Facilitating Life-Enhancing Career in the Context of Significant Social Challenges and Changes: The Perspective of Goal-Directed Action

ubiquity press

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ABSTRACT

The problems and challenges people in both Eastern and Western societies face regarding life work and career are complex and in flux. These issues range from a neoliberal socio-economic climate to the increasing prevalence of the gig economy and part-time work. These problems, compounded by racism and social injustice, threaten the existential and moral commitment required not only for sustained work involvement but also for constructing a meaningful life. The neoliberal agenda appears to give pre-eminence to individual agency. However, at the same time, it challenges the joint collaborative and cooperative requirements needed to construct meaningful long-term carreers. These challenges to long-term career are elaborated. In this article, we address this problem by examining the conceptual link between short-term, goal-directed actions, mid-term projects and long-term career, in an approach known as contextual action theory. Essentially, this framework suggests that long-term career is constructed through in-the-moment goal-directed actions and mid-term projects, both of which require significant components to contribute to a meaningful and motivated career. This article provides the opportunity to examine the characteristics of contextual action theory that contribute to addressing the challenges to long term career, including goals as explanatory, relation to the other, the process of change, culture, and social justice. These characteristics are illustrated by referring to current research and practice that have emerged from contextual action theory.

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There is little doubt that what has been known as career is being impacted by significant social challenges and rapid change (e.g., Ayandibu, 2021). These changes are likely to continue for the foreseeable future to impact the job market, employment opportunities, and how people make sense of their lives (e.g., Supiot, 2021). They raise several questions for persons who are planning or engaging in their own work life, for those in positions as employers and policy makers who can facilitate or hinder the work lives of others, and for professionals in psychology and related disciplines who are expected to speak to these issues (e.g., Hooley et al., 2017). The test is whether our understanding and theories of career address these questions and, if so, how effectively. We may also ask whether and how our approaches to acting in the career realm as psychologists and career counsellors address the problems raised in this context of change. The answers are dependent on both an understanding of the challenges as well as a conceptualization that addresses their complexity and the human response to them. Both the circumstances in which the challenges and crises to career arise and responses to them are a function of human action. Specifically in this article, we identify a range of problems. We then propose the conceptualization of goal-directed action and its application to research and practice as one approach that provides some guidelines to address the problems.

SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES AND CHANGES FOR CAREER

Among the significant challenges and changes affecting career currently are several interrelated factors, outlined below. These factors have been shown in the literature to have changed the framework in which individuals construct career (e.g., Barhate & Hirudayaraj, 2021; Di Nuovo et al., 2021; MacDonald & Giazitzoglu, 2019; O'Keeffe et al., 2021; Ravenelle, 2021; Santilli et al., 2021; Song, 2018). These factors are interrelated and range from broad socio-political positions such as neo-liberalism to the much more time focussed effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While some of these developments are of more recent origin, career has always been subject to changing local and global factors as well as how the term itself is understood in different contexts and cultures (e.g., Abkhezr & McMahon, 2017; Alshabani & Soto, 2020; Chen, 2021; Flores et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018; Wada et al., 2019). Occupational career is not a fixed entity, nor is our understanding of it. Nevertheless, it needs to be addressed in the context of these challenges and changes. Among the significant factors that have been identified in the recent literature as related to career are neoliberalism, changing technologies, globalization and the recent pandemic and climate change. Importantly, these developments are occurring in the context of

substantial questions about the how the world responds to environmental changes.

NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberalism has become the dominant economic school of thought over the past several decades (Poschen, 2015). Neoliberal thinking emphasizes the role of the individual over the collective, and neoliberal policies have the effect of reducing the responsibility of governments for managing the economy (O'Keeffe et al., 2021). It has permitted the needs of business to become the predominant driver of policy. Trends toward temporary and precarious work, including the gig economy, and technological change appear to exacerbate the adverse effects of neoliberalism on equitable employment and living conditions for workers. While these trends have been beneficial to businesses (O'Keeffe et al., 2021), they have had the effect of transferring economic risk to the individual worker (Ravenelle, 2021). Irving (2018) suggested that the language used in discourse about "career choice" and "individual freedom" has obscured the underlying structural inequities that confront the individual under neoliberal assumptions. Racial and social injustice are unlikely to be diminished by the trend toward more precarious, temporary work. Rather, these inequities are likely to be perpetuated and worsened by current work trends, as the temporary worker, rather than being freer and more self-sufficient, is disempowered by the current trend toward "flexible" work.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

Technological change is likely to have even more consequences for workers in the coming years than it already has. The widespread use of the Internet as a communication and commercial tool has been a huge shift that has had significant impact on workers. Internet use allows for greater geographical flexibility among workers (Wood et al., 2019), more part-time and work-from-home possibilities (Carter & Hedge, 2020), and more self-employment using digital platforms (Ravenelle et al., 2021). Among the technological changes anticipated to have important bearings on work include artificial intelligence when implemented globally (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019; Sivarajah et al., 2017), the adoption of autonomous vehicles (Bansal & Kockelman, 2017), the shift to smart cities (Curseu et al., 2021), and the use of intelligent 3D printing systems (Haefner & Sternberg, 2020). These changes are likely to translate to less demand for labour, more temporary work, and require workers to adapt to the new industrial environment (Berger et al., 2019; Rampersad, 2020).

GLOBALIZATION

Globalization refers to the increasing economic interdependence of countries, often connected with the advance of technology. Karoly and Pannis (2004) see it

as one of the major trends that is shaping the future if work. It has had a positive impact on the economies of many countries, including job creation and addressing poverty. However, vocational theorists and researchers have also seen it as a manifestation of neoliberal thought, bound up with values of self-improvement and freedom of choice (Hooley et al., 2017; McMahon & Watson, 2020). It promotes manufacturing in lower-cost regions through "delocalization," which has advantages for businesses. Varied regulatory regimes allow for poor working conditions in some regions due to lower wages and a lack of regulatory standards to ensure health and safety (Nota et al., 2020).

Lack of environmental regulations may also allow for pollution and destruction of the environment in regions that prioritize development over environment (Rahman et al., 2019). As regulatory requirements that protect the environment may increase the costs associated with production of goods, workers may find that the quality of their local environment is degraded as a result of globalization of labour.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In a review of the literature examining COVID-19 and work, Cubrich and colleagues (2022) found that the majority of workers have been affected negatively by the pandemic, but precarious, low-wage and nontraditional workers more so. These negative factors have included lack of access to benefits and resources and job insecurity as well as a greater share of exposure to and illness from the virus. On the other hand, the trend toward remote work was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The degree to which those who switched to partial or total remote work will be called back to work in office environments remains to be seen. However, it seems likely that some of this shift is permanent (Medhi & Morrisette, 2021). People who are able might choose to relocate to suburbs, if they are not required to attend the workplace daily (Ramani & Bloom, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to continue to influence the world of work in other ways. The degree of preparedness for future emergencies, including pandemics, is being be reconsidered by governments, organizations, and individuals. Most pertinent to the world of work, the pandemic has prompted what has been termed the Great Resignation (Lufkin, 2021), meaning the reconsideration of priorities regarding work-life balance and values-based work choices (Taylor, 2021). It is the latter that is likely to impact career guidance most directly.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Poschen (2015) identified the climate crisis as a critical challenge for future economic growth and human well-being. Climate change is already impacting work. Kjellstrom (2016) reported that 15-20% of annual work hours in some occupations in south-east Asia may have already been lost due to global warming. Poschen observed that overuse of natural resources has led to job losses, and that climate change is having a disproportionate impact on women and people living in poverty who tend to work in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, and who may live in makeshift settlements that are threatened by climate-related weather events. Increasingly frequent natural disasters associated with climate change, which may have already started, will damage physical and social infrastructure, affecting medical, economic, and transportation systems, and may disrupt education and training (Clayton, 2020). Busby (2021) notes that some island nations face existential threats, and that other nations face the loss of significant infrastructure in coastal areas, thus increasing the likelihood of migration within and between nations.

Conversely, there will be new job opportunities in more environmentally friendly energy production, such as solar and wind generation manufacturing and maintenance. Preserving and managing the natural assets on which life depends are essential tasks for policy makers to address, which should have some positive effect on employment. However, there is no guarantee that such jobs will make up for the losses from other effects of climate change (UN-DESA, 2017).

IMPACT OF CHANGES

The challenges outlined above constitute our collective shared risk and are likely to create anxieties and apprehension for the future in all but the most privileged strata of society (Clayton, 2020). Climate anxiety appears to be especially common among younger adults (Clayton & Karazsia, 2020). The threat of unemployment due to technological change is feared by a substantial proportion of Americans (McClure, 2018). Neoliberal concepts of individual action optimizing individual happiness seem antiquated in the face of environmental concerns and global insecurity. Rather, collective interests rather than those of the individual are likely to be prioritized due to the scale of the current challenges (e.g., Oldfield et al., 2021; Santilli et al., 2021; Song, 2018).

CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT

The accumulation of challenges described do not fit well with traditional models of career guidance and counselling. These models have emphasized the matching of the person's traits and abilities to the occupational environment (e.g., Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) and the individual's development and choice over one's lifetime (Super, 1980). They may prove to be inadequate to meet these challenges, given both kind of changes

in the 21st century and their accelerated pace (Hooley et al., 2017; Irving, 2018). Moreover, these earlier approaches have not questioned the social justice and significant environmental changes in the employment and work in which people are and will be engaged. More recently, more activist and social justice perspectives are emerging in the career literature. Concepts such as sustainable decent work (McMahon & Watson, 2020) and life design (Hartung, 2019), intended to address inequalities and minimize damage to the environment, may become the primary focus of career guidance as a response to the challenges outlined above. For example, McWhirter and McWha-Hermann (2021) have called for a greater critical consciousness among vocational and industrial organizational psychologists. They assert that a social justice perspective must be based on context-informed scholarship. Similarly, the psychology of work (Blustein et al., 2019) addresses issues of marginalization, human rights, and decent work. These and other authors (e.g., Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012) suggest that the psychological tradition in which career counselling developed is not equal to the task of assisting individuals in the face of the current challenging, and in some cases, exploitative societal contexts. Tu and Okazaki (2021), for example, identified the structural and cultural dimensions of the working lives of Asian Americans. They suggested qualitative research as a means of addressing issues not addressed by traditional quantitative approaches.

Not least in efforts to address changes in the world of work and career is life design counselling (e.g., Hartung, 2019; Savickas et al., 2009). It is an intervention grounded on the identification of life themes and the development of narratives that provide the basis for an optimal life and career. It represents a response to the current environment by helping people to design active lives that contribute to equitable and sustainable development that are also personally meaningful (Pouyaud & Guichard, 2018). Both Guichard (2015) and others (e.g., Blustein et al., 2019; Cohen-Scali & Pouyaud, 2019) have emphasized the dialogical characteristics of the process of constructing one's life. Indeed, Guichard (2022) challenged the career field to move beyond its focus on work to address "action" in Arendt's (1958) understanding of those terms, if responsible, sustainable life is to be maintained.

Another recent development is the resurgence of "calling" in an effort to address issues of meaning (e.g., Duffy et al., 2018). Several explanations of the term give credence to some type of transcendent summons or force. It is reflective of the importance of meaning but may alleviate responsibility from employers, and even justify the experience of hardship at work (Lemke, 2021).

The complexity of the current and previous contexts relative to career and career interventions have been addressed broadly through systems theory (e.g., McMahon & Patton, 2018; Vondracek et al., 2015 or 2014). Essentially systems theory undertakes to account for the social, cultural and individual processes that constitute individuals and their actions.

These developments show that career psychology is changing in response to new and challenging contexts. These responses are cause to be optimistic. However, some may also be incomplete if they throw the burden back on the individual, that is, the person as agent as the only solution to these challenges. It is not sufficient that, as Hooley and colleagues (2017) argue, career counselling rely on the idea that one can "narrativise oneself out of structurally imposed constraints" (p. 15).

PROPOSAL FOR AN INTEGRATED SOLUTION

To address the issues identified and the range of other changes and challenges to an adequate understanding of career, career psychology, and career guidance and counselling, we propose a conceptual framework known as contextual action theory (CAT) (Valach & Young, 2004; Young & Valach, 2000, 2004). Based on this framework, we have developed and used applications to practice and research. The notion of human action, that is, the intentional, goal-directed behavior of persons, undergirds this perspective. People generally understand their own and others' behavior as goal-directed. Human action is constituted by individual, social, cultural, as well as bodily and environmental factors (Raeff, 2020). We share Raeff's view that human action is embedded in its social context, which must be accounted for to understand action adequately. Essentially, this perspective allows us to accommodate social context, complexity, and the human person in understanding career and in implementing career guidance and counselling and other interventions. Contextual action theory also allows us to see career as a system of goal-directed action, where the sum is greater than its parts. Generally, systems theory captures or reflects the complexity of human systems. It is an approach based on the context. Patton (2015) noted similarlites and differences between the systems theory framework and contextual action theory, highlighting their common conceptual understanding.

This broad human action perspective extends our understanding of the place of occupation and work in people's lives in the context of factors such as globalization, technology, and neoliberalism. It does not solve those problems directly. Rather, it responds to the need for attention to the broader systems in which work and workers are embedded without losing the perspective of the person acting within those systems. In CAT this complexity is captured by different systems of action, different ways in which action is organized

and different perspectives on action (see Appendix for a description of these aspects of action). Each contributes to both understanding and acting relative to career and career interventions.

The purpose of presenting this response to the challenges facing career and work in the 21st century is not to oversimplify them, but rather to appreciate their complexity. The challenges for work and career identified in this paper, as well a host of other factors addressed in the career psychology literature, are at play simultaneously. Our view is that this understanding of action allows us to see its complexity. One important step in unpacking this complexity is that contextual action theory establishes the conceptual link between action and career, and simultaneously uncouples the arbitrary and limiting link between career and occupation.

What we are proposing is a paradigm shift that moves the focus away from the individual as separate from social contexts to address the various iterations of the person within social contexts - joint action with others, projects involving a range of actions over time, and career involving institutional and societal others over the long term. Of course, each of these has the possibility of having negative rather than positive outcomes for those involved. However, our thesis is that individualism is no longer the only explanation for career development. Indeed, we could say that the changes we are currently experiencing demand a different response. The challenge is not only to understand that process of career development from the perspective of greater goal-directed interconnectivity, but also to foster greater interconnectivity through this perspective. CAT furthers this interconnectivity is several ways.

GOALS AS EXPLANATORY

The first important contribution of contextual action theory is that it looks at the goals of action rather than the antecedent causes of action for its explanation. By doing so, it brings to the fore what people are doing and why they are doing it. It is primarily an integrative framework. CAT does not ignore other explanations for action but gives primacy to the experience of goals as a way to accommodate the systemic influences. In human action, the open system implicit in the ongoing and anticipated changes becomes evident through intentionality. By moving away from work and occupation exclusively, CAT can provide a bigger picture of what people do – of what they are doing in light of the range of interrelated challenges described in this paper.

RELATION TO OTHER

An effective response to the changes in the world of work and in people's lives more generally cannot be realized through fostering greater isolation. Rather, the notion of joint action, and its more elaborate systems of project and career, are grounded in one's relation to

the other. Actions, projects, and career are constituted in relation to the other, even if the other is not physically present. This focus on what people are doing together reflects both what the action itself is about, but also addresses the relationship between the parties. The potential of greater understanding between people, of empathic understanding (Raeff, 2020) can begin to be fostered by taking on the perspective of what persons are doing together and the functional steps required to do so. Shifting the focus to look at joint actions can help identify common goals and facilitate mutual empathic understanding. Understanding the joint nature of action may offer a different perspective on how people construct their lives. Of course, we recognize that some joint actions, projects, and careers can have negative consequences in people's lives. However, valuing the role of the other as more than instrumental challenges the principle of neoliberalism that every action is a market transaction (Sugerman, 2015).

PROCESS OF CHANGE

One of the implications that the challenges identified in the article is that the world and its inhabitants are in the process of change, which will continue to be the case, in significant and profound ways. The approach advocated by contextual action theory is that action is characterized by change. It reflects the moment, the anticipated next moment, and the context. An understanding of change implicit in CAT is that change occurs in relation to a goal. By delineating the factors of meaningful action, motivated projects and life-enhancing career, CAT can not only describe change but assist in their realization.

CULTURE

Contextual action theory holds that the person who acts is acting within a culture. Specifically, career development in the traditional understanding of the term (e.g., Super, 1980) involved acting in relation to cultural standards. In Super's approach to career development, occupational career was realized for many people in Western industrial societies, particularly men. Career for many involved acting in relation to the cultural standards of these societies. However, when contexts are different from what previously was known and expected, readily understood, and habitual between people acting within shared contexts, acting can become challenging because cultural standards are lacking or unclear. The challenges and changes enumerated in this article suggest that contexts are different, not only across countries, but also within countries where previously what was known or expected in the career domain is now changing. Although much of what people experience can be expected and shared with others within cultures, they can also expect cultural change. Both the shared experience and the challenges to what is shared will be experienced jointly in actions and projects. People join with others in constructing new

cultures. How people engage with others, which is the focus of contextual action theory, has meaning within historical, economic, and cultural contexts.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Social justice refers broadly to the fair and equitable access to resources and opportunities regardless of race, gender, social group, nationality, or other factors. It has been of particular concern to the field of career research and practice because of what appears to be the implicit sidelining of issues of decent work and equitable access to it.

Our view is that contextual action theory fits well with the social justice perspective being articulated for career psychology and career practice. For example, CAT focuses on the actions and projects between people. It has less of an individualistic perspective than many psychological approaches to career. Social justice practices must be supported by an approach to how people act together that reflect both context and process, both of which are the heart of contextual action theory. The focus on how people act together is reflective of the principle of the fair and equitable opportunities and treatment between peoples (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Given its emphasis on culture, relations, context and human action, CAT points to a relational ethics (Haslebo, 2020; Valach et al., 2015). It invites consideration of the moral obligations engendered by career in joint relationships, and connected to community/communities and the broader context in which career is enacted.

RESEARCH APPLICATIONS

Contextual action theory has led to the development and use of a qualitative research method, known as the action-project method (A-PM; Wall et al., 2016; Young et al., 2005; Young et al., 2021). The method is used to describe joint actions and projects. It has been used to address the meaning of actions and projects, that is, reflecting the social context, of those involved. In addition, it looks closely at the specific behavior and the internal processes of the participants, to the extent that they are available. The method also recognizes that adaptation over time is inevitable, and thus has means to account for projects longitudinally.

Specifically, A-PM has been used to describe projects related to the transition to adulthood, including education and career, for a range of groups and topics, including parent-youth joint projects for young people with developmental disabilities (Marshall et al., 2018; Young et al., 2017; Young et al., 2020); between parents and youth in Saudi Arabia (Khalifa et al., 2018); between young adult peers (Young, Marshall et al., 2015); in urban residing Aboriginal families in Canada (Marshall et al., 2011), and in counselling (Young et al., 2011). It has also been used to describe how non-paid work is determined, for example, between young carers and their parents

(Aeyelts et al., 2016), as well as a range of other topics (e.g., Klaassen et al., 2015; Zaidman-Zait et al., 2014)

The strength of the action-project method to date is that it considers culture, social institutions, and practices by looking specifically at participant joint actions and projects. This method captures culture as enacted. It grounds career and work-related actions and projects by examining what participants are doing together, through their cooperation and collaboration, or lack of it. In addition to the A-PM, ethnographic and other research methods may serve to elaborate on the role of social institutions and structure in career.

APPLICATIONS TO PRACTICE

The complexity and challenges of career are particularly evident in what clients present to counsellors for their assistance. Contextual action theory is a way to address this complexity in an uncertain career context. First, CAT offers counsellors a means to consider both the counselling itself and the client's action and projects outside of counselling as goal-directed action, and ultimately related or not related to career. What the counsellor and client are doing together is a joint action/project. But the subject of the counselling is likely the client's actions and projects outside of counselling. The first step in addressing the client's concerns is to recognize that the client is engaged in goal-directed action. Of course, this is implicitly the case with the many approaches to interventions. Indeed, contextual action theory is applicable across different intervention approaches, but has the additive advantage of making the place of intentional human action more explicit.

Second, contextual action theory provides the counsellor with a framework to see the relationship between actions in mid-term projects and long-term career. In addition, the following are three specific ways in which CAT can be applied to practice: (1) within the context of the working alliance, helping clients to identify pertinent actions and projects, (2) working with dyads specifically, identifying and supporting joint projects, and (3) using differences in the systems of action and how action is organized (see Appendix) to identify characteristics of meaningful actions, motivated projects and life-enhancing career.

IDENTIFYING AND SUPPORTING IN CLIENT PROJECTS

Contextual action theory is not the basis for a specific and separate approach to career intervention. Rather it is a perspective from which counsellors are encouraged to look at their practice and at the issues that clients bring to them. Domene, Valach, and Young (2015) identified the means that counsellors can use to help clients identify and understand their actions and projects and enable them. These five tasks for the counsellor are: (1) to consider how the client's life is organized and the actions,

projects, and career in which the client is engaged; (2) to begin to address problems the client is encountering, not from the perspective of their cause, but how they are manifest in the client's actions and projects; (3) addressing emotions and emotional memory as factors that energize action, (4) to help the client connect what is happening in counselling to their daily life, and (5) all of these tasks are embedded in a working alliance (Domene et al., 2015). These tasks do not constitute a distinct counseling approach but are additive and applicable across approaches.

SUPPORTING PROJECTS WITH OTHERS

One specific intervention emanating from contextual action theory is based on the tasks of helping clients identify and facilitate the joint actions in the life domain that is of concern. Young et al. (2020) offer an example of this method in providing assistance to young immigrants making the transition to a new country. This supportive intervention addresses the joint goal-directed actions and projects that migrants undertake with significant others, such as family members, teachers, friends, or immigrant support workers, about their education, occupation, or other relevant social integration goals. The five steps of the intervention involve (1) a joint conversation between the participants (dyad), including video review of the conversation, (2) the identification of the dyad's joint project through narrative feedback, (3) ideas of ways to facilitate the project, (4) the counsellor's telephone monitoring of the project with both parties for an agreed upon time period, for example, three to six months, and (5) a final integrative joint conversation between participants. In the illustrated case (Young et al., 2020), the intervention facilitated their finding suitable career paths in a new country through their sharing information about past experiences and future prospects in their new country. They also reported experiencing significant enhancement of their relationship by being supported and feeling supported by the other.

A variation on this type of assistance is to focus on the joint action or project of what the counsellor and client are doing together and addressing what the client is doing in their lives outside of counselling (e.g., Young et al., 2022). The premise of this intervention is that these joint actions and projects can be enhanced and their goals realized through a supportive clinical intervention.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MEANINGFUL ACTION, MOTIVATED PROJECTS AND LIFE-ENHANCING CAREER

As noted earlier, action is a complex phenomenon, made more challenging for clients and practitioners in the context of the changes enumerated in this article. Ultimately the challenge is whether and how meaningful action, motivated projects and life-enhancing career are possible. To that end, Young and colleagues (Young &

Valach, 2019; Young, Valach, & Domene, 2015) have listed a number of characteristics that potentially contribute to the successful realization of actions, projects and career for each level at which action is organized that is, the specific elements of the action, its functional steps, and its meaning. For example, at the level of verbal and non-verbal behavior, meaningful action is dependent on having the skills that are required for the action. Similarly, degrees of both predictability and novelty may be needed at the functional level when engaged in implementing a long-term, life-enhancing career. At the level of meaning, a career should be socially integrated. In practice to address the socially integrated criterion, one would expect the client and counsellor to examine the extent to which the client's construction of meaning includes social integration and how social integration is realized. But this and other components of meaningful actions, projects and career invite the question about how others, ranging from immediate others with whom one has close relationships to employers, social policy, institutions, available resources, and culture more broadly join in meeting these expectations. It is also recognized that suitable answers to these expectations are not fixed but will vary in light of the changing circumstances of occupation and broader societal issues. They invite consideration in view of the issues raised in the first part of this article.

CONCLUSION

The challenges and changes addressed in this article are complex and invite response at many at different levels and from a variety of sources. The perspective of action in career psychology proposed here provides one way to approach the career and work-related challenges people face. It is not a simple solution, nor does it encompass all the ways in which these challenges can be addressed. However, it points the field of career psychology to greater involvement with the other, initially in joint actions and projects with others, but also with institutions, governments, policy makers, and employers. It fundamentally recognizes that the individual, which has been the basis for career guidance and counselling interventions, is not without moral expectations. It is not simply the individual without relationship. Furthermore, it is not simply the individual in the private sphere of family and friends, as the historian Siedentop (2014) argues. It involves participation at a broader level. Thus, it is not only teleological and rational, it is contextual both with reference to what has happened in the past, what is happening in the present, and what will happen in the future, and with reference to the impact on others, in their relationships and in the broader social context. Contextual action theory provides one means of conceptualizing, researching, and intervening relative to

career, broadly understood, that addresses the actions we engage in and how they construct the person.

APPENDIX
SYSTEMS, PERSPECTIVES AND ORGANIZATION OF ACTION

The systems of action identified in contextual action theory are action, project, and career. Action, as noted above, refers to the intentional, goal-directed, in-the-moment behaviour. When human actions are joined or constructed as having common goals over time in the short or medium term they are identified as a project. Finally, when projects coalesce over the long term and have a significant place in the person's life, they are known as career. Importantly, in this perspective, career includes but is not limited to occupational career. Here career refers to "a superordinate construct that allows people to construct connections among actions, to account for effort, plans, goals, and consequences, to frame internal cognitions and emotions, and to use feedback and feed forward processes" (Young & Valach, 1996, p. 364). Contextual action theory views human action as social in nature and uses the term "joint action" to refer to what occurs between people. It posits that actions, projects, and career cannot be adequately understood as entirely individual phenomenon. Indeed, project and career explicitly arise from and are related to the social context.

Contextual action theory has also posited three distinct perspectives on action. It can be understood from the perspective of manifest behavior, that is, the observable behaviors engaged in to carry out the action. The internal processes, that is, thoughts and feelings the person experiences in carrying out the action, provide a second perspective on action. Finally, a third perspective, social meaning, refers to how the action is understood by the actor and others. These three perspectives are reflected in how action, project, and career are organized. Meaning is organized in terms of the actors' intentional frameworks of our actions, projects, and career that come together to construct a larger framework for our lives. These actions, projects, and career are steered through a number of functional steps as the actors move toward their goals. Finally, they are dependent on specific elements of the action, that is, the verbal, physical, environmental, and other features involved in the action.

TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

As this is a conceptual article, the transparency statement does not apply.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

RY provided the broad conceptualization for the paper and provided detail on the contextual action theory approach. EC reviewed the literature, contributed to the writing of the section on the social challenges to career, and helped in writing and editing other sections of the manuscript. Both RY and EC engaged with making revisions, and read and approved the final manuscript.

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