and career construction (actively designing the 'new' self and constructing a career)

8. Bridging consciousness levels (connecting conscious knowledge about the self with subconscious insights about the self)

    i. Enhanced self-insight (noting scores on the test and examining deeper meaning of 'stories')

ii.   Integration (scores and stories are integrated)

The eight themes and subthemes that emerged from the secondary qualitative analysis (see Table 3 above) relate predominantly to the 'narrative author', but, albeit to a lesser extent, to the 'social actor' and the 'motivated agent'. Theme 4, Emancipation and Empowerment, emerged predominantly from the female participants' responses.

Discussion

I begin this discussion by elucidating the most pertinent quantitative outcomes of the intervention demonstrated in the five. Next, I discuss the most salient qualitative findings. However, it should be stated at the outset that very few group projects have been conducted to assess the validity of group interventions based on self- and career construction as a specific life-design discourse. Accordingly, I was not able to compare the findings presented here with a large number of previous research projects.

Quantitative Outcomes

Career Adaptability

The finding that the female participants' post-intervention *CAAS* scores consistently showed more practically meaningful improvement than the male participants' post-intervention scores as well as the finding that, in disadvantaged contexts especially, the female participants' sense of control had improved, supports the findings of authors such as Maree (2017c; 2018; 2020), Albien (2019), and Naidoo et al. (2019). Both gender groups indicated that virtually all facets of their career adaptability had increased practically meaningfully. In Project 4 (in which inmates, as well as a number of officials, participated), practically meaningful improvement was shown in general. However, no improvement was found in regard to Career Control. This is understandable, given the fact that the research involved participants in a correctional services facility (in which their control over what was happening was limited). In Project 5, it was interesting to note that, while no statistically significant differences were found, analysis of the two gender groups' effect sizes revealed that the increase in the female participants' post-scores in the Curiosity, Confidence, and total *CAAS* scores was bigger than the improvement in the male participants' post-scores in those fields. The difference between the two genders' post-scores in Control, though, was negligible. This finding, too, made sense as the region in which this project was conducted was by far the most disadvantaged of all the regions considered in the study. It would be unrealistic to expect the participants to show meaningful improvement in regard to Control after a brief intervention that did not relate to the context in which they found themselves.

Career Decision-Making Difficulties

Overall, both gender groups' career decision-making difficulties decreased to an unsatisfactory extent during the intervention. This was no doubt because "[t]he reality of decision ambiguity is attributable to the psychological, socioeconomic, and sociocultural contexts of contemporary career decision-making" (Xu, 2021, p. 2). The three contexts listed by Xu (2021) underline the challenging, disadvantaged contexts in which the first three projects were conducted. However, it was encouraging to note that both gender groups in some instances showed some decrease in their difficulties after the intervention. To a certain extent, the findings support those of Perdrix, et al. (2012) that narrative career counselling can decrease people's career decision-making difficulties. Xu and Tracey (2015) highlight facets of career decision-making uncertainty such as limited or inhibited access to information, contradictory opinions of significant others regarding people's possible career choices as well as the unpredictability of the future. These authors contend that these facets "will likely persist despite decision-making efforts undertaken during a given window of career decision-making" (p. 2). Given that these issues clearly manifested among the participants in the outcome research investigated in the current

study, it is clear that thorough analysis and resolution of the idiosyncratic career decision-making challenges of people in similar circumstances is essential.

Qualitative Outcomes

The qualitative findings support Maree's (2019) finding that integrative, qualitative-quantitative group career construction counselling can promote counsellors' efforts to help people construct, deconstruct, reconstruct, and co-construct their life stories when the need to rewrite these stories arises. More specifically, an important finding was that the intervention prompted the participants to reflect on their lives and to take feasible steps to bring about change and transformation in their lives. This finding supports the findings of Jennings and Lynn (2005) as well as Maree (2018) in this regard. The sense of hope, empowerment, purpose, and calling (Hall & Chandler, 2005) that relates strongly positively to the notion of 'positive uncertainty' (Gelatt, 1998) revealed by the analysis of the participants' qualitative responses (across the five projects) is encouraging.

Integrated Assessment of the Review Outcomes

Overall, the findings confirm the value of group career construction counselling as was also found by authors such as Santilli et al. (2019) and Cardoso et al. (2017).

Impact of The Current Research on the Social Actor, the Motivated Agent, and the Autobiographical Author

The intervention focused on the 'narrative author' in the first place (McAdams, 2013; Savickas, 2020) primarily and on career adaptability and career decision-making challenges secondarily. It is clear from the qualitative analysis especially that the intervention strongly enhanced the self-conceptualising of the 'autobiographical author' who produces (Savickas, 2020) a "reflexivity schema and identity strategy for authoring a vocational identity and composing a career story" (p. 169). However, the intervention enhanced only to a limited extent the "self-organizing … yet self-regulating and self-conceiving" (p. 169) of the 'social actor' as well as the career adaptability of the 'motivated agent' as motives begin to "explain the actor's strivings" (p. 169).

The predominantly narrative methods used during the intervention to a lesser extent speak to the participants' (past, present, and future) time perspective, their decision-making capacity, their exploratory behaviour, as well as their sense of self or self-esteem than to their narratability and autobiographicity (exemplified by the reflexivity and sense-making displayed by the 'narrative author'). It is an open question whether employing different quantitative measures to assess the impact of the assessment would have yielded different results. Using (quantitative) measures of self-reflection, reflexivity, and meaning-making to assess the direct effects of the intervention might have been a more appropriate strategy as the intervention addressed these outcome variables directly. Likewise, altering the intervention slightly to enhance the needs of the social actor and the motivated agent could result in enhanced social actorship and motivated agency.

Theoretical and Methodological Issues That Remain a Key Topic for Future Research, Practice, And Policy

Differentiating Between Group Career Counselling Assessment And Group Career Counselling intervention

While group career counselling assessment from a quantitative, positivist perspective (and subsequent provision of career counselling in individual or group contexts) does occur in many schools in affluent areas in Global North as well as Global South countries, the kind of group self- and career construction counselling intervention discussed in this article occurs only very rarely. This imbalance calls for urgent attention.

Gender-Based Differences

The integrative assessment overall confirmed that the female participants benefited more from the intervention than their male counterparts. Given the dismal situation of women in disadvantaged contexts especially, this is not surprising. In many instances, their sense of self is inadequate; they have little control over their circumstances; they are still not regarded as equal to men; their perceived and real opportunities to design themselves and construct their careers successfully are severely impeded; and others' perceptions about them and their chances of achieving success in life are generally negative and disparaging. In addition, the high levels of poverty and disadvantage evident in the current study correlated strongly negatively with the female participants' future prospects. However, the qualitative outcomes of the study also confirmed the female participants' desire for emancipation and empowerment.

Value of Online, Blended, Hybrid, as Well as In-Person Group Assessment and Intervention

It is clear that the blended approach applied in the projects examined worked well. In high-income countries, group online counselling is more accessible than in-person counselling and also more affordable. Thus, this mode of delivery of counselling can be implemented to render career counselling to much larger numbers of people in a moderately short space of time (Cherry, 2020). As the outcomes of this research confirmed, in rural areas especially, due to environmental barriers, connectivity can be a major barrier to the delivery of career counselling. Information retrieval generally occurs at a very slow rate and is more expensive than in more affluent areas. The upshot is that poor and marginalised people are largely excluded from group career counselling.

In the projects listed in Table 1, as well as in numerous other projects (even before the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic), in both individual and group career contexts, I used both a blended approach (in other words, blending or combining online and offline career counselling) and (from time to time) a hybrid approach (trying to find the best way to administer career construction counselling, irrespective of whether I used online and/or offline counselling for my specific purposes). Over time, I have found that assessing groups of roughly 50 people or fewer online (depending on the availability of computers and associated facilities) and subsequently conducting small-group counselling (4-6 participants per group) works well.

Role of Context

Xu (2021) contends that "less research has explored the multicultural/cross-cultural variations of common manifestations of each decision-making component" (p. 6). This warrants the attention of all stakeholders conducting research in contexts that differ from their own. Various idiosyncratic factors will co-determine the most appropriate group career counselling protocol and strategy to be followed in any given context as well as the number and length of career counselling phases and sessions. These factors include the schedule of the institution (where the intervention will take place) and its learners and teachers, the size of the group to be assessed, participants' fatigue levels, the institution's facilities (including venues and equipment

such as computers and laptops), the support staff available to assist the primary career counsellor-researcher (including psychologists, registered counsellors, psychometrists, life orientation teachers, and career development practitioners), and the time available.

Above all, it is essential to abandon all preconceived ideas about communities and how they can best be supported. Contextualising, decontextualising, recontextualising, and, especially, co-contextualising each intervention is non-negotiable. Involving and being guided by community members is the key to successful interventions. Likewise, focusing on and constantly renewing both the content (Holland, 1997) and the process (Gati & Kulcsár, 2021) of career counselling is important.

Concluding Observations

The outcomes of the current research corroborate Hoffman's (2003) view that the notion of the (psychological) self is analogous to the idea of Australian aborigines, who are born into 'songlines' (or dreaming tracks), yet, know only a fragment of those songlines (Chatwin, 1987). By regularly talking to people who are acquainted with other stanzas, authorship of individuals' own songlines is authorised and expanded. This notion is intriguingly similar to how people enhance their own life stories during (self- and) career construction counselling when they revisit and simultaneously reflect on their past. Persisting with the songlines metaphor, the individual self or identity is interpreted reflexively instead of as "a stretch of moving history progressive, like a river or a stream" (Chatwin, 1987, p. 119). Identity is not seen as an attribute that vests completely within individuals but rather as a series of progressive movements that are thrust forward by reflexivity to enhance both internal and external self- (and career) construction and the advancement of people's 'grand' stories. This is achieved when actionable insights are converted into action.

This article also represents a modest response to Wink's (2005) call to researchers to "question our long-held assumptions … to find the magic of personal discovery based on our own lived experiences" (p. 67). His words are a call to all career counsellors to help people reflect critically (on their stories) and then 'act actively' to promote forward movement. The group self- and career construction approach empowers counsellors and participants to manage 'glass ceiling' challenges that arise as a result of people having been silenced, marginalised, unvoiced, and 'named' unjustly (Wink, 2005). Moreover, it supports the conviction that 'one size [does not fit] all' (Savickas, 2019b).

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

The research reported on in this article consisted of relatively small studies that involved purposefully selected samples of participants and therefore has limited inferential potential. Randomised, controlled studies in different contexts with different groups of varying sizes are needed to enhance the inferential potential of the approach demonstrated in the research. In addition, longitudinal studies in which the research reported on here is replicated (with or without including other assessment instruments to assess the impact of the research on matters such as participants' self-worth, sense of self, and career resilience) is essential. It may also be worthwhile to design an assessment instrument that can establish and assess before and after an intervention the extent to which participants can articulate what they regard as important to them (e.g. their mission and visions statements) (Maree, 2020). Moreover, designing and using measures of self-

reflection and meaning-making can yield invaluable quantitative information in addition to the qualitative outcomes that emerge from an intervention.

Conclusion

The research reported on in this article supports De Vos, Jacobs, and Verbruggen's (2021) assertion that jobs no longer comprise "a stable composition of tasks requiring a predictable set of skills in order to perform" (p. 11) and that it is no longer sufficient to rely on what are believed to be unchanging personality traits to inform career counselling. Likewise, the research supports the belief that quantitative assessment and outcomes on their own cannot uncover deeper seated, subjective facets of people's personality configuration (Blustein et al, 2013).

The research confirms Savickas' (2014) view that "[w]e as career counselors should become multilingual instead of unilingual" (n. p.). That is, counsellors should remain open-minded and embrace contemporary developments in the field to assist them in their efforts to help people negotiate repeated transitions in their work lives. It also shows that following an integrative approach to career counselling in group contexts has the potential to enhance the reflexivity and sense-making of the autobiographical author.. Group career construction counselling, using the integrative, group self- and career construction counselling espoused here, proposes a feasible, exciting intervention strategy to mediate the effects of poverty in different contexts. It also confirms Cardos0 et al.'s (2014) view that career counselling interventions should be designed, tailored, and administered in a way that addresses the idiosyncratic needs of individuals as well as groups of people.

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