ANALYZING CURRENT AND FUTURE WORKFORCE ISSUES:

Students' Perspectives on Career Development

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NCDA National Career Development Association
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION + HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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In my work with graduate students, my greatest hope is always to kindle a passion for career development. I want them to see this field not just as a profession, but as a way of guiding people through some of the most important choices of their lives. When a student begins to realize that career development is about much more than résumés or job searches – that it is about identity, meaning, and storytelling – something ignites. That spark is what we need to nurture, because graduate students are not only the future of our field, they are also the future of how people will navigate work and life in an ever-changing world.

At its core, career development is about storytelling, helping people make meaning of their work, values, and life roles. In the years ahead, career decisions will be less about climbing ladders and more about choosing where, how, and with whom to spend our time and energy. Educators and practitioners will play a critical role as "career influencers," helping others learn how to make these decisions again and again. When career is seen holistically, as the mix of paid and unpaid life roles we navigate over time, every conversation becomes a career conversation. Graduate students, who often straddle the roles of learner, researcher, and practitioner, are uniquely positioned to embody this mindset and extend it into their future work. They are tomorrow's educators, counselors, HR leaders, nonprofit professionals, and policy makers. They will be the ones guiding others through transitions, uncertainty, and discovery.

This monograph excites me because it demonstrates the impact that graduate students can have when invited into the heart of the career development conversation. Born out of a graduate course at the University of Minnesota, the publication is more than just a collection of student projects. It is proof that when graduate students are challenged to think critically, to write for a professional audience, and to contribute as peers, they rise to the occasion. Their chapters explore pressing issues, from diversity and equity in the workplace to alternative career pathways, and apply theory to practice with fresh eyes and bold ideas.

Engaging graduate students in this way is not merely an academic exercise. It is an act of empowerment. By writing for publication, these students were invited to see themselves as contributors to the profession rather than passive learners. They discovered that their perspectives matter, that their voices belong, and that they have something important to offer to the ongoing dialogue about the future of work.

For NCDA, engaging graduate students means investing in the resilience and relevance of our profession. They bring fresh perspectives, challenge assumptions, and remind us that career development is constantly adapting to new realities. They are the pipeline of practitioners, educators, and leaders who will carry the mission of this association forward. Supporting them means ensuring that career development remains at the center of conversations about equity, innovation, and human flourishing in the decades ahead.

As you read this monograph, I encourage you to approach it with both curiosity and conviction. These chapters are not simply assignments polished for publication; they are glimpses into the future of our field, shaped

by the voices of those who will soon lead it. My hope is that you will see the spark of passion in their words, and that together, we can continue to kindle that spark until it grows into a fire that sustains our profession for generations to come.

Marty Apodaca
NCDA President 2024-2025

Marty Apodaca, MA, LPCC, CCC, NCC is a Senior Counselor at the University of New Mexico's (UNM) Student Health and Counseling where he assists his clients in exploring the intersections of career and mental health. For over a decade, he previously served as a Career Development Facilitator at UNM Career Services, where he supervised and trained both individual and group counseling interns. Marty presents to counseling graduate students on career related topics and has taught undergraduate career development courses.

THE NEED FOR MORE CAREER CONVERSATIONS:
Preparing Students to Engage in Critical Issues Impacting the Workforce

Michael J. Stebleton

The future of work continues to shift. For example, the average 5-year-old in the year 2025 may live to be over 100 years old. Tomorrow's graduates will likely have between 20-30 different jobs across multiple industries throughout their lifetime (McGowan & Shipley, 2020). How individuals envision and experience a new work-life landscape will be altered significantly in the coming years (Carstensen, 2022). Workers will develop their own new maps of life which will be comprised of a constellation of life roles, both paid and unpaid, over the course of a lifetime. Mid- and late-career professionals will likely pursue encore career options and have opportunities to reinvent themselves (Conley, 2024; Oliver, 2024).

The purpose of this introductory chapter is two-fold: first, to provide some context for the ways that career and work will continue to change in the future and second to describe the student-driven project that resulted in this monograph.

Engaging in Career Conversations

Tristram Hooley (2023), career development scholar, discussed changes in career after the COVID-19 Pandemic and once defined *career* as how we opt to spend our time. Increasingly in the future, individuals who have the privilege to access more choices and resources will decide on what (and where) they want to spend that time. Career development counselors, coaches, and guides will occupy important roles in supporting students and clients to make those decisions over the course of a lifetime. Perhaps more importantly, educators can act as career influencers and teach students and new workers how to develop the skills to make frequent career and life decisions (Stebleton & Ho, 2023). Career educators can support workers in developing these skills by having regular career conversations with students and new graduates. When career is viewed holistically (i.e., a combination of paid and unpaid roles that change over time), every conversation has the potential to be a career-related conversation (Ho & Stebleton, 2024).

Yet many young workers are reticent about holding these career conversations with managers and supervisors. It is well-documented that Gen Z individuals hold different values and perceptions of work, including technology (Katz et al., 2021). According to a 2024 Gallup poll, approximately 47% of Gen Z respondents said they would get better advice from ChatGPT rather than a manager (Gallup 2024). In another study reported by *Forbes* (Robinson, 2025), 41% of Gen Z respondents trust artificial intelligence (AI) more than humans, and 50% of Gen Z respondents feel more comfortable confiding in AI, rather than their manager, about work issues (Robinson, 2025). As a more seasoned career development professional and faculty member, I find these statistics disconcerting! It is my contention that everyone needs to feel comfortable having frequent career conversations, whether they are on the receiving and/or giving end of these interactions.

For career development educators, the fact that the way employees currently work has changed over recent years is not entirely a novel concept. That said, new students of

career development and theory are learning how to best prepare for these changes. It is in the spirit of initiating and inspiring new career conversations that I entered the spring semester of 2025 with a group of new students who enrolled in my University of Minnesota course, *OLPD 5033: Foundations of Individual and Organizational Career Development.*

Course Purpose and Overview

The purpose of the course is to learn and examine career development theory and practice from both an individual and organizational perspective. Additionally, the students explore workplace trends, demographics, and current topics related to their experiences. The three-credit course is open to graduate students and advanced undergraduate students. This course is taught in the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. The course is an elective that attracts students from a range of programs and colleges including Higher Education, Adult Education, Human Resource Development, and Human Resources/ Industrial Relations through the Carlson School of Management.

As in the past, the course offers opportunities for self-assessment and ongoing reflection through writing. For example, students are assigned to write a self-narrative for their project where they are asked to reflect on early childhood experiences about work and the meaning of success, however that might be defined. Students complete their own Strong Interest Inventory and leadership work values questionnaires. This semester, I decided to add another component to the writing process. I wanted the students to have the opportunity to write to a larger audience, a public one that would be able to read students' ideas and evaluations.

So often students write a final paper, upload it to the instructor, and move on to the next semester, often without reflecting on the process (and maybe not even taking the time to read the instructor's comments). My objective was to create a new learning experience where students would get feedback from professional editors in the field – and then take those suggestions and feedback to keep revising and resubmitting until "accepted." In many ways, I hoped to simulate a professional manuscript writing experience (without the dreaded reviewer #2's dismissive comments).

In the fall of 2024, prior to the new semester, I approached Melissa Venable, editor at the National Career Development Association, about this project idea. Fortunately, she was up for collaborating with me on the task. The current monograph is the outcome of that initial conversation. The publication is a collection of 14 student contributions that resulted from their final project assignment in OLPD 5033. The projects address a range of timely issues and topics yet fall under two main categories: The first section explores current issues impacting work and career development. The second section focuses on applying career development theories and models to support specific populations of interest.

The Students

There were 14 students enrolled in the course in the spring of 2025 from a range of diverse backgrounds and academic disciplines, including Human Resource Development, Higher Education, and Adult Education. There were three advanced undergraduate students who enrolled in the course. The other students were primarily M.A. or M.S. students completing this elective for their graduate programs. It should be noted that this career development course is not intended for counseling educators (i.e., students generally are not looking to becoming career counselors or guidance counselors).

The goal for the class is to become more aware of issues impacting career and work – and to encourage students to become more familiar with the language and theory of career – and to ultimately feel more comfortable having these career conversations across different work and learning environments in the future. It should be emphasized that students came to this project with a range of different writing experiences. For some students, this assignment was the first time that they wrote an academic

research paper that required following the American Psychological Association's (APA) style of publication.

The Project

The final project was introduced early in the semester, but we did not begin to focus on it until around week seven. A couple of students have remarked that we might have started the project in earnest earlier in the term.

I reviewed the objectives and guidelines that the students received in their instructions for the project. The draft of the project, including the structure and organization of the monograph, was shared and revised multiple times with Melissa Venable and another NCDA collaborator before sharing it with the students. I share these instructions here so that others may better understand and perhaps replicate this project.

INSTRUCTIONS TO STUDENTS

Final Project: Writing for Publication

DIRECTIONS:
We will be working together to each submit a chapter for a group publication. The publication will be a monograph that will only include this course's student contributions. The publisher will be the National Career Development Association (NCDA). NCDA will make our work available for anyone to read (i.e., you will be a published author at the end of this project).

OBJECTIVES:
1) To explore a topic of your choice and to learn more about the varying perspectives on this issue as it relates to work and career development, 2) to apply career development (CD) concepts to a specific population, and 3) to have a polished piece of writing that will be published by a professional organization.

TOPICS:
There will be two main sections to the monograph.1) Exploring Workplace Issues and Career Development, and 2) Supporting Specific Populations Using Career Development. The overall theme(s) for the monograph will focus on the integration of career development theory with a specific issue or problem impacting the workplace and/or the future of work; and to apply CD concepts to supporting populations. Each of us will have the opportunity to integrate career development theory with applied practice. You will opt to add your piece of writing to section 1 or section 2.

INTENDED AUDIENCE AND OBJECTIVES:
It is our shared hope that these topics will be of interest to career development audiences at all levels and represent different contexts.

INSTRUCTOR'S NOTES:
We discussed and negotiated different topics as a class – and finally reached 14 different topics. Although not scripted, we ended up with seven students who selected topic under section 1 and seven students under section 2. Students were encouraged to integrate at least 2-3 different career development theories or frameworks – and consider how these theories might be implemented into some form of practice. Some of the students opted to include more traditional theories (e.g., Super, Parsons), while others gravitated to the emerging theories such as narrative approaches and non-western models to understanding career. One of the many strengths of the monograph is the contributions that focused on the need to learn more about marginalized populations. This effort includes critically examining career issues from diverse perspectives (e.g., applying Indigenous approaches to first-generation college students) and integrating more inclusive approaches (Buford & Flores, 2025; Carter & Sisco, 2024).

Outcome for the Writers and Readers

For the reader, we hope that you will learn more about these timely and relevant topics impacting work and career development. Some of the issues are evolving now, such as diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies in workplaces or hybrid and return to office mandates. Other chapters focus on populations and how to address pressing concerns about education and career pathways, such as BIPOC college students and young men who are opting out of four-year degree trajectories. All the chapters are significant in some way and are directly related to current issues impacting the field of career development. The project aligns with NCDA's commitment to supporting and promoting greater involvement in graduate education and adding to the available NCDA graduate resources.

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I would personally like to thank the editors Melissa Venable and Melanie Reinersman at NCDA for their time and energy reviewing and commenting on students' drafts. Finally, I would like to thank and acknowledge the students and their diligent work. Many of them commented on how much work this involved, but also on how much they learned from the project. I wish all student contributors and readers of this monograph the best as you move forward in your own career pathways.

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EXPLORING CURRENT ISSUES IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

EMPLOYEE RETENTION AND GENERATIONAL ISSUES

Ani Grothe

In today's diverse and rapidly changing workforce, understanding the unique needs and values of different generations is important to improving employee retention (Glynn, 2025).

While many organizations are filled with multigenerational workers – such as the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, working together in the office – there are differences among these groups in work norms and values that can be tied to decreased employee retention.

Low employee retention rates have become an increasingly important issue due to labor shortages increasing, AI and automation on the verge, workforce demographics shifting, and high turnover costs (ACG Resources, 2024; Solanki, 2025). Job-hopping has emerged as a key issue in today's career landscape, bringing up the debate about its impact on long-term professional development and organizational stability. As many of the Gen Z graduates (1997 - 2012) enter the workforce, it is essential to understand why this is becoming more prominent and how to decrease it and bring employee retention rates up. Exploring these issues requires examining how employee retention involves a mutual commitment between employee and employer, focusing on how shifting expectations around mobility and stability, especially among younger workers, are reshaping what that commitment looks like.

This chapter explores employee retention across generations by looking at competing perspectives on job-hopping and workplace loyalty, integrating career development strategies to propose a plan for organizations and educators to address shifting workforce expectations and improve retention practices.

The Mobility Mindset: Understanding Job-Hopping Among Younger Generations

The newer generation of employees tends to follow a mobility perspective, in which job-hopping is promoted and seen as beneficial. According to Richmond (2024), "The number one reason given was to get a higher salary, followed by better work conditions, more growth opportunities, and better benefits" (para 6). Out of all these reasons, there is a consensus that workers are involved in a work environment that does not fit their values or needs. This is because many organizations are still being managed by older generations, who have more traditional norms that prioritize face-to-face communication and hierarchical structures, which leads to newer generations feeling like they are not being seen or heard (Gerhardt et al., 2022). Richmond (2024) stated, "Gen Z workers are expected to comprise about a quarter of the labor force by next year, so finding ways to keep them on board is critical, especially since research shows as much as 50% are disengaged from their jobs, 40% want to leave within two years and 35% even say they would leave their current job without having another one to move to" (para 3). The desire to survive and thrive through work could cause younger generations to follow the urge to change jobs to achieve better salaries, opportunities for growth, and benefits.

The Value of Stability: Retention Benefits Across Generations

From a stability standpoint, where employee retention is favored, there are many benefits for both employees and employers across generations. For employees, the benefits include financial stability, credibility, career advancement, and skill mastery. An important

factor in this is the declining job market (Mould, 2025). The experience for most workers, in particular the younger ones, is "jobs vanish as quickly as they appear, benefits are slashed, exploitation is rife, and career paths once paved with middle-class respectability have crumbled under the relentless march of automation and the ubiquity of the platform economy" (Mould, 2025, para 2). With this ever-changing and unstable environment, the work world is immersed in, it is better to make career decisions based on security, and the new generation is realizing that. According to Mould (2025), "It appears as if Gen Z wants to emulate their grandparents' career paths that were tied to one company with large pensions, a tight-knit family feel and gold watch upon retirement, and revert to a life of comfort and security rather than the endless grind of competing in the employment marketplace" (Mould, 2025, para 2). As Generation Z begins to prioritize stability and long-term growth, their values begin to align more with older generations, while still staying true to valuing flexibility and continuous learning. This shift brings a unique opportunity for stronger intergenerational collaboration in the workplace. Employees from every generation have something to offer to an organization and their work teams (Glynn 2025).

"Creating intentional efforts to boost and retain employees across every working generation shows that your business is willing to invest in its people" (Glynn, 2025, para 43). When organizations create environments that encourage generational knowledge sharing, it leads to more dynamic problem-solving and innovation within an organization. This blend of perspective also promotes mutual respect and helps break down generational stereotypes, promoting a more cohesive workplace. As retention rates improve, these cross-generational relationships grow stronger, essentially enhancing team performance and organizational success. In this way, the growing desire for stability and long-term connection across generations echoes Davis's (2023) reasons for why people work: people seek purpose and a sense of belonging in their work, which is created through environments that support retention and cross-generational collaboration.

Career Development Models and Their Role in Retention

To better understand the motivations behind job-hopping and the push for stability, it is important to examine these trends through a career development lens. These models provide deeper insight into how individuals navigate their careers in response to internal values and external pressure, and how organizations can better support their sustainable career paths.

One model that is relevant to the issue of job-hopping and generational shifts in the workforce is the Protean Career Model, based on the work of Hall (1976). Hite and McDonald (2023) suggested the model explains that a person "can be flexible and adaptable in a turbulent, ever-changing landscape" (p. 18). This model emphasizes that individuals, not organizations, are responsible for managing their own career paths, a belief that strongly relates to younger generations like Millennials and Generation Z. These generations are progressively motivated by personal values, like flexibility, purpose, and work-life balance, rather than traditional organizational promotions or tenure. The Protean Career Model helps explain why many employees today may choose to switch jobs frequently, not because of disloyalty, but to find roles that better align with their goals and identities. In a labor market shaped by automation, shifting norms, and economic uncertainty, the model's focus on adaptability and continuous learning makes it relevant as it highlights the importance of self-direction and lifelong growth, both of which are essential for going through modern careers and for organizations looking to increase long-term retention (Truyens, 2019).

Another valuable framework for navigating modern career paths is the Chaos Theory of Careers, developed by Pryor and Bright. This theory "understands reality in terms of complex dynamical systems" (Pryor & Bright, 2012, p. 70), emphasizing that careers are non-linear and often unpredictable. In today's ever-changing workforce, this model helps explain why job-hopping and non-

traditional career moves have become more common (Solanki, 2025). According to this theory, individuals need to learn to adapt, take advantage of chaos events, stay open to new opportunities, and develop resilience in the face of uncertainty (Pryor & Bright, 2012). This is especially relevant for younger generations, who often face unstable job markets and must respond to uncertainty faster than previous generations.

Importantly, the Chaos Theory of Careers also speaks to issues of employee engagement and retention. As workers navigate instability, they are more likely to stay with employers who provide support through transitions, offer opportunities for continuous growth and learning, and promote adaptable, inclusive environments. According to Gallup's State of the Global Workplace (Harter, 2024), only 23% of employees report being engaged at work, while 62% are not engaged and 15% are actively disengaged, costing the global economy $8.9 trillion. When employers encourage adaptability and promote learning through change, they not only empower individuals to manage their careers more effectively but also boost engagement, which is directly tied to retention. More engaged employees are not just more productive; they are also more likely to stay.

Implications for Career Development Educators and Practitioners

Understanding the evolving dynamics of career development and generational perspectives has important implications for career development (CD) educators and practitioners across contexts like higher education. To effectively support today's workforce, CD professionals should train practitioners to avoid generational bias. A good resource for CD professionals to share is *Gentelligence* by Dr. Megan Gerhardt, who promoted four practices to help break the generational stereotypes and divide: resisting assumptions, adjusting the lens, strengthening traits, and expanding the pie (Edwards, 2025).

These insights not only shape how intergenerational dynamics are understood but also inform practical strategies that can be applied across various professional settings to create a more inclusive and productive career development support. The principles of employee retention and development have broad applications across many professional contexts. In higher education, institutions play a vital role in preparing Gen Z students for the workforce by offering career readiness programs, mentorship opportunities, and experiential learning that align with the evolving workplace expectations. In human resources and human resource development (HR/HRD), implementing tailored onboarding processes, personalized recognition strategies, and leadership development initiatives is crucial to engage a multigenerational workforce and reduce turnover. Similarly, adult education contributes by concentrating on the reskilling of older workers and promoting age-inclusive practices to make sure all employees, regardless of age, have access to growth opportunities and feel valued in their roles. Together, these efforts can create a more adaptive and inclusive work environment.

Strategies for Strengthening Retention Across Generations

Looking ahead, addressing generational issues is crucial to improving employee retention in today's diverse workforce. First, applying Gerhardt's (2024) four principles for bridging the gap in a multigenerational workplace results in a better understanding of each generation. Her principles, resisting assumptions, adjusting the lens, and expanding the pie, encourage a new perspective on how to not discriminate on generational differences, but be curious about what each generation has to offer. Similarly, her principle on strengthening trust supports the creation of environments where collaboration is promoted and not discouraged due to psychological safety. Secondly, Glynn (2025) shared some useful steps to retain each generation in the workplace, such as implementing thoughtful policies, providing mentorship programs, allowing flexible work arrangements, offering training and development opportunities, creating multigenerational teams, and providing recognition and rewards. All these steps should help keep generations

active in the workplace and overall improve retention rates. Like Glynn said, "A variety of generations creates a more dynamic and innovative organization as each cohort brings its own unique background, perspectives, and experiences" (Glynn, 2025, para 5). By utilizing these strategies and perspectives, organizations can not only promote a more inclusive and collaborative environment but also build a resilient workforce equipped to thrive across generational lines.

As an undergraduate student who is part of the younger generation of workers, I think all these strategies are proactive and effective in providing a better space for different generations to work together. Because each strategy works to include a more inclusive space, newer generations will be inspired to stay at their current job, instead of job-hopping, because they will be able to fulfill their needs and feel seen, thus improving overall employee retention rates.

Conclusion

Overall, navigating employee retention in a multigenerational workforce requires a thoughtful balance between honoring the diverse values of each generation and creating a shared workplace culture that is rooted in purpose and growth. As explored through this paper, strategies that promote flexibility, adaptability, and generational understanding, such as those outlined in the career development models like Protean Career and Chaos Theory, as well as Gerhardts's *Gentelligence*, offer practical ways to boost engagement and reduce turnover. When organizations commit to supporting both mobility and stability, they create environments where employees not only stay but thrive. This shift reflects deeper human needs in that, beyond survival and financial gain, employees are driven by a need for meaning, belonging, and the ability to contribute to something greater (Davis, 2023). By aligning organizational practices with these core motivations and embracing generational diversity, workplaces can not only retain talent, but also empower talent.

Ani Grothe

I am graduating from the University of Minnesota in December 2025 with a major in Business and Marketing Education and a Sales Certificate. I am lucky enough to have the opportunity to be a digital marketing and communications intern at DCC Marketing, where I assist in developing and executing social media strategies and support on media planning and reporting.

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THE FUTURE IS HYBRID

Jasmine White

Jobs have been remote or hybrid for a while but as I was leaving high school everyone's lives changed, and the whole world stopped altogether. When I was a kid growing up, I saw how my parents went through their work careers, as well as the paths of my older brothers' friends entering the workforce. The talk about work was always post-college graduation: find a job with a company, put your nose to the grindstone, and work. The other part is that most work is 9-5 in the office or where your job site is and for me, it was unusual to see my parents being able to work from home. COVID-19 impacted everyone all at once and more specifically there was a dramatic change in job modality across the board. Everyone was remote, unemployed, or working through the fearfulness of COVID-19 being an essential worker.

A current topic within the workplace is what is going to happen to those who work from home or are in a hybrid setting. The initial wave of COVID-19 started five years ago, which kick-started the conversation of what work life would or could look like. Companies are reconsidering the modality of where their employees do their work. As some are mandated back in office, there has been quite a bit of uproar about those mandates. Living in Minnesota and reading up on government workers specifically, how their policies were recently changed, and the feedback they have provided is eye-opening. As an example: "Ryan Sully, a U.S. Department of Commerce employee, said Governor Walz's announcement was pushing him to consider a career change" (Bierschbach, 2025, p. 2). The recent news was a huge concern for Sully regarding his personal life because the main reason for moving in 2022 from South Dakota to Minnesota was that he was offered a fully remote job. With frustrations that were represented in this article, he said he would consider going into the private sector and leaving government work. Sully is coming from an approach that is valid considering hearing about the news. When he was under the impression that is what the position would look like having a mandate to change his situtation completely with no discussion about options is almost appalling. "By early 2023 about 30% of full-paid days are worked from home, with hybrid [work from home] being the most common approach to this (Barrero et al., 2023)" (Bloom et al., 2022, p. 2). This 2023 statistic shows that of full-time paid jobs, under half are still working from home and a majority being a hybrid model. Working in an office full-time is a tough sell to most employees.

Disadvantages and Advantages

A major issue with the change in where and how people work is how it can affect their personal lives. This can ultimately affect a largely diverse demographic, including parents, couples, single-person households, and individuals with disabilities. Over the last five years, there have been a lot of modifications workers have made due to going from working in the office to working from home or only having to go into the office a few times a week (Koski, 2023). For example, there have been responses from parents who work hybrid that say, "The biggest challenge for parents was to focus on two things at the same time, like focusing on work and not on personal responsibilities" (Koski, 2023, p. 55). There are challenges on both sides of working fully remotely and fully in person. A lot of it comes down to people's mental load to scramble to figure out a new system that works for their personal and work lives. The compromise and solution could be revisiting the hybrid working model.

Due to some dramatic life changes for some including not having to pay for childcare, as much gas for commuting, and when having a long day at the office resorting to buying take out meals.

Many workers express needing flexibility and the trust of their employers. This has promoted a healthy growth of better working outcomes as well as better working relationships (Koski, 2023). "These findings highlight how hybrid-WFH is typically beneficial for both employees and firms but is usually underappreciated in advance, particularly by managers." (Bloom et al., 2022, p. 18). It is a change that needs to be discussed and outlined for both parties to be comfortable with how work life is going to look for each company exploring this topic. As a few articles have described there is no right or wrong way to do hybrid work. This can be positive for all if the parties involved have open communication about what hybrid work will look like for them.

Economic Impact

There are economic drawbacks from employees not working in buildings within cities because they are not contributing to the boost of income flow that is supported by having foot traffic being there to support funds to keep cities looking nice. With companies going from having workspaces in buildings to having all employees working at home and not returning there will be many empty buildings not being used (Brandes, 2024). There have been perks when it comes to working from home. Many Gen Zers like the option of remote or hybrid so they can avoid commute times and balance work and social life. Employees have been the majority of people who want to stay in a hybrid work life while leaders are the ones advocating for in-person work (Koski, 2023).

Considering many companies financially could not keep paying for workspaces when most of their employees were at home during COVID-19, they eventually gave up the space or stopped renting it out. Large cities in North America have seen major effects on their communities, one article notes two cities that stand out: Nashville, Tennessee and Boise, Idaho (Brandes, 2024). With the struggles completely remote work has on cities, there have been a few strategies in the works to try and match the economic income a city gains when the buildings in the cities are full. Brandes told us that "there are cities that have historically been highly dependent on public transit" (Brandes, 2024, para. 10). That is where Nashville and Boise approached this challenge with a solution by making their cities vacation destinations to bring the revenue up through high volumes of foot traffic (Brandes, 2024).

Another view is that employers have been anxious about the productivity and quality of work when it comes to comparing remote/hybrid work and in-office. When measuring this with a few studies looked at monthly/yearly work reviews to measure what things have been done. Overall, it is hard to gather concrete evidence that hybrid employees aren't producing quality work. Quality goes hand and hand with trust, so employers need to find qualities of trust within their employees and the work they produce no matter where they are getting it done. At the end of the day, productivity is all relevant to what someone is working on and when it needs to get done to have it be done right. Hybrid work "gives employees independence to get quality over quantity" (Koski, 2023, p.27).

In terms of how much hybrid work can impact a company there of course are positives and negatives. A positive that hybrid options offer employees is that you can work with a team that lives all over the world which can bring in a lot of unique perspectives. A negative is employees missing out on in-office opportunities that will not happen when someone is working remotely. For teams to be collaborating there needs to be some sort of face-to-face experience to kick start natural interactions and relationships. This often happens when co-workers are in the office where things like lunch breaks can start up casual conversations. With a hybrid model, there is a chance for stronger bonding relationships between bosses and employees. Going back to gains for cities, the flexibility that most workers will have at some point of the week in office can start to go a long way

in building more consistent traffic in cities. Another interesting point Brandes (2024) mentioned is using vacant buildings for housing. "Emerging data suggest that the most economically resilient neighborhoods in cities are those that have a very healthy diversification of uses, such as offices and residential uses together in similar proportions" (Brandes, 2024, para. 25). Transforming office buildings into residential buildings is not a quick fix or one that will be remotely comparable in terms of the potential income that an office building would bring. It is very important to start somewhere, and this may be the solution for a more consistent rebuild.

Job Satisfaction

Hybrid work has helped people's job satisfaction responses increase and created a desire to work without feeling burnout. "After the pandemic ended, nearly 90% of respondents would strongly demand flexibility in terms of when and where they work" (Wójcik, 2023, p. 56). Burnout is a major factor in job turnover rates as well as low job retention. Getting people in the office a few times a week is also beneficial when pairing remote work to build community. "The issue of the social well-being of employees, i.e., their interpersonal relations, seems to be particularly crucial" (Wójcik, 2023, p. 57). Before cell phones, there were natural breaks between home and work because there was not a massive open line of communication when leaving work with your co-workers and bosses.

Work has consumed a lot of people's lives since technology has information readily available at our fingertips. Back in the day, emails could only be read on computers, and they communicated with landlines or pagers. The article mentions how drastic of a change it was when cell phones came into the picture and that a boss relied on communicating via phone call to have his employee check for an important email to come through over the weekend. Other than people who work to save lives and rely solely on being in constant communication there should be separation from direct contact with work for those whose work lives are not a make or break on someone's life status. There is an argument that hybrid work is here to stay and that there are positive reasons why it can be successful.

Hybrid is a mix of the best of both words in terms of compromise to being fully remote and fully in office. Work retention is a whole other topic that aligns with what is going on in the world of discussing this worldly transition of coming post-pandemic. With what everyone went through it is almost impossible to start to force people to be fully back in the office due to so many personal and professional positives by working at the bare minimum partially remotely. The luxury of flexibility has become a new normal and it has become a comfortable ask for most employees to their employers.

Mental Health

A lot of what employees and employers need from work culture is trust and community. Patel and Plowman (2022) discussed the importance of having a best friend at work, which leads to many positive outcomes. Not only does this help people feel more comfortable in the workplace but also keeps people accountable for doing their work well. More specifically, Gen Z for example, exhibits socialization as being an important part of the workplace they want to be a part of. Recent studies show that Gen Z prefers a workplace that offers flexibility and one that takes time to get to know them. Making connections is crucial in deciding on a workplace for most Gen Zers because of the direct correlation to having access to constant contact via social media and mobile devices (Ma & Fang, 2023).

Chaos Theory ties into all the unknowns and not being able to control or predict them (Pryor & Bright, 2012). This theory helps to encapsulate what some are experiencing in the job hunt, working world, and balancing both work and personal life. Understanding that failing forward is going to be your best option to grow in times of uncertainty is going to be uncomfortable. Knowing that "everything has the potential to influence and be influenced by everything else in the system" (Pryor & Bright, 2012, p. 4). Knowing this, having support in place through career counselors or human resources personnel to find a creative solution can help to alleviate

the mental load. Gen Z students are looking for jobs that make them happy or interesting to be a part of because they care more about who they are working with and why they are spending quality time on things that matter (Ma & Fang, 2023).

Another way to support mental health as workers guide themselves through unpredictable times is being able to understand the Narrative Approach. "Narrative approaches view the episodes or phases of one's life as chapters to be examined and re-examined" (Stebleton & Franklin, 2022, p. 184). Being able to approach work situations with a sense of being more humane so that one can show up to work to the best of their ability. The Narrative Approach involves storytelling which can bring inclusion to the working community by letting individuals feel heard and seen. Some have imposter syndrome in the workplace due to not feeling as though they belong which is a heavy burden and can stop full potential productivity. It also helps to "educate clients regarding the reality that life-career planning is an ongoing, cyclical process rather than a single-time event that is only engaged in during times of crisis" (Stebleton & Franklin, 2022, p. 186).

Another mental load that can be very overwhelming, especially if the workplace is changing, is work modalities that you are not mentally prepared for and are worried it won't work out. Knowing that failure is talked about in the chaos theory can be good and it is uncomfortable. Chaos theory and Narrative go together in helping new people to adjust to the working environment, one's that had their working environment completely change and those who are looking for new work.

Conclusion

Hybrid is a compromise between both sides that either want to continue to work from home and those who are mandated to work in person. Knowing that times are changing again due to being out of the pandemic it is going to cause a lot of problem solving. This topic of work and what it looks like does not have a quick fix, it will take time to get into the groove and find what works. It also is individual choices based on the company or who you work for because each industry needs different things. Being patient and willing to have open communication about what is next and how to go about it is going to be the right path to finding solutions to this problem.

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DEI AND ORGANIZATIONAL DIVERSITY ISSUES AND TRENDS: APPLICATIONS IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Rachel Blankenship

Over the past decade, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices have been at the forefront for individuals and organizations. As demographics change, organizations are expected to shift their practices and mindsets around DEI in meaningful ways. Although with the recent changes and awareness increasing, the discussion of DEI has shifted to a new mindset for many individuals and organizations while making it a more prominent focus around career development. The conversation around DEI includes topics such as promotion, workplace culture, hiring, and leadership representation. With these topics in mind, organizations may choose to take a different approach with DEI practices and initiatives. These practices can include employer-mandated training on diversity and commitments to equity in hiring practices.

Career educators and human resources personnel must thoroughly understand organizational diversity issues and DEI as they shape how individuals prepare for the workforce and support career development opportunities. When working in human resources, it is critical to understand more about DEI and how it influences individuals and the organization. As DEI evolves, it will continue to be an important conversation to be had as perspectives shift with changes and discussion. In particular, it can be valuable to look at it through the lens of career development, including Social Cognitive Career Theory and Systems Theory Framework, while examining what comes next.

What DEI Looks Like Now

Over the past several years, DEI practices have evolved tremendously. Until recently, the idea of DEI initiatives and policies became acceptable as more people recognized that it would be a permanent enactment in various organizations. However, that changed when U.S. President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order in his first week in office that restored merit-based hiring and promotions across the federal government, along with another Executive Order that ended many DEI programs throughout the United States (White House, 2025). The Trump administration believes "corporate DEI practices have unfairly disadvantaged and discriminated against white men" (Guynn, 2025, para. 26). Additionally, the White House stated that "DEI creates and then amplifies prejudicial hostility and exacerbates interpersonal conflict" (Alfonseca, 2025, para. 20). This counteracts Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which was put in place to end employment discrimination based on race, religion, color, sex, or national origin (Snell & Morris, 2023). Due to these executive orders, companies have been removing their DEI initiatives and mentions of diversity throughout their organization. Terms like "belonging" have taken the place of DEI in corporate lingo as it gets phased out and struck from their public agendas (Guynn, 2025).

Certain large companies that have rolled back their DEI policies include Major League Baseball, Walmart, Amazon, Molson Coors, Morgan Stanley, Google, and more (Murray, 2025). Among those, Target has been a major company raising discussion among Americans as Target removes its DEI practices. Target ended its Racial Equity Action and Change

initiatives along with its three-year diversity, equity, and inclusion goals (Bradley, 2025). According to the Wall Street Journal, their stocks dropped 12 percent within three to four weeks of the rollback, and their investors were unaware of the financial risks (Nassauer & Simon, 2025). Target saw 5 million fewer customers while Costco, which is standing firm with its DEI initiatives, saw 7.7 million more customers in the span of four weeks (Ghabbash, 2025). JPMorgan Chase has been in several headlines as the CEO, Jamie Dimon, talked about how he plans to eliminate ineffective and costly diversity initiatives but wants to stay committed to the programs that have been helping boost the diversity of the company's employees and customer base (Guynn, 2025). Despite many companies getting rid of or scaling back on DEI practices, other companies are standing strong and committed to programs that help their company's workforce and customer base, like JPMorgan Chase.

Differing Perspectives of What DEI Should Be

Despite recent criticism over DEI efforts, some people believe that DEI is positive and contributes a lot to organizations around the world. In *Defining Equity and Inclusion in the Future of Career Education*, Bate (2022) shared that many organizations struggle when they work with historically advantaged populations as the organizational culture, unconscious bias among other employees, social segregation, and not being inclusive are due to preexisting structures and the rootedness of Whiteness within the systems. This shows that without DEI practices, it can be troublesome for environments to be truly inclusive, as the preexisting structures are the historical systems that were set in place for, and favor, White-dominant culture norms, along with their employees unknowingly excluding other individuals, making marginalized employees tend to feel unwelcome or not valued.

A Pew Research Center survey found that most US adults who are employed, about 56%, feel that focusing on increasing DEI practices at work is positive (Minkin, 2023). Minkin (2023) also found crucial information that shows how DEI practices can be beneficial: about 78% of Black, 72% of Asian, and 65% of Hispanic workers believe that focusing on DEI within their workplace is a good thing. Workers were more likely to say that being a man in the workplace makes it easier to be successful than to say it makes it more difficult, about 36% to 6% respectively. Finally, another important point the survey found was that the DEI training within the workplace, was perceived to be positive with 53% of workers saying that the training was *very helpful* or *somewhat helpful* (Minkin, 2023).

Kratz (2024) made several key points about how DEI was a considerable factor in companies' initiatives and budgets. Findings included that 85% have a budget that is dedicated to DEI, and 78% of organizations in the US prioritized DEI more than they did in the previous year, while 45% discussed that they would increase their DEI budget in the next financial year. This older research (prior to the 2025 changes) supported the value that organizations placed on DEI practices and policies in relation to organizational success. This value stems from the belief that it is not about hitting diversity hiring quotas but rather breaking barriers so that everyone has the same opportunity to thrive in the workplace (Alfonseca, 2025). To these companies, DEI is about about the emphasis is on long-term change and fairness. With all of this in mind, it is crucial for career educators and human resource personnel to acknowledge how DEI initiatives influence employee experiences and various structures within the organization.

On the other hand, some individuals believe race and ethnicity should not be a part of the conversation, but rather employees should be hired or promoted due to their own merit and skills. As discussed before, U.S. President Donald Trump's actions are based on this belief regarding DEI practices. Entering his presidency, he vowed that he would "end the government policy of trying to socially engineer race and gender into every aspect of public and private life," and he would "forge a society that is colorblind and merit-based" (Murray, 2025, para. 48). People all over the nation

agree with what Trump has to say and believe that DEI focuses too much on race and gender at the expense of individuals' merit (Guynn, 2025). Kratz (2024) talked about what happens when organizations promote people solely based on their diversity, and the risks that might come with that. If you promote these individuals based only on diversity, they may not be the most qualified or experienced for the role, which can then lead to lower productivity, inefficiencies, and decreased employee morale (Kratz, 2024). This can lead to the perception of tokenism, which can undermine the organization's credibility in their commitment to DEI and might devalue the achievements of those who have earned their positions. Promoting individuals not based solely on merit and qualifications might lead individuals to have a sense that they are being treated unfairly, and they might start to show resentment as they have continuously and consistently shown what their capabilities are. This can lessen motivation and employee engagement while contributing to a toxic work environment (Kratz 2024). When employees do not identify with the organization's values and goals one result is increased turnover rates. With all of this in mind, there are risks and implications that come with the DEI practices that organizations have integrated into their workplace and hiring practices. Individuals can struggle to do well in their positions and integrate into the organization if they are not fully prepared for the position and do not fully align with what their mission. Looking at DEI through this lens, DEI initiatives may have their downfalls if they are not supportive of employees' loyalty and hard work in the company.

Applications of Career Development Models and Frameworks

While looking at the two different perspectives on DEI practices, it is important to examine it through a career development perspective, specifically through models and frameworks. There are numerous theories and models that fit well in looking at how DEI operates. The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) aims to help explain the occupational choices individuals make, along with their interests and how they achieve goals. *Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work* by Robert W. Lent and Steven D. Brown (2020) discussed how SCCT looks at how the three cognitive-person variables help exercise agency in career development. The three are self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals. Self-efficacy beliefs refer to an individual's judgment of their own capabilities to be able to organize and execute various courses of action that are needed to perform (Brown & Lent, 2020). Burga et al. (2020) noted that these beliefs are continuously evolving, based on performance domains, and how individuals interact with socio-contextual factors that stimulate identification and motivate them towards their career goals. When organizations implement DEI initiatives, factors that contribute to individuals' development of self-efficacy beliefs are affected. Therefore, individuals may have a better experience at the organization and higher job satisfaction if they have high self-efficacy, i.e., they believe that they have the capability to perform well. Or they may have a higher self-efficacy if the organization they are working for does not have DEI initiatives, and they feel as though that is what they need to succeed. By looking at DEI through SCCT's belief of self-efficacy, everyone can have a different experience or perspective based on their judgment of what they need to achieve higher performance at work.

In addition to looking through the Social Cognitive Career Theory, the Systems Theory Framework (STF), can aid the understanding of the interaction between the employee and the environment. Hite and McDonald in *Career Development Links to Career Psychology* (2023) talk about how the Systems Theory Framework has several different systems that are interrelated, such as the individual, the social system, and the environmental-societal system over the context of time. The individual system includes influences that are gender, age, health, ability, disability, beliefs, values, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc. (McMahon & Patton, 2018). The influences that represent the social system could include peers,

workplace, community groups, educational institutions, etc. (McMahon & Patton, 2018). This could also include national culture, the economy, and political environment for both the social system and the environmental-societal system (Zubair & Moazzam, 2024). The STF helps recognize how marginalized individuals might face barriers that are out of their control, such as discrimination or biased hiring practices. It shows how it is an interconnected system and how people do not make decisions about their careers solely on themselves but are also shaped by their family, peers, and more. In consideration of STF, organizations should not have their DEI efforts focus solely on the individual but on the entire organizational system, including culture and human resources (HR) practices. It also helps people look at how the STF considers the individual system influences and how they create experiences and challenges that are unique to the individual within the workplace.

Furthermore, social influences show that the stereotypes individuals may perceive to be positive can be damaging, setting unrealistic expectations, and might deny individuals the opportunity to be able to be judged and looked at based solely on their merits (McDonald & Hite, 2023). STF helps explain how it can be challenging for organizations to hire or promote individuals solely on merit and skills, as there may be distortions due to stereotypes or other underlying biases. McDonald & Hite (2023) explained how it can be a human tendency to think that your culture is the best and anything that is not like your own culture might appear unusual or unsuitable to you. From an HRD standpoint, STF may be beneficial to look at when executing hiring practices and how to better the employee experience. Systems Theory Framework helps take a different look at DEI and what it can look like for individuals within an organization.

Strategies and Next Steps for the Future of DEI

Going forward, DEI will continue to change as the world evolves, and it is important to look at what strategies and applications could be the next steps for DEI. Bernstein et al. (20219) helped acknowledge and further reinforce the idea that organizations will be more inclusive if they look beyond the composition of the workforce, to help concentrate on how well those members who are not the majority are incorporated into the culture and address the system-level inequities that limit career opportunities for the non-majority employees. Along with that, Bate (2022) discussed how career coaches, counselors, recruiters, and HR managers need to help lead with the consciousness of inclusion for the future development of the workforce. These roles are key in influencing hiring practices and access to opportunities that will pave the way for the future workforce. Professionals believe that organizations need to take those steps to reach the goal of being a race-conscious organization to help acknowledge the national racial inequities in the workforce (Buford & Flores, 2024).

As more people adopt the idea of DEI and how important it is in the workforce, the more resistance there will be to the organizations that do not have DEI practices. If there is resistance within the organization, then it may lead to its downfall, as employees may choose to work elsewhere, and people will choose to get their goods and services at other places (Leonard, 2024). The less resistance, the better employee retention and competitiveness of the organization in the economy. Likewise, it was found that HR managers could streamline the process and procedures of applications to avoid barriers (Hamidullah et al., 2024). For example, the government and other nonprofit organizations should not look at people's names while screening applicants to avoid bias while reviewing resumes (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). By acknowledging these steps and recommendations, they will help individuals and organizations prepare for the future of DEI.

As an individual studying human resource development with a minor in business, I will be taking this knowledge and these recommendations with me going forward as I enter the workforce. It is important for my line of work to stay on top of the continuously changing trends and laws about DEI and what that means for the individuals I will be working with. As I deepen my understanding of HR and what that looks like in organizations, I hope to help contribute to the solution of addressing workplace inequalities and creating environments that help all succeed in their professional development.

Conclusion

Looking at DEI from a career development perspective through Social Cognitive Career Theory and Systems Theory Framework and different perspectives of individuals, it continues to be an important topic as the workforce evolves more each day. Career educators will be beneficial to those entering the workforce as they understand more about the effects of organizational diversity issues and DEI. Many believe that DEI is there to level the playing field and to recognize those barriers that exist that might prevent those who are equally as qualified from reaching the same opportunities. But others believe that DEI takes away the opportunity for individuals to be hired or promoted in the organization, as they need to be solely based on their skills and past experiences. DEI is a part of an ever-changing environment that constantly needs to push forward towards better practices and initiatives within organizations. It is pivotal to keep in mind what DEI means for you and what you need to succeed in your organization, whether that be an organization that continues to pursue DEI initiatives or an organization that has eliminated initiatives entirely. Continuously adapting and preparing for what comes next will help organizations and individuals stay ahead of the competition and evolve.

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ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND EMPLOYEE CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Nick Hartman

Why Leadership Development Programs are Important for Retention and Talent

In the workplace today, companies face a key question about talent: Are they doing enough to retain and develop their workforce? As the competition for highly skilled employees grows, retaining key employees is growing in importance. Organizations need to actively invest in their talent to ensure success. A leadership development program is "an official commitment to help top-tier employees not only grow their skill sets but also help them find new roles within the company to exercise these skills with a long-term influence" (Wooll, 2025, point #2). Leadership development programs are essential for retaining and engaging talent because they help employees grow and envision a long-term future within an organization. Without these opportunities, a company can risk losing high potential talent to their competitors.

Many employees are looking for more than just a paycheck; they want growth and purpose in their work. Employee engagement also relates to purpose and growth. A company's lack of initiative to invest in its talent can lead to loss of profits and a disengaged workforce. Leadership development programs show employees that their potential is recognized and that the company is willing to invest in their future.

What is a Leadership Development Program?

Leadership development programs in the corporate setting are structured programs designed to grow the next generation of leaders. They are particularly curated for high performers that show a strong potential and willingness to grow. These programs typically combine formal training, mentorship, projects, and exposure to senior leaders. According to McKinsey, "companies that invest in leadership development are 2.4 times more likely to hit their performance targets" (Brassey et al., 2019, p. 1). For young professionals and workers with less work experience, these programs can offer a fast-track to career growth and real-world learning that is more advanced than their peers. Some of the best leadership programs target individuals with potential rather than a high performing individual. This shows that an early investment in talent is a smart long-term move.

What makes these programs so special is their focus on development through a hands-on approach. Participants will often rotate through different departments or business units over a certain period of time. This gives them a broad understanding of how the company works and how all the different units interact with one another. Many programs also include coaching, regular feedback loops, and networking opportunities that someone may not have in a traditional role.

On the other hand, there are leadership development programs for executives that offer the higher tenure employees more development in the areas of strategic thinking, change management and leading at scale. At this level, the leaders are expected to drive company-wide results and change in the workplace. Executive programs usually involve initiatives like peer-to-peer learning, coaching from external consultants, and real-time problem-solving challenges. While younger professionals tend to benefit from

structure and exposure, executives need space to reflect, reset, and expand their leadership mindset. "Common executive leadership challenges include change management, retaining, recruiting, and developing talent, addressing conflict, and fostering a harmonious work environment" (Parsons, 2025, "Executive Leadership Challenges" section). These challenges are very high level and need high level strategic thinking to be addressed. In both aspects of leadership development programs, it is not just a goal that companies want to have, but a necessary program to ensure a company can develop top talent and provide long-term growth.

Key Characteristics of a Strong Leadership Development Program

When looking at a good development program there are many key characteristics that stand out. *The Harvard Business Review* mentions that a strong leadership development program is not just about building specific skills, but it is about developing the whole person (Yemiscigil et al., 2023). This is a helpful framework to understand when creating a program because certain skills are important to have but rounding out an individual will ultimately help them grow and succeed at a company faster than ever. Mentorships and coaching are key areas that make a program successful. Early career professionals may be able to develop relationships with executives or other high-level employees that can foster growth and personal development. The most common mentorship model that is used in these programs is one-on-one mentoring. This allows for an employee to directly connect with an experienced co-worker in a more meaningful way. It creates a space where feedback can be personalized, and an employee can openly discuss the different challenges they are experiencing. Along with mentorship, successful programs include rotational assignments and cross functional experiences. These make sure that the participants have exposure to all of the different areas in the business which will help build a much broader skill set. Having a structured evaluation along this journey is also important for developing a leadership development program (LDP). It allows for the participant to ensure they know what they can improve on. All of these different aspects help create a well rounded experience, but ultimately a good LDP invests in the participants not for the roles they are in currently but the leaders they can become.

A good example of a successful LDP comes from Milwaukee Tool (2025). The Milwaukee Tool Engineering Development Program (EDP) is a well-structured rotational program designed to turn new engineering graduates into future leaders within their company. Over two years, the participants rotate through different areas like product design, testing and manufacturing which gives them exposure and hands-on experience (Milwaukee Tool, 2025). What makes this program stand out is how it combines technical training with real project work, mentorship and continuous feedback. This is a strong example of an LDP because it invests in the employees early on and shows a structured career path for the workers' future.

CAREER THEORIES THAT SUPPORT LDPS

Systems Theory Framework

It is useful to explore the intersection of LDPs and career development theory because LDPs can play a critical role in a person's career development. The Systems Theory Framework points out that career paths are not linear but that they are shaped by ongoing interactions between personal attributes, social relationships, and broader environmental factors (McMahon & Patton, 2018). Leadership development programs contain a systematic approach such as encouraging reflection, adaptability, and continuous learning. By developing self-awareness and a strong leadership identity from participating in a LDP, individuals can align their personal values with organizational goals. This is very important as it supports long-term satisfaction engagement. These programs also emphasize learning through experience, feedback, and mentorship. A participant is continually growing as they journey through

the program. Each participant can have a different experience than their peers and it is very much nonlinear. Leadership development programs do not just support individual career advancement; they also strengthen a person's ability to navigate and influence the complex systems of the business which can be essential for career growth. For example, this can happen through an organization's culture. Work culture influences expectations around behavior, collaboration, and values, which can make navigating a new environment challenging. This is where a LDP can be especially valuable. By rotating through different experiences each year, participants build the skills to adapt and succeed across various organizational settings.

Career Construction Theory

Career Construction Theory emphasizes that individuals actively construct their careers through personal narratives, adapting to changing roles, environments, and expectations (Savickas, 2020). Story construction helps employees connect their experiences to a larger narrative, giving them purpose and clarity. It enhances goal setting and ownership of their development. This is especially relevant in a leadership development program as participants are often navigating new professional identities and broader responsibilities. With many different rotations comes new experiences and relationships which can directly shape a participant's interests and narrative. This can happen through reflection and the different experiences they may have throughout the program. Participants begin to discover who they are and where they want to go.
A corporation that has a strong LDP wants to ensure that their participants can understand their own interests, so as to develop a strong competency in an area where they can excel and find personal growth. To maximize the benefits of Career Construction Theory in LDPs, organizations should prioritize opportunities for regular reflection and narrative building. Incorporating structured reflection sessions can help participants connect their diverse experiences to a coherent career story. Providing tools like career assessments and coaching should also occur throughout this process.

Moving Forward

Looking ahead, leadership development programs offer a meaningful way to address two of the most pressing issues in today's workplace, employee disengagement and employee development. LDPs can offer organizations a clear path to invest in their own workers while responding to shifting employee expectations and workplace dynamics. It helps them grow into roles that align with both their personal aspirations and the organization's long-term strategy. When designed well, these programs can create a sense of purpose, connection, and direction.

Sometimes LDPs are not the answer. Not every employee is interested in pursuing a strong leadership path. Career development is not one-size-fits-all, and organizations should recognize that different people are motivated by different kinds of growth. What is the most important aspect is offering diverse pathways and ensuring that employees feel seen and supported regardless of whether they are on a leadership track. For those with the interest and potential, LDPs can be a powerful tool.

Leadership development programs are not just about creating future executives. They are about creating stronger, more engaged teams and building a workplace culture that supports success.

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AI: A POSSIBLE CAREER DEVELOPMENT TOOL AND NOT OUR REPLACEMENT

Nathan Price

Workforce Shifts and the Urgency to Evolve

The workforce is going through significant transformations, including the rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation, an urgent demand for new digital and adaptive skills, the need for continuous upskilling, and a widening disconnect between education and industry needs (McKinsey & Company, 2025). According to Korn Ferry (2018), the world could face a global talent shortage of more than 85 million skilled workers by 2030, so ignoring the current needs for advancement will be detrimental to the functions of Human Resources (HR) and academia. Many HR functions have embraced advancements in the employee experience with AI such as training, recruitment, and talent development (Khang et al., 2024), which is starting to put leaders in the role of translators between human values and AI systems (Tenakwah, 2025). Conversely, many higher education institutions have resisted integrating AI into their systems, clinging to traditional systems that are not adequately aligned with the evolving nature of work (Chklovski, 2025; Oswald et al., 2019). The current dynamic of the world calls for a systemic overhaul and revision of not only education requirements but also career readiness frameworks that better integrate K-12 education, vocational training, and higher education.

The High School Opportunity Gap

According to Super's Life-Span, Life Space Theory (1990), adolescence, particularly during the high school years, is a formative period for career identity development (Super, 1990). However, the current high school system often falls short of providing equitable, personalized support. With an average caseload of 375 students per guidance counselor (IES, 2024), many schools prioritize compliance-driven (e.g., GPA, FAFSA, SAT) services and interventions rather than the transformative guidance that is critically needed for our students (Stanciak, 1995). School systems such as Minneapolis Public Schools have begun investing in Career and College Readiness Centers to bridge this gap (Achieve Twin Cities, n.d.). However, the current reality is that many districts lack the resources to replicate such a success system wide.

These challenges disproportionately impact low-income families and students of color. Studies show these students are more likely to encounter biased perceptions and be steered away from rigorous career pathways by educators (Linnehan et al., 2011; Shillingford et al., 2018). Additionally, Parkhouse et al. (2021) argued that we should have culturally responsive guidance and education for our students to affirm their lived experiences. Even with new training initiatives, the lack of personalized and individualized support has created a motivation gap, particularly among underserved students, who may not see the immediate value of participating in career planning while managing daily survival (Griffiths & Campbell, 2025; Quispe-Victoria et al., 2024). To break through these ongoing barriers, we will have to redesign and implement targeted, inclusive strategies that address and solve the systemic inequalities while also preparing a capable workforce to meet workforce demands.

There has been a shift, not entirely to our career development structures, but to the access to Generative AI and how individuals use it for career development and decision making. As career development specialists (CDS) within education systems, we must evaluate whether AI can assist with our career development interventions and increase the

need for personalized access. We cannot ignore the elephant in the room, but must be willing to address and explore potential ways to advance our practices.

Defining AI and Its Role in Student Futures

The rising exploration and utilization of Generative AI induces fear due to the notion of replacing work, a tool for people to work smarter and faster, or a detriment to our current world. As a career coach, I see students and adults who are comfortable with AI, using it to drive their career development and guide their decisions faster than the traditional way of exploring through programs, mentorships, and other initiatives.

Wilson et al. (2024) and Schatt (2023) cautioned against adopting AI without understanding the necessary human context, conditioning of AI, and quality of input. Schatt (2023) emphasized the irreplaceable value of human sensitivity toward emotions and the narrative dimensions of a student's journey. Wilson et al. (2024) and Borenstein et al. (2023) similarly reported concerns about reinforcing bias and undermining trust if not strategically guided through ethical human-centered frameworks. Another downside of using AI is the potential for critical thinking skills to become underutilized. Individuals may use an AI platform for assistance before thinking through the scenario, avoiding going through the process to disseminate what information is pertinent versus overgeneralized. The goal is to debunk the thought that AI is trying to replace or eliminate the necessity of community and practitioners.

There are advantages in the ways AI could be customized to the individual; it has a collective knowledge that it can pull from, and is accessible to everyone to use. Also, using AI can give young people time to cover other materials that may be needed for their exploration (Wilson, 2024). When used thoughtfully, AI can play a transformative role in career development by offering scalable, personalized guidance, helping students match their skills and interests to evolving labor market trends, and democratizing access to career exploration tools (Wilson et al., 2024; Chklovski, 2025). Research shows that AI-assisted systems can support early exposure to career pathways, simulate real-world scenarios, and offer reflective prompts that encourage deeper meaning-making, all essential components in narrative career construction (Schatt, 2023). Although there are counterproductive behaviors and arguments towards applying AI, there is a way to train individuals how to use it as a tool to drive their career development.

Exploring AI and Career Development

Since our students are starting to use AI as a navigational tool, CDS can step up with intentional structures that train, guide, and support their career development. To effectively meet the needs of students in an increasingly AI-driven workforce, high school career development centers (when available) must adopt a tiered intervention model that personalizes the career exploration process while remaining aligned with staff capacity (Achieve Twin Cities, n.d.). Before integrating AI, several preparatory steps should be taken, including strategic planning, capacity building, and institutional alignment. Cobo and Garrido (2023) argued that effective implementation of AI in schools depends on four key readiness factors: capacity building among educators, accessible digital infrastructure, ethical culture, and shared ownership between leadership and frontline practitioners.

System-Wide Introduction/Intervention

CDS teams and school administrators should co-develop a strategic plan that introduces students and staff to AI platforms. A school-wide launch is helpful to create a sustainable structure of training all in the tool. Since many career development centers have automated workshops (Duarte et al., 2022) to give to students, this could be a way to collaborate with the teachers to discuss expectations and introduce a way to properly use AI. Your school could schedule a workshop during orientation or back-to-school rallies titled "What is AI and how AI can support, not replace, your decision making." This should include teaching

CAREER EXPLORATION ACTIVITY

In this activity, students begin by completing a career interest assessment using O*NET, reflecting on their results, and using AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT or other school-approved platforms) to analyze and synthesize their findings. They will then begin forming connections between their career curiosities and real-life professionals, culminating in a written "Day in the Life" narrative for one career of interest. This activity builds technical and analytical skills and encourages students to explore their identity, values, and future aspirations through narrative writing and dialogue with trusted adults or mentors.

1. O*NET Career Interest Inventory
   a. Students visit O*NET and complete the **Interest Profiler**.
   b. Upon completion, students download or screenshot their results as a PDF.
   c. Students upload the file into their digital folder or Google Drive.

2. Personal Reflection
   a. Students write a 1–2 paragraph reflection answering:
      i. What career areas resonated with me the most?
      ii. Which roles am I not interested in, and why?
      iii. What surprised me?
      iv. What questions do I have about these careers?

3. AI Prompt Creation and Analysis
   a. Remind the students of AI's role and reiterate the ethics and limitations of AI.
   b. Students attach a PDF of their interest inventory summary and personal reflection into ChatGPT (or another AI platform).
      i. Prompt to use:
      "Based on my interest inventory and reflections, what are three careers that align with my skills and values? Please explain why each career might be a good fit."
   c. Students read, reflect on, and save the AI-generated response.
   d. Have the student revise their prompt to include more context (e.g., life goals, family dynamics, and academic preferences) and have them re-run their prompt.

4. Use the "Day in the Life" Narrative
   a. Students choose one of the three AI-recommended careers.
   b. They use AI to help write a "Day in the Life" story of someone in that profession.
   c. Prompt to use:
   "Write a realistic 'day in the life' story of a [career title] who enjoys [student's interests]. Include what tasks they do, who they work with, and what makes their job fulfilling."

5. For the next assignment, have the students find 1 individual who is currently in the field and conduct an informational interview with a person in their desired field to gain insight into their lives.

6. Finally, have the student write a report on the field of choice and compare the AI notes with the interview notes. Have them report on the comparison of what AI got right. What surprised them from the interview? How can you use this as a tool to further your understanding of the field?

students how to write meaningful prompts and how to reflect on the information provided while also teaching about bias awareness, critical prompting, and ethical exploration. Additionally, it is essential to create a resource guide that pairs with the presentation, along with related activities, such as narrative approach essays to explore potential career fields and personal statements that will support secondary students as they prepare for the college admissions process.

Reimagining Career Development Through AI Integration

AI-assisted career development should be further reinforced through integrated classroom activities. CDS can collaborate with educators to embed a series of reflective and exploratory exercises into English, social studies, or advisory curricula. The goal is to have a guide that can be uploaded to the AI platform to analyze the students' writing and stories. Have the students write prompts for other areas, such as scholarship essays, personal statements, and other narrative approaches.

Writing prompts should include information about demographics, family influences, strengths, values, and life goals. AI outputs align with their identities and goals when students provide an in-depth input context. Through this customization, students are turning the simple AI tool into a platform for self-discovery, not just information retrieval. In exercises, such as the Career Exploration Activity provided in this chapter, students are encouraged to use AI to simulate answers, compare outputs with real-life conversations, and refine their perspectives. Students should be explicitly taught how to provide meaningful input into AI systems by grounding their queries in personal context.

1:1 Interventions

In one-on-one sessions guided by high school CDS, AI can function as a reflective bridge between meetings, offering students a tool to evaluate their stories and pull out themes to bring to the CDS. For example, you can have a student conduct a narrative construction exercise; students can be prompted to ask AI how certain interests might manifest in future roles. CDS can review these AI-assisted reflections with students and ask what contextual elements may be missing from their story or output to identify areas for deeper exploration or redirection. This ongoing process empowers students to move beyond static inventories and engage in iterative meaning-making, which is an essential component of adaptive career development (Hirschi, 2015). CDS teams must monitor how students are using AI, ensure culturally sustaining practices are honored, and address misconceptions early. By positioning AI as a reflective partner rather than a replacement for human insight, CDS creates a model that expands access, deepens understanding, and honors the complexity of each student's journey (Wilson et al., 2024; Schatt, 2023).

Conclusion

CDS are preparing students to thrive in a future shaped by digital transformation and rapid innovation. Equipping both students and CDS professionals with the tools and training needed to engage AI responsibly will expand access to meaningful exploration and identity-aligned planning. With systemwide workshops, in-class writing prompts, and one-on-one coaching layered with thoughtfully guided AI tools, we can support every student, especially those historically underserved. AI is not the answer to all gaps in career development, but when guided by human values, it becomes a bridge: one that creates space for deeper reflection, stronger relationships, and a more equitable path to purpose.

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DONE WITH THE HUSTLE: TIME TO RETHINK 996

Guoying Li

In recent years, the *996* working system – working 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week – in China's internet workplace culture has become particularly prevalent. Initially, this model was regarded as a way to boost corporate competitiveness. However, it has gradually evolved into a passively accepted workplace norm. Phrases like "996 is a blessing" have even emerged, equating long working hours with personal success and further fueling the rise of a culture of Juan.

The word *Juan* originates from internet slang, referring to the phenomenon where individuals or groups overly strive to compete in an environment with limited resources, ultimately leading to a decline in overall efficiency. Unlike healthy competition, involution is usually manifested as ineffective overtime, redundant tasks, and wasted resources, lead individuals and organizations into a cycle of low efficiency.

Currently, the phenomenon of 996 or even 007 (i.e., working all day) is becoming very common. To stand out in the workplace, many employees have to use their rest time to work. At the same time, work intensity is constantly increasing with heavier workloads, a faster pace, and companies expecting employees to complete more tasks in a shorter time. As a result, there is often more focus on quantity rather than quality. Career competition is also getting tougher. Both frontline employees and senior managers are under a lot of pressure. For senior managers, the pressure is even greater because promotion opportunities are limited, and resources are scarce. They need to not only perform well, but also maintain their influence and position in the company. This can easily lead to tension and conflict among colleagues.

In the context of globalization, is the Juan culture in the Chinese workplace a driving force for economic development or a reflection of imbalanced management models in enterprises? This chapter explores the causes and influences of Juan culture and how individuals may find a way out of this kind of work environment. From the perspective of international career development, it is helpful to compare the management methods of different countries, which provides a reference for the workplace environment in China.

The Origins of Involution: A Complex Socioeconomic Phenomenon

The formation of Juan culture is a complex social phenomenon influenced by several factors such as the economy, enterprise management mode, and social culture. These forces influence employees' attitudes toward work and normalize long working hours.

From an economic perspective, China is transitioning from a traditional labor-intensive economy to a high-tech and refined economy. In this process, companies need employees to invest more time and energy to enhance their technological and innovative capabilities (Qiuye, 2019). Rapid development and fierce market competition have accelerated the rise of Juan culture. Especially in the internet industry, in which enterprises need to rapidly expand and iterate products to seize a limited market share. In this context, companies often improve efficiency and competitiveness by extending employees' working hours (Yong, 2022).

At the organizational level, the Chinese business management mode generally uses performance appraisal to measure the work performance of employees. This management model forces employees to work overtime to achieve higher performance goals. Meanwhile, achieving these goals will bring employees higher salaries and better

promotion opportunities. Additionally, most of these companies have developed from the ground up over the past two decades. They expect staff members to have the same level of dedication as the organization's founders and early management. This thinking has become normal in the culture of the company.

Social and cultural expectations also influence employee behavior. Chinese society emphasizes collectivism, and individuals often closely link their values with the achievements of the collective. Under this cultural background, employees are more likely to accept the overtime culture. Also, families have high expectations of individuals, especially in families with poor economic conditions. Children often need to work hard to improve their family's economic situation. This family pressure prompts employees to accept the Juan culture.

The Impact of Juan Culture on Individuals, Organizations, and Society

This section examines Juan culture on people, organizations, and society, reflecting both the benefits and the costs influenced by long working hours and high-intensity work at different levels.

Individual Level

Due to long working hours and intensive effort, individuals may accumulate more work experience, improve their professional skills, and thus obtain promotion opportunities and faster career growth, accelerating career development (London, 1983). Also, overtime is often accompanied by overtime pay or other forms of rewards, particularly in the internet sector, where high-intensity work can bring substantial financial returns.

The adverse impact of long hours of high-intensity work can easily lead to mental health problems, such as physical and mental exhaustion, anxiety, and depression (Sun, 2025). In terms of physical health, there may also be a decrease in immunity, an increased risk of chronic diseases such as hypertension, and even death from overwork (Jinguan, 2021). At the same time, long work hours compress personal life and family time, making it difficult to balance intimate relationships and personal interests, leading to difficult family relationships, decreased social activities, and decreased life satisfaction (Whiting, 2023).

Organizational Level

In addition to the individual level, organizations also hope to maximize their benefits through the 996 work schedule. By extending working hours, employees can complete more tasks in a short period, helping companies achieve higher performance and profitability. Companies also save recruitment and training costs by reducing the cost of hiring new employees. The 996 work schedule accelerates project progress, launches products quickly, and meets market demands in the short term, which can enhance corporate competitiveness.

Excessive work pressure and overtime culture can also lead to an increase in the employee turnover rate. The average employee turnover for more than 31 Chinese online enterprises is less than three years (Jiemian, 2018). The organization's long-term stability is impacted by frequent talent turnover, which also raises training and recruitment expenses. This high-intensity work and repetitive tasks can lead to employee burnout and a lack of creativity, negatively impacting the company's innovation and long-term development.

Societal Level

The 996 culture at both the individual and organizational levels will eventually have an impact on society. From a macro perspective, the culture of Juan plays a role in driving economic growth by pushing individuals to make efficient use of their time and energy. Encouraging continuous innovation can enhance overall productivity improvements and industrial advancement.

At the societal level, the competitive atmosphere influences this work culture, promoting diligence and efficiency. This leads to faster innovation cycles, greater labor output, and improvements in industry standards. It may enhance productivity in the short term. However, the downside of Juan's

expectations is becoming increasingly visible in social health. Rising stress and fatigue leave employees with limited time and energy to invest in their families. For example, the stress may impact marital stability, reducing the willingness to have children (Yu, 2023).

Meanwhile, the Juan culture will exacerbate inequality among societies. High-paying companies, such as the internet industry, usually offer more rewards for employees working overtime. However, employees in non-high-paying companies, such as manufacturing, traditional service industries and agriculture, may face the same time requirements without corresponding rewards. In the long run, this will exacerbate social inequality.

Cross-Cultural Comparison of Workplace Practices: Understanding and Learning from Different Countries

To address the influence of Juan culture on both the individual and organizational levels, while reducing social inequality, this chapter compares the working cultures of different countries. Through describing the key characteristics of the working environment in each country, and how these characteristics affect employees' work and organizational behavior, we can learn from the advantages and challenges of these workplace cultures.

Japan

Japanese organizational culture emphasizes stability, continuous improvement, and collective decision-making. Lifetime employment is not as common as before, particularly before the 1990s. Many companies provide long-term employment opportunities. Employees expect job security from their employers (Shimizutani & Yokoyama, 2009).

Similar to the concept of stability is Japan's improvement culture, that is, continuous improvement. This culture encourages employees to improve their work processes. Focus more on the efficiency, pursue quality rather than quantity (Smith, 2024). To achieve stability and continuous improvement, Japanese companies often use *Ringi,* which means that through consensus and collective discussions, decisions are made and conflicts are resolved. Usually, frontline employees give ideas, these ideas will be approved layer by layer. Ringi ensures that every decision within the organization is well thought out and widely supported (Baker, 2025).

Learning from Japan — Kaizen Culture to Promote Continuous Improvement. Companies can apply the PDCA model (Plan–Do–Check–Act) to their daily operations (Deming, 1986). This helps employees constantly improve work processes and enhance the productivity of their daily work. This iterative thinking does not regard improvement as a one-off event. This not only enhances organizational productivity but also cultivates organizational adaptability. Furthermore, through lean management, redundant steps and unnecessary processes have been reduced. Employees no longer achieve their goals by extending their working hours. This approach enables employees to focus on high-value tasks and enhance organizational efficiency.

United States

American workplace culture emphasizes individual personal freedom and independence (Amelia, 2024). Workers are encouraged to be creative, suggest new ideas, and work on their own. Companies care more about individual abilities and performance (Amelia, 2024).

In addition to individualism, American companies usually focus on results and are increasingly adopting flexible working models. The company emphasizes results rather than strictly adhering to processes. Flexible working hours and remote work have become common, especially in the high-tech sector (HaiMa ZhiJia, 2025). Furthermore, many American companies generally adopt a flat management structure, emphasizing teamwork and communication. The direct communication method enables employees and superiors to express their opinions more freely (HaiMa ZhiJia, 2025).

Learning from the US — Flat Management and Flexible Work. The company can achieve flat management by reducing management levels. The simplification of the organizational

structure can shorten the decision-making time and improve communication efficiency. Establishing a more inclusive workplace to increase the employees' sense of ownership, such as an open communication platform. The internet industry's adoption of remote working as a flexible working model enables workers to better manage their time based on the demands of their jobs, increasing productivity and job satisfaction. For instance, a few Chinese online companies have started experimenting with the idea of working four days in the office and one day from home.

Europe

The workplace culture in Europe attaches great importance to employee benefits and the balance between work and life. In many European countries, employees are offered longer paid vacations and shorter working hours. Many companies support flexible working methods, such as remote work and flexible schedules (Tuncturk, 2023).

Equality and inclusiveness are also key principles within European work environments. The workplace culture in Europe emphasizes equality and inclusiveness. Companies usually advocate open communication and employee participation in the decision-making process. Emphasizing teamwork and collaboration, and communication between employees and superiors creates a more open and transparent environment (Ling, 2022). In addition, diversity and inclusion are fundamental values in European organizations. European companies encourage employees from diverse backgrounds and cultures, welcome different perspectives and experiences, and encourage employees to share diverse views and experiences (Griffith, 2023).

Learning from Europe — Employee Benefits and Workplace Diversity. Drawing on the practices of Europe, companies can offer more reasonable vacation arrangements by increasing paid annual leave and introducing greater flexibility in working hours. Offering remote work and flexible work schedules helps employees manage their personal and professional obligations better, also it can improve organizational efficiency.

Businesses should support organizational diversity and inclusivity and encourage individuals from diverse backgrounds to participate in decision-making to lessen workplace prejudice based on gender, age, or ethnicity. This helps improve creativity. For example, in China's internet industry, there is a common but unofficial rule not to hire people over 35. Although not publicly stated, many companies follow this principle when recruiting. Learning from Europe's inclusive culture can help provide more equal job opportunities for all employees.

Utilization of the managerial expertise of other nations may enhance the Chinese workplace. Japan's Kaizen culture places a strong emphasis on continuous improvement through the PDCA cycle, allowing staff to concentrate on high-value tasks. Innovation is encouraged by flat management, which is supported by the US model. Diversity and benefits are valued in European workplaces. It is advised to lessen discrimination and give everyone an equitable opportunity for advancement.

APPLYING CAREER DEVELOPMENT THEORIES TO ESCAPE EXCESSIVE OVERTIME

Holland's Career Theory: Finding the Right Role to Avoid Unnecessary Overtime

Holland's Career Theory (Holland, 1997) focuses on the personal interests and career types. In China's 996 work culture, many people forget themselves and their own interests.

STRATEGY: Use the elevator pitch method to assess yourself (Reid, 2018). If you feel hopeless and aimless every day, it is a serious mismatch. The Holland Career Interest Inventory assesses people's interests and abilities in depth and determines the best career path for them. By knowing if you are Realistic, Artistic, or Social, for example, you can avoid roles that do not fit your personality. Additionally, as more companies

begin to adopt flexible working models and offer a wider range of job roles, people have more and more opportunities to find careers that better align with their interests and working styles, which not only increases job satisfaction but also helps reduce unnecessary overtime caused by poor job fit. Adopting this strategy gives people more career possibilities while simultaneously increasing job happiness and reducing needless overtime brought on by a poor job fit.

Super's Career Theory: Planning by Stages to Avoid Over-Competition

Super's Career Development Theory considers career growth as a progressive process, and individuals can change their work goals through the different career stages (Super, 1980). In China's highly competitive working environment, it is very common to face the pressure of long working hours to pursue rapid promotion (Ni, 2023). Many employees tend to overlook the importance of integrating career decisions with longer-term life goals. If there is a lack of clear long-term goals, the career path will deviate.

STRATEGY: A more structured strategy is to divide career goals into short-term (1-2 years), medium-term (3-5 years), and long-term (over 5 years). Focus on developing your key skills and managing key efforts to increase your influence in a short time. Aim for horizontal development or managerial roles in the medium term. Long-term planning on how to maintain a healthy work-life balance and prevent the 996 from becoming the norm. By avoiding excessive investment in inappropriate stages, a sensible career plan can help reduce anxiety and unnecessary competition.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT): Coping with Uncertainty Through Self-Efficacy

SCCT mentions the individual self-efficacy impact on career decision-making (Lent et al., 1994). Due to worries about their careers stagnating, people in China's competitive workplace frequently experience overtime pressure, which lowers their self-efficacy.

STRATEGY: Developing self-efficacy helps people avoid uncertainty, reduce long-term work anxiety. Using time management tools like the Pomodoro Technique and Time Box (Cirillo, 2018) to make work time more efficient. Establishing clear expectations for results, focusing on the process rather than the results. If your workload becomes too much, talk to your manager and adjust priorities to avoid overcommitment.

Integrative Life Planning (ILP): Balancing Work and Life for Complete Growth

ILP emphasizes a creative balance between work and life (Hansen, 2011), avoiding excessive bias towards one aspect while neglecting others. For Chinese professionals, work often occupies a large part of their lives, neglecting aspects such as family, health, and social interactions.

STRATEGY: Treat life as a five-part patchwork to reduce stress and, over time, emphasize the diversity of life. Establish a clear digital boundary, such as avoiding sending work emails outside working hours. By using overtime compensation for activities such as fitness training or psychological counseling, an investment in physical and mental health can be achieved. Maintain close relationships by consciously arranging family time and social activities every week. By using commuting time or spare time to learn new knowledge or explore personal interests, skill development can be integrated into daily life. To ensure financial stability, it is suggested to establish a six-month emergency fund.

Conclusion

The Chinese workplace 996 and Juan culture issues need to be considered from the organizational, individual, and social levels. Because these problems do not exist independently, they are the reason why companies run, how individuals respond, and how the broader environment shapes our ideas about work. Only by these three levels can we find the root cause and explore the solutions.

At the organizational level, to avoid employee burnout and maximize efficiency.

We can learn management techniques from Japan's PDCA cycle and reduce unnecessary tasks. Meanwhile, Americans' flexible arrangements and flat structures can improve communication and encourage employee autonomy. European models place a strong emphasis on diversity and employee benefits, which enhances business branding and raises employee happiness.

At the individual level, it is necessary to enhance career planning and responsibility. People can use the Super's Development Theory and Holland's Career Interest Theory to find a job that fits their interests and life stages. Also, the SCCT can increase self-efficacy, enhancing time and resource management. Changing major to small cities, or from huge to smaller firms, is also an option for people's work-life balance.

At the societal level, creating a healthier work environment requires stronger regulatory enforcement and a change of cultural attitudes. Government organizations must enforce labor regulations to protect workers' rights. At the same time, the media and educational institutions can help change public opinions. For example, pay attention to the long-term negative effects of excessive work and encourage more sustainable, human-centered values around success and work.

Addressing the issue of Juan culture needs a group effort, policy innovation, and cultural influence. Through working together, we can create a focus on value, a highly performing and productive workplace. Thereby, we can balance work life and create a respectful and caring atmosphere.

Guoying Li - I am a 30-year-old mother with seven years of experience in human resources and business support at leading Chinese internet companies. In pursuit of personal growth and career transformation, I chose to study for a graduate degree in the United States during a critical stage of my career, and welcomed the birth of my child during my studies. Despite the challenges of shifting roles, I managed my time efficiently and completed all my courses with straight A's. This experience has broadened my life perspective and strengthened my adaptability and coordination skills in multitasking environments. I am now eager to apply these experiences to my next professional chapter.

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WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE: CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND THE MOTHERHOOD PENALTY

Yuxin Xue

After the enactment of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920, women's employment became legal and universal. Especially during World War II and in the decades that followed, the status of women in the labor market improved significantly (Yellen, 2020). Today, it has become a social norm for women to enter the workplace. However, with the prevalence of female employees, a serious problem is now being overlooked: the motherhood penalty. The motherhood penalty refers to disadvantages experienced by women in the workplace because of their role as a mother (or potential mother), such as discrimination in hiring, reduced wages, lack of recognition of abilities, and more stringent evaluation criteria (Correll et al., 2007). Many academic studies have documented the motherhood penalty, which is not a new phenomenon, but remains a persistent and timely problem. For example, research by Correll et al. (2007) found that job applicants who were mothers were regarded as incompetent and not dedicated enough, resulting in a decrease in promotion and employment opportunities. Budig and England (2001) found that the income of women with children was lower than that of women without children.

The motherhood penalty is highly relevant to women's career development and there is a growing awareness of this issue. Whether companies should make jobs easier for women and how policies can relieve this phenomenon are widely debated. Addressing the motherhood penalty is no longer a matter of individual women's grievances. It is the key to making career development more fair. This article primarily uses career development theory to address the motherhood penalty as much as possible.

Importance of the Issue

In the current job market, the motherhood penalty has become a widespread but often overlooked issue. Women with children are often treated unfairly when it comes to job hunting, salary and promotion opportunities.

Data show that women's job opportunities, salaries, and promotion opportunities will all be affected after having children. "Women are 20% less likely to be in work a decade after their first child is born" (Amy, 2025, para. 7). After controlling for marital status and all human capital variables, Budig and England (2001) found that the drop in wages for having one child was 5%, while the total drop for having two children was 11%. The total decrease in having three or more children was 15% (Budig & England, 2001). Data from the Survey of Income Dynamics (PSID) in the United States supported researchers' findings that mothers may reduce their work experience because of caring for children, or take on more flexible jobs that may have limited pay and growth prospects (Jee et al., 2019). This may directly affect their chances of promotion.

All these findings show that motherhood seriously affects the career development of female employees. Even women who have not yet given birth are indirectly affected. For example, female employees may choose not to have a baby to avoid the motherhood penalty, or the company may not hire female employees to avoid offering maternity allowance. Therefore, addressing the motherhood penalty is crucial for promoting fair career development opportunities.

Dispute of the Issue

There is a lot of controversy about the motherhood penalty. The differences in

measurement methods, sample selection, and theoretical interpretation among various studies have led to widespread debate over the existence and cause of the motherhood penalty (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysiak, 2020). Some people believe that the motherhood penalty is unreasonable workplace discrimination, while others believe that the motherhood penalty is reasonable because the pregnancy of female employees causes economic losses to the company.

Working women who become moms may trade perceived competence for perceived warmth. According to Cuddy (2004), recruiters expressed less interest in hiring, promoting, and educating the working mother compared to the childless woman, which sets female employees at a competitive disadvantage in the workplace simply because they become mothers (Cuddy et al., 2004). Cuddy et al. (2004) concluded that "This trade unjustly costs them professional credibility and hinders their odds of being hired, promoted, and generally supported in the work-place" (p.715). Motherhood penalty is an unfair treatment due to gender bias and stereotypes. This bias not only deprives women of career opportunities but also exacerbates gender inequality in the workplace.

Another view of motherhood that many people believe is that after having children, women spend more hours taking care of children, which leads to a reduction in their working hours. Therefore, the efficiency of the company will decrease. The company is not obligated to bear this loss, so it avoids the problem by hiring fewer female employees because men's labor force participation and work efficiency are not assumed to be affected by having children. Research shows that after the birth of the first child, women's labor force participation rate and working hours show a significant and lasting decline, while men's labor force participation rate and working hours are largely unaffected (Kleven et al., 2019). With this viewpoint, companies have the right to make decisions based on projected productivity, and this is not considered gender discrimination.

Use Career Development Theory to Solve the Issue

This article proposes solutions to the motherhood penalty through the application of Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory.

Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory

According to Super's Life-Span, Life-Space theory, people's career development is a lifelong process, consisting of five stages: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and decline, in which each person will play multiple roles (Hartung, 2013).

From the individual level, the conflict between the role of mother and the role of employee is the key to the motherhood penalty. This is also the expression of the concept of life-space mentioned by Super. "Adult roles often conflict and may affect career salience, choices, and satisfaction" (Hartung, 2013, p. 88). First, female employees need to recognize that this conflict is universal, not a sign of lack of ability or lack of professional determination (Hartung, 2013), and they should maintain confidence in their abilities. At this time, career development consultants can help women reflect on their level of investment and expectations in different roles. Career development consultants can also help them adjust short-term goals and reformulate long-term career plans by rethinking priority roles in their current career development. This can help them reduce the stress of not being able to develop as before. Career development is a non-linear, circular process (Hartung, 2013). Career development consultants can help women recognize that a temporary break is not the end point, but a turning point. Cognitive behavior therapy, for example, may help them reassess their self-concept. When planning their future development, women should be encouraged to re-explore themselves through skills renewal, re-education and other methods to expand their career development path.

At the corporate level, the company's values and norms directly affect employees. If the company culture does not encourage or support work-family balance, as exemplified

by the lack of flexible work systems or parental leave offered by the company, it may increase the mother's work stress and role conflict, thus aggravating the motherhood penalty. Super emphasized that people have multiple roles, and these roles need to be coordinated and balanced (Hartung, 2013). By aligning workplace policies with the life stages and role requirements of employees, companies can help reduce role conflicts and support continuous career development. For example, companies can provide female employees with flexible working methods, such as remote work. According to Super's theory, career development should be combined with an individual's life stage, and organizations should allow a certain flexible development trajectory, such as non-linear promotion and phased return to work when formulating promotion systems and job requirements (Hartung, 2013).

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

SCCT emphasizes self-efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goals, as well as the interaction of social cognitive learning and social environment (Lent, 2013). The core of SCCT is that, from the perspective of cognitive psychology, it reveals how individuals are influenced by self-belief, environmental feedback, and psychological expectations when they face complex career choices (Lent, 2013).

At the individual level, female employees may internalize the social stereotype that they should always put their children first. This belief can lead to negative outcome expectations, such as thinking that they will be less successful or less valued in the workplace, which is the negative outcome expectation of SCCT (Lent, 2013). Hence, career development consultants need to guide women in the conversation to identify and reject traditional internalized biases, so that they understand that this thinking is not necessarily from their own experience, but from the discipline of the patriarchy. Career development consultants can also use SCCT's cognitive reframing to help them reconsider their role as mothers, such as changing from thinking that they need to be primary caregivers to children and reduce their work efficiency to being able to multitask and manage their emotions.

At the company level, companies should also change any implicit bias against female employees who raise children. Rather than making working mothers feel excluded from important responsibilities, organizations should use action to reinforce that they remain reliable and valued team members. Companies can also establish a special feedback system so that all employees can see the performance growth after the return of employees with children, which may break the bias. This may also motivate mothers and make them more confident. SCCT also emphasizes the importance of role models, so companies can hold regular mentoring activities to let outstanding mother employees be role models and publicly recognize them.

Implications for Career Development Educators

The motherhood penalty is not a superficial personal issue, but rather an unfair restriction for mothers hidden behind workplace rules and social concepts. Therefore, as adult educators, we should not only impart knowledge and skills, but also identify and intervene in structural injustice (Egan et al., 2006). Educators should include content such as the distribution of roles in household labor in career development courses to help women uncover hidden structures of inequality. One of the core aspects of adult education is to help learners build critical thinking to advance society. Educators can encourage women to think about who sets the rules and who benefits from the rules, and guide them to turn their personal experience of the motherhood penalty into a cornerstone of social equality. Egan et al. (2006) proposed that career development should not only be seen as a process of individual skill accumulation, but also as a transformative process that is shared between organizations and individuals. Although motherhood is often seen as a limitation in the traditional workplace, adult education can help female learners identify the core competencies through career redefinition strategies, and translate them into career competencies recognized by the labor market.

Next Step in Solving the Issue

To truly solve the problem of the motherhood penalty, workers, employers and educators need to go beyond the surface of identifying problems and empathizing with them. Companies could start by offering flexible office hours and locations for women with children. Maternity leave should also be promoted for both men and women, so that their work efficiency is basically the same. In this way, companies can change the policy of not hiring women because it makes them less productive. Educators need to help women identify, critique, and challenge hidden inequities in the workplace, rather than adapt to them. The most important thing is for everyone to reduce social stereotypes of women, such as the belief that women will have to sacrifice their careers and mothers should return to the family.

I think I will play the role of researcher and practitioner in solving this problem. I will continue to study issues related to the penalty of motherhood and find more targeted solutions based on women's educational experience and social background. I will also apply the research results, guide learners to grow and reflect on their own lives and society, and promote social equality.

Yuxin Xue - I am a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, majoring in Adult Education. I grew up in China and am now studying in the United States. Therefore, I have experienced two completely different educational approaches and academic concepts. This cross-cultural journey has deepened my understanding of diversity and equity. My research interests include women's development, women's rights and workplace equality. The article submitted offers some strategies for women and related personnel who are facing or worried about the issue of the motherhood penalty in the workplace.

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APPLYING CAREER DEVELOPMENT MODELS TO SUPPORT SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

SUPPORTING THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT LGBTQ+ WORKERS

Shannon McCrady

The Long and Winding Road Toward Equality

Nearly 75 years ago, those belonging to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ+) community began the fight for equal rights as a result of what came to be known as the *Lavender Scare*. The Lavender Scare started because of the Cold War, when being gay was seen as a security risk in the US government, and resulted in the dismissal of thousands of gay and lesbian federal employees. This purge was linked to fears of communism and the belief that gay individuals could be blackmailed.

President Eisenhower's Executive Order 10450, signed in 1953, banned LGBT people from federal jobs. This deeply affected the lives of the LGBT community, far beyond those working in government jobs. The effects were widespread and lasted for decades, delaying the push for equality as a result (Lavender Scare, 2025). Although the federal ban was partially struck down in 1973, when a federal court ruled that sexual orientation cannot be the only justification for dismissing someone from federal employment (Lavender Scare, 2025), it was not fully repealed until nearly 64 years later when President Barack Obama signed his final Executive Order, #13764 on January 17, 2017, (Executive Order 10450, 2025).

Obviously, being a part of the LGBTQ+ community, especially in the workplace, has never been easy, but career professionals can help. In the decades since the Lavendar Scare, we've seen the LGBTQ+ community rise up in various ways:

- demonstrations in the mid-1960's "for the right to federal employment and military service" (Baumann, 2020, para. 1),
- Stonewall Riots of 1969, which lasted for six days and marked a key turning point in this fight (Howard University School of Law., 2023a), and
- marches on Washington D.C. for LGBTQ+ rights, first in 1979, and again in 1987, 1993, 2000, and 2009 (Howard University School of Law., 2023b).

In 2015, in a landmark decision, the Supreme Court ruled in Obergefell v. Hodges that based on the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment, the right to marry is a fundamental right, which established same-sex marriage equality in the United States (Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015). This granted the LGBTQ+ community the right to equal access to employment benefits like dependent health insurance, though many larger companies were already offering domestic partner benefits (Dawson & Rae, 2023).

Today, thanks to the Supreme Court ruling in *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020), discrimination in employment on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity is prohibited under Title VII of the Federal Civil Rights Act (*Bostock v. Clayton County*, 2020). Treagus (2020), citing a *USA Today* article from 2019, estimated that about 5.7 million LGBTQ+ Americans lived in US states that did not explicitly provide workplace protections. Thankfully, because of the *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020) ruling, it is now illegal nationwide to discriminate against workers because of their LGBTQ+ status (Treagus, 2020). However, in 2025, despite these history-making triumphs, the LGBTQ+ community is being targeted again by a conservative federal government that threatens to take away rights and protections, including "giving federal agencies the green light to openly discriminate against their trans employees" (Francois, 2025, para. 4).

Discrimination in the Workplace Continues

While the recent rulings are promising for the LGBTQ+ community, there is still work to be done. A 2022 survey conducted by the Center for American Progress (CAP), found that employment discrimination and exclusion from the workforce hinder economic stability for LGBTQ+ communities, leading to higher rates of poverty, unemployment, reliance on public benefits, and housing instability (Medina & Mahowald, 2023). The 2022 CAP survey revealed that:

- 50% of LGBTQI+ respondents experienced workplace discrimination or harassment due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status.
  - This figure rises to 70% among transgender respondents.
- 37% experienced verbal harassment.
- 25% faced sexual harassment.
- 15% encountered physical harassment.
- 22% were fired or not hired due to their sexual or gender identity.
- 21% were denied promotions, equal wages, or training opportunities because of how they identify.
  - These issues were significantly more prevalent among transgender respondents, LGBTQI+ people of color, and those with disabilities (Medina & Mahowald, 2023).

Clearly, the *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020) ruling was not enough.

Another study, *Equality Rising*, conducted by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation in 2023, three years after *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020), found that while a majority of LGBTQ+ workers are open about their sexual or gender identity to at least one coworker, they are least likely to be open about it with Human Resources. This indicates a lack of trust in Human Resources Departments. This should be deeply concerning to human resources professionals. The *Equality Rising* study also found that there are double standards in the workplace when it comes to conversations with coworkers. LGBTQ+ people report hearing about coworkers' kids, relationships, and social lives at work, yet they tend to keep silent about those aspects of their own lives to avoid outing themselves or making people uncomfortable. This puts LGBTQ+ workers in a position of feeling the need to withhold details about their personal lives or even lie when working in unaccepting work environments. The *Equality Rising* study also found:

- Workers who reported feeling depressed at work due to the unwelcoming work environment, including:
  - 42% of LGBTQ+ workers,
  - 42% of LGBTQ+ workers of color; and
  - 54% of transgender and non-binary workers.
- Workers who reported feeling exhausted from hiding their sexual orientation or gender identity at work:
  - 22% of LGBTQ+ workers and
  - 41% of transgender and non-binary workers.
- Of workers who chose to be discreet about their sexual orientation or gender identity at work:
  - 51% hid their identities due to concerns about privacy.
  - 40% hid their identities out of fears of stigma or violence.
  - 29% hid their identities due to fears of negative impacts on their work image or status.
  - 23% hid their identities due to fears of discrimination and lack of workplace protections (HRC Foundation, 2023).

What can we do to support LGBTQ+ people in the workplace?

Based on HRC Foundation's *Equality Rising* Study (2023), support starts with an inclusive work environment, which allows everyone to "feel a sense of belonging and fairness" (p. 20), regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Company values and corporate social responsibility efforts need to be shared

from the top down and with all employees. Unwelcoming work environments are harmful not only to productivity but also to employee retention. Companies perform better when they create inclusive environments where everyone feels they can be themselves and succeed at work. Employees who feel safe and accepted at work are often better employees because they feel happier, are more engaged and productive, and are less likely to quit (HRC Foundation, 2023).

Mitch Berlin, Vice Chair of Ernst & Young Americas, said, "There are millions of dollars on the line, and as the LGBTQ+ population grows, organizations that prioritize inclusiveness will differentiate themselves among top talent" (Ernst & Young, 2024b, para. 5). A 2024 workplace survey, conducted by Ernst & Young, found that the LGBTQ+ community in the US has nearly 14 million adults and continues to grow at a rapid pace as Gen Zers (who are six times more likely to identify as LGBTQ+ than Gen X) reach adulthood (Ernst & Young, 2024a). The HRC published findings from the Public Religion Research Institute that show 28% of Gen Z adults identify as LGBTQ+ (Pappy, 2024). By 2030, Gen Z will make up 30% of the workforce, so clearly it is paramount that employers improve LGBTQ+ inclusion, visibility, and engagement using tangible strategies, clear communications and operational initiatives (Ernst & Young, 2024a). Taking into consideration that the *Equality Rising* Study (2023) found that 28% of LGBTQ+ workers and 37% of transgender or non-binary workers have left a job due to the unaccepting work environment, this is significant for companies that want to have a diverse and dedicated workforce. Companies must utilize employee resource groups and adopt corporate social responsibility efforts targeted at creating inclusive and supportive environments where all employees can thrive as their most genuine selves. Employees who feel accepted and safe at work tend to be happier, more productive, invested in their work, and are less likely to quit their jobs (HRC Foundation, 2023).

Therefore, for companies that want to recruit and retain the best and brightest employees, including those who may identify as LGBTQ+, creating a corporate culture that is safe and inclusive is vital. According to a Catalyst webinar, *Active allyship: Strengthening LGBTQ+ inclusion in your company*, one way for company leaders to accomplish this is by creating allyship in the workplace culture. To do this, they must recognize and tackle discrimination within their institutions (Catalyst, 2024). The Catalyst webinar also suggested that companies should develop comprehensive non-discrimination policies, create confidential channels for grievances, and utilize employee engagement surveys along with exit interviews to effectually identify and resolve instances of discrimination (Catalyst, 2024).

Next, leaders will need to facilitate educational initiatives including training on subjects like gender identity and sustaining ongoing awareness campaigns to combat the rise of anti-LGBTQ+ discourse. Leaders should also work to transition from superficial gestures to authentic allyship by actively engaging with LGBTQ+ employees to ensure that initiatives are based on real needs. It is imperative to provide extensive mental health resources as well as gender-affirming healthcare to effectively support LGBTQ+ employees (Catalyst, 2024).

For allyship within a company to be successful, leaders must advocate openly and inclusively. They should issue public declarations regarding diversity and inclusion while incorporating inclusive language in their communications. CEOs ought to interact directly with employees to cultivate a culture of authentic allyship. Organizations should empower managers and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) to serve as capable allies. It is essential to offer managers opportunities to enhance their understanding of inclusion when it comes to teams, as well as time to work collaboratively with ERGs (Catalyst, 2024).

At a time in the US when organizations are abandoning diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, and protections of LGBTQ+ people seem precarious at best, career counselors and human resource professionals have an obligation to support employees and job seekers who are marginalized. Lyons et al. (2020) found that access to a social support

network was a significant contextual factor that positively influences both the sexual identity and career advancement of LGB individuals. Therefore, it is imperative that career counselors help LGBTQ+ clients identify local support networks if they don't already have them. This could be through community groups, like local chapters of PFLAG or OutFront, or through online forums and social media groups.

Tang et al. (2020) suggested that those seeking counseling may not understand the "interconnectedness of health, mental health, work, and life concerns," (p. 23). Therefore, counselors must bear in mind that wellness is related to one's work life and personal life, as well as overall health. Research demonstrates that career development and one's mental health are connected, and a combined approach of career and mental health counseling may be optimal (Tang, et al. 2020). According to Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2013) and Zunker (2016), as cited in Speciale and Scholl (2019), career counseling is a holistic practice, which means, in addition to work-related concerns, counselors are addressing more personal issues like discrimination based on age, gender identity, sexual orientation, or race.

Zunker (2016), as cited in Speciale and Scholl (2019), found that it is important for career counselors to assess their own biases and beliefs prior to their first meeting with a marginalized client. Career counselors need to recognize that resistance on the part of the client may stem from fears of judgment or from previous bad experiences with other counselors. In fact, it is common for the LGBTQ+ community to experience intolerance, prejudicial attitudes, or harassment from counseling professionals (Galgut, 1999; Henke, Carlson, & McGeorge, 2009; McNair, 2003; as cited in Speciale and Scholl, 2019). According to Tang et al. (2020), research suggests using integrative career counseling approaches to address the needs of diverse clients.

Savickas' *Career Construction Counseling* is one example of a proven counseling strategy that effectively incorporates mental health concepts and terminology into career counseling (Savickas, 2002, as cited in Tang, et al. 2020). It is not possible to disentangle mental health from career counseling. As Tang et al. point out, "Truly holistic treatment requires an integrative counseling approach that addresses both the intertwined nature and the intersectionality of clients' presenting issues" (2020, p. 28). While career counselors may not see themselves as mental health practitioners, research clearly suggests that career counseling and mental health are closely connected.

WHAT CAREER DEVELOPMENT THEORIES CAN BE USED TO SUPPORT THIS COMMUNITY?

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social Cognitive Career Theory can be especially useful when working with marginalized groups who have experienced discrimination in the workplace and society, to help them understand the process of career development and decision-making (Lyons et al., 2020). This model can help overcome barriers like encountering prejudice and discrimination based on sexual orientation, which can "impede the translation of interests into academic and career goals" (Lyons et al., 2020, p. 385). Even when they have high self-efficacy, when LGB workers anticipate discrimination in a specific realm, they are less likely to develop a serious interest in that area (Lyons et al., 2020). Career counselors can assist these clients by helping them reconsider career options they may have previously disregarded as not an option. By helping them understand why they felt these were not good career options, we can help them analyze their work-related skills, personal values, and potential career interests, thereby expanding their potential career options (Lent, 2020).

Integrative Life Planning

Another useful approach is the Integrative Life Planning (ILP) model. According to Sunny Hansen creator of ILP, this career development framework allows career

counselors and their clients to study different parts of life to determine how they fit together as a whole and relate to each other overall. This approach, which goes beyond the typical job seeking tasks, is specifically appropriate for the LGBTQ+ community because it offers the opportunity to gain a more holistic understanding of the individual. ILP considers clients' identities, experiences, and life goals, to "help them make sense of where they have been, where they are, and where they are going" (Hansen, 2011, p. 168). In fact, the flexibility of ILP surprised even Sunny Hansen when she learned how the approach has been used in different settings and with diverse populations. The six critical life tasks of ILP are also relevant for LGBTQ+ clients:

1. Seeking work that needs doing within the evolving global landscape;
2. Caring for physical, mental and emotional health;
3. Linking family life and work life;
4. Appreciating multiculturalism and inclusiveness;
5. Examining spirituality and your reason for being; and
6. Handling personal and organizational changes.

By completing this list of tasks, career counselors can assist their clients in creating a more methodical life plan, which will help them feel more control over their lives (Hansen, 2011).

Social Learning Theory

Datti (2009) suggested that Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory is another option for working with LGBTQ+ clients. This theory is defined by four influential factors affecting career decisions, including genetics (gender, race), environmental factors (political climate, location), learning experiences (positive and negative), and problem-solving skills (work habits), which can help clarify the reasoning behind career choices. According to Datti, as cited in Lyons et al. (2020), some of these conditions that are commonplace for non-LGBTQ+ people, may have a greater impact on LGBTQ+ clients. The most obvious example of this is politics, which affects everyone, but may impact the LGBTQ+ community more significantly. Datti (2009) points out that career counselors who work with the LGBTQ+ community must understand and address issues surrounding coming out, being part of a sometimes-invisible minority, as well as other cultural and family values, self-esteem issues, and the potential for confusion when it comes to identity. By creating a safe space and empathizing with clients regarding these concerns, career counselors can help increase confidence, especially with those who may be resistant to the idea of counseling (Datti, 2009).

Hope-Centered Models

Powers and Duys (2020), as cited in Lu et al., (2024) suggested that career counselors need to be cognizant that trauma may present with other negative symptoms, such as a negative self-concept, so it is important to integrate coping skills into career counseling sessions. This gives clients the strategies they need to effectively navigate the challenges that will inevitably arise at work and in life. Prescod & Zeligman (2018) and Topiztes et al., (2019), as cited in Lu et al. (2024) suggested that using "an approach based on hope and resilience, along with positive regard and positive reinforcement can be effective in building posttraumatic growth" (p. 11).

Although the hope-centered model of career development (HCMCD), developed by Niles, Amundson, and Yoon, was not originally intended for LGBTQ+ workers, it is a valid approach for working with this community (Clarke et al., 2018). This model "encourages individuals to reflect on their circumstances; envision their future; and develop, implement, and adapt their plans as they build their desired life" (Clarke et al., 2018, p. 156). One significant aspect of this model, especially when working with clients who may have experienced trauma, is hope. Niles (2011) described hopefulness as "envisioning a meaningful goal and believing that positive outcomes are likely to occur should specific actions be taken" (p. 174), which allows LGBTQ+ clients to

see the possibilities in various options and encourages them to take action toward their goals. HCMCD also takes into consideration environmental factors (Clarke et al., 2016), which are certainly relevant for the LGBTQ+ community, especially given the increasingly hostile environment in the US today. Using the HCMCD model, we can help clients develop "the necessary self-awareness, work awareness, and adaptability required for career self-management" (Niles et al., 2014, as cited in Clarke et al., 2018, p. 156). In other words, this model provides the opportunity to help LGBTQ+ individuals understand their own feelings and motivations, the world of work and what opportunities are available to them, as well as how they can be flexible and open in their approach to work.

Conclusion

Career counselors can use these theories to support the unique needs of their LGBTQ+ clients, whether that is in a higher education setting or working with adults in career transitions. The most important thing to keep in mind is the history of oppression and discrimination, as well as the trauma these clients may have experienced, especially if they fit into multiple categories of marginalization. These theories can be utilized in counseling sessions to help clients overcome barriers, offer them hope and perspective, as well as insights into their perceptions of the workplace. The data clearly highlights the importance of taking the time to get to know these clients and ask questions about their experiences, so career counselors can be sensitive to the societal, familial, and cultural contexts that may influence their clients' decision-making.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:
While there are many acronyms for the LGBTQ+ community, for the purposes of this paper "LGBTQ+" is used except when the cited source uses "LGBT", "LGBTQI+", or "LGB."

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THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF CAREER MESSAGING AND DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT FOR BLACK, INDIGENOUS STUDENTS OF COLOR

Leslie Garcia

As a young student of color on the path to college, I received little guidance on what I should be doing in preparation for college until my junior and senior year of high school. By participating in Minnesota's Post-Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO), I was able to get an understanding of how to navigate college life before enrolling in a university. In high school, the conversations I had with my high school advisor and family members about attending a university mainly focused on studying what I want to. From those conversations, I decided to pursue a college degree and major in international business so I could one day go work for an international company. But as I began post-secondary education at the University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire, I started doubting the message of studying whatever I wanted to. After some time, I reevaluated what I needed and wanted out of my college experience and moved back to Minnesota to finish my undergraduate degree. I realized that family was a greater value to me than whatever I was studying. It was no longer about some grandiose plan that needed to be accomplished, because it was interfering with my values.

Career messaging starts young and conversations regarding what a student wants to accomplish as they grow older should follow. I am only one person with one set of experiences. There could be Black, Indigenous, and Students of Color (BISOC) who have had similar experiences, but there could also be other students who haven't been given similar opportunities or messages from family, friends, or mentors in their lives. By providing opportunities to develop life-relevant skills and forms of educational support for students of color, career messaging and career development can be more accessible for these students. By using career development theories, advisors, career educators, or mentors can help students of color align themselves with a future where the students are able to find success.

Overview of the Issue and Perspectives

BISOC do not always have the privilege to navigate existing systems without barriers as they interpret the messages they receive regarding higher education and future career development. A lack of university experience affects the message that BISOC youth receive and could also impact how they navigate a university setting. Part of this lack of university experience can begin at a young age, such as around high school, for students of color. This could relate to the experiences and knowledge of educators who are in the classroom teaching these students. Examining the relationships between teachers and students of color at an early stage is important to help educators create a sense of belonging and allow students to be ready to participate in the classroom setting. This could be achieved with teachers who are more conscious of BISOC messaging, as stated by Parra Lopez et al. (2024):

> Evidence suggests that student–teacher relationships are even more important for BIYOC [Black, Indigenous Youth of Color]. ... Many studies have investigated the effect of matching student and teacher race/ethnicity, and that having teachers who are a similar race has many positive effects, including improved

> student engagement, achievement, as well as reduced dropouts, absences, and suspensions. (p. 2450)

Students of color are more likely to interact with the instructor and the institution when they know they have more individualized support from an external source (Parra Lopez et al., 2024). These relationships provide students with a teacher who mirrors similar experiences and allow students to possibly even ask questions and receive relevant information to the student.

Another aspect to consider are possible life-altering events that divert students away from education, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic. Ott (2024) brought in the concept of authentically caring for students. Ott (2024) shared, specifically from the beginning of the pandemic:

> Access to technology necessary for distance learning, such as laptops and internet hotspots, were slowly distributed and access to food, healthcare, and mental health services typically provided by schools and districts disappeared at the onset of school closures, with low-income BISOCs [Black, Indigenous, Students of Color] most significantly affected. (p. 2347)

With all the barriers that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, many students of color and their families were burdened with a lack of resources; these students lost the chance to be prepared for school and interact with teachers who wanted to see them succeed in school and then succeed later in life in their work.

A different perspective to consider when thinking about how to handle the needs and messaging for students of color comes in the form of colorblind racism. For example, Russo-Tait (2022) noted some of the "color-blind racism" or "color-blind ideology" that affects academia, specifically the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematical (STEM) fields. As stated by Russo-Tait (2022), "Color-blind ideology is not about overt racism, it is an ideological system that keeps white people from understanding systemic racism for what it is, preserving the racial order in the process" (p. 1826). This impacts underrepresented students of color because ignoring the issues regarding race and STEM, or in any field of study, in a primarily white institution (PWI), this could prevent these students from wanting to pursue these fields. If colorblind racism is about preserving a racial order, then that leaves a bit of a conundrum because there is then a hierarchy of races solely based on an idea. The idea that this form of racism is not overt still has great impact due to keeping white people unaware of the impact that certain actions have on BISOC. Making students, regardless of race, aware of subtle racist actions and the consequences of those actions on students of color can provide space to have discussions about racism in academia.

Career Development Theories to Consider

One career development theory to consider when examining career messaging for BISOC is the Hope-Action Theory (Niles et al., 2011). This theory includes five competencies: self-reflection, self-clarity, visioning, goal setting and planning, and implementing and adapting. The application of this theory for career messaging and development will focus on the visioning competency. Visioning, as stated by Niles et al. (2011), "involves brainstorming future possibilities and identifying future scenarios" (p. 124). By providing the opportunity to students of color to work with a trusted mentor to imagine their futures, this can allow students to become more motivated and excited to envision what life they can attain.

To use Hope-Action Theory with professionals in practice, work from Clarke et al. (2018) provided practical uses. The authors worked with internationally educated professionals in Canada, applying the Hope-Action Theory with this group and journaling specifically as the method of applying visioning to their work. The authors encountered one student who struggled with learning a language before conducting a visioning exercise, and after the exercise, the participant stated, "I can't believe I let language stop me! I can't wait to get language out of the way!" (Clarke et al., 2018, p. 162). By examining this specific example, career development educators or other mentors can

adapt a visioning exercise with their students of color to help students identify what could be a possible barrier in their future possibilities when they start imagining their education beyond middle or high school.

Another career development theory to consider when examining career development for students of color includes the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994). This theory focuses on self-efficacy, expectations on outcomes, and the interactions with the goals but still considers an individual's culture and their own personal development regarding either their educational messaging or their workplace development. Lent et al. (1994) recognized that the framework can be used, in its original state, to "better capture the issues, challenges, and obstacles that especially characterize the career development of particular groups of women and minority members" (p.117). Acknowledging that the framework has application to students of color is relevant. Transitioning from a student to an individual in the workplace is already a challenging journey for some. Having additional obstacles in the journey can be daunting to the student.

SCCT can provide some greater understanding, especially with help from Burga et al. (2020) to understand what purposes it could use for in work readiness. As stated, "[Furthermore], personal agency is being tested as the structures provided by family systems and educational institutions diminish over time" (Burga et al., 2020, p. 156). The messaging for students of color may seem to be in contention, as there will be many considerations for them in terms of their values. Personal agency, family structure, and the institution are examples of forms of messaging and values given to students of color as they approach decisions regarding choosing a university or other types of education.

Social Cognitive Career Theory also provides some insight for human resources professionals. Professionals should be "interested in the models addressing task performance, work satisfaction, and career management, since they are more focused on the experiences of individuals already in the workforce" (McDonald & Hite, 2023, p. 115). Human resource professionals in an organization may become career development educators for incoming students of color as they transition into the workforce. They need to be prepared to understand the different experiences that students of color bring into the workplace.

Practices and Implications for Career Development Educators

One practice to consider is work-based learning programs (WBLs), as shared by Medvide and Kenny (2022). Work-based learning programs are described as experiences beyond the classroom:

> Programs outside of the school setting represent another potential resource in preparing students for a successful transition to postsecondary education or the workforce. These programs, which can include internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing in the community, or vocationally based curricula, can provide students with direct exposure to work environments, opportunities to develop tangible skills, and access to supportive adults in the workplace. (Medvide & Kenny, 2022, p. 298)

This would be beneficial when thinking about hope and students of color because all these parts of a WBL program provide students with the opportunity to envision themselves successfully making transitions from school to the workplace. WBL also provides students with direct mentorship from those with the experience of working in a variety of fields of a student's interests.

A consideration to account for in future implications of career messaging is the idea of student success and self-efficacy, a major proponent of Social Cognitive Career Theory. According to Weatherton and Schlusser (2021), "Student success can be seen in terms of outcomes, like persistence, increase in self-efficacy, and publication rate. However, these concepts can just as easily be seen as components that facilitate success if it is defined as achieving a particular goal" (p. 2). This definition of success is complex as it considers traits such as persistence and

self-efficacy into the goal. A student of color may be able to do the work asked of them, but the goals of the work may move to an unobtainable level of completion depending on who is assigning the work and the goals.

Next Steps to Address Future Problems

One of the next steps to consider when examining hope and other forms of career support for BISOC is to focus on self-efficacy and self-advocating. However, one of the issues with self-efficacy or self-advocating can be the feeling of burn out. For example, Suwinyattichaiporn and Johnson (2020), examined Latino/a/x first generation students, finding a variety of factors that affect their mental health as they pursue higher education, which include stress, social isolation, and depression. According to Suwinyattichaiporn and Johnson (2020), "Support from family and friends has been found to reduce the impact of psychological problems among students … previous evidence suggests social support helps lessen college students' depression, anxiety, and stress" (p. 301). Students of color require social support from friends and family to help provide networks of mental strength and outlets to express their fears surrounding their life at university.

Conclusion

In 2023, I decided to pursue a master's degree after a conversation with my father in the Summer of 2022. He assured me that I'd be supported by my family to go back to school, and so I decided to take the leap and apply. I had previously spoken with my undergraduate professors who recommended me as a graduate student candidate. As stated in the introduction, I am one experience in navigating career messaging and career development. I would be the first in my family to return to higher education to obtain a degree beyond an undergraduate degree, which provided its own challenges. However, if I were to tell myself in 2022, by applying hope-action theory and social cognitive career theory to my mentality on returning to higher education, there would be great possibilities for me in imagining what life would look like as a graduate student.

In turn, career educators or advisors to young students of color could use the theories provided by giving them guidance on how to advise Black, Indigenous students of color from their own experiences. By also being a workplace that offers a space for work-based learning programs for students of color, workplaces are creating a beneficial environment for themselves and the students of color by getting them accustomed to the transition from being a student to a workplace professional. Also having human resources professionals who become more conscious of the different experiences BISOC can provide from their education and personal lives can create a more diverse workplace. By supporting these students from the beginning of their education, even during a traumatic event such as COVID-19, to when the student makes their decision on what to do post-primary and secondary education, their messages for career development will also come into fruition.

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ADDRESSING MALE COLLEGE ENROLLMENT DECLINE USING CAREER DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

Kirsten Koerth

Interest Population

Throughout the United States, college class sizes are getting smaller. There are 2.7 million fewer college students now than there were at the start of the last decade (Marcus, 2025), and men represent a greater portion of that number of those lost (Bennet & Fritz, 2024). Declining enrollment is especially significant for male BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) students (Bennet & Fritz, 2024). Overall college enrollment is down due in large part to a reduced birth rate following the Great Recession (2007-2009), but there are many additional factors (Marcus, 2025). Beyond the falling birthrate, rising wages in the skilled trades and an increased demand for workers in those fields is drawing many young men to those occupations instead of college. The phenomenon has led Generation Z (people born between 1997 and 2012) to be dubbed "The Toolbelt Generation" (Cheung, 2024). The multitude of negative societal and economic effects of declining male enrollment in college is motivation for career professionals to discover ways to encourage more men to consider higher education.

Jobs within the trades are appealing to a greater proportion of young males because of a variety of factors, including a lack of interest in college, a demand for workers in the trades, and the changes in jobs in trades. Advancing technology within many fields has allowed for more variety within certain jobs (Cheung, 2024). These careers can also be high paying, especially for a worker who is just starting their career (Schaffhauser, 2024). A concern that artificial intelligence (AI) may threaten certain positions that require a college degree is additionally motivating for a person joining the trades, as is the rising cost of college (Bennet & Fritz, 2024; Cheung, 2024).

While the current development of more professional training opportunities outside of college is helpful for many, the decline in college attendance is still concerning. There are several reasons why a decrease in the number of college-educated men could have a negative effect on individuals and the greater society. Downstream consequences for the economy are a clear issue, as fewer candidates for jobs requiring college degrees will be available. This can be seen in STEM fields, including the semiconductor industry, which is experiencing a dearth of qualified job applicants (Wiseman, 2024). Fewer students also means fewer colleges, which support thousands of employees (Marcus, 2025). College educated people generally also make more money throughout their lifetimes (Cheung, 2024). The culmination of these economic impacts may have significant ripple effects for the future economy.

Additionally, employees with college degrees are more likely to report increased overall satisfaction with their lives (Bennet & Fritz, 2024). This may be due in part to the difficult and physically demanding conditions or challenging schedules of many jobs that do not require a college education, including in the trades (Cheung 2024). While many people gain satisfaction and great reward from working in the trades, some are attracted to these careers because of high pay, rather than for reasons that contribute to their overall career satisfaction. Factors other than pay that contribute to long-term job satisfaction include independence and the ability to serve others (Blustein et al., 2023). Careers in the trades may be high paying, especially initially, but they are also more likely to include long hours, physical labor, and periods of

unemployment (Cheung, 2024). Not every worker will tolerate the amount of physical work that is needed for these positions for their entire working life, and a college degree may be needed for a less physically strenuous job.

Careers in the trades generally fit the standard of *decent work*, as they typically pay a satisfactory wage, have union representation, and offer safety protections for workers. These careers may not always fit the definition of *meaningful work*, or "individuals experiencing their work as being both significant and positive in valence" (Blustein et al., 2023 p. 297). Characteristics of meaningful work include community within the workplace, ability to attain personal goals, and a lack of repetitive or meaningless tasks. Those who describe their work as meaningful are more likely to stay at their organization, have higher psychological well-being, and be innovative in their role (Blustein et al., 2023).

In addition to the economic and individual drawbacks of declining male college enrollment, negative cultural impacts of a less-educated male populus are salient, though more difficult to predict and pinpoint. Attending college has a multitude of benefits outside of earning a degree, and can contribute to a person's overall personal development. Some specific benefits include development of soft skills, networking and socialization, exposure to new ideas, progression of critical thinking skills, among many others. Soft skills, like professionalism and teamwork are fostered during college, and a lack of those skills may have negative consequences on the quality of job applicants (Bennet & Fritz, 2024). The culture of our nation may be negatively influenced by a citizenry with fewer soft skills. Non-college educated people are also less healthy and lead shorter lives, influencing the overall national culture (Zajacova & Lawrence, 2018).

Current efforts by colleges to reverse the decline in male enrollment include developing college departments that attract more male applicants, such as natural resources and forestry (Elder-Connors, 2024). Certain colleges have created task forces specifically tasked with recruiting more male students. These efforts have brought male high school students to college campuses to expose them to opportunities there, and have developed initiatives to retain male students once they enroll (Bennet & Fritz, 2024).

Using Career Theories in Practice

Male students should be advised to follow whatever career they are interested in and have the aptitude for, but post-secondary education should be a part of the conversation throughout their schooling. Teachers, school counselors and specialists, administrators, coaches, and other school staff members are an integral part of inspiring boys to go to college. Simple reassuring conversations with students can greatly impact students' decisions, as well as their confidence in themselves. Several career theories can be useful as a foundation in career advising for young men.

Trait and Factor Theories

Trait and factor theories state that careers can be matched with workers like a lock and key, with qualities of both the job and the applicant together making a perfect fit (Nauta et al., 2020). While this is a somewhat prescriptive perspective on career development, it can be a starting place for students to better understand what their interests and aptitudes are through assessments that assist with recommendations for career direction. This approach may be especially important for students who are not already considering college, because it can spark the exploration of options that are not in their immediate interest area or are outside of their perceived qualifications. An especially useful website for trait and factor-related advising is O*NET Online, an online inventory that includes a wealth of information about a variety of career fields and occupations (U.S. Department of Labor, 2025). Guiding high school students on the use of this tool may help them find careers that they previously had not known about, and it provides details on required qualifications for each job, among other relevant information.

Social-Cognitive Career Theory

Social-Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) can also be used effectively to advise young adults, especially men. Self-efficacy, or "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Lent et al., 2020, p. 132), and outcome expectations or "beliefs about the consequences or outcomes of performing particular behaviors" (Lent et al., 2020, p. 133) are main tenets of SCCT. Building self-efficacy among young men is important for them to know they are capable of achieving a college degree. Many students may feel as though they do not belong in college for a variety of factors, including societal prejudices against BIPOC men, for example (Bennet & Fritz, 2024). Developing positive outcome expectations related to college may also help with societal expectations that deter male students from attending college (Lent et al., 2020). For example, some male students may feel that there are negative social ramifications for attending college, but if outcome expectations for males are presented positively, they may be more likely to consider higher education.

Systems Theory

When advising young men, systems theory can be applied to recognize the context of each student. Systems theory considers the influence of contextual factors including race, gender identity, geographic location, political environment, etc. when providing career advice (McMahon & Patton, 2018). Learning enough about an individual to be able to implement systematic thinking can be time consuming for a career development professional, but it is needed for the most successful and genuine interactions. Teachers are uniquely able to apply systematic thinking, because they may already know contextual factors about the student from their pre-existing relationship.

The Role of Teachers and School Career Development Professionals

Teachers play an especially important role in helping students grow self-efficacy and positive outcomes expectations. Gender norms and career aspirations are influenced greatly by teachers, and teachers have the power, throughout a child's school career, to build self-assurance and provide opportunities for their male students to develop college aspirations (Korlat et al., 2023). Possessing negative academic expectations of oneself can be a self-fulfilling prophecy, and without having self-efficacy in academic areas, students are unlikely to pursue college. Creating positive outcome expectations for young males may remedy concerns men have with attending college. Teachers can use their existing relationships with students and their understanding of students' contexts to create positive outcome expectations, and provide effective and tailored advice (Yenney, 2020). Male role models (including teachers), especially for BIPOC students, help students envision themselves in college and create a sense of social acceptance for young men in higher education (Bennet & Fritz, 2024).

Academic encouragement from teachers and their role modeling may help counteract negative messaging around college for men. Since much of a student's "holistic social context," or the "social context that comprises several crucial social groups to which individuals belong" while in high schoolcomes from their teacher (Xu et al., 2023, p. 596), they have a specific role to play in male students' feelings about college. Introducing and discussing career development and college throughout students' education is essential, as students' career aspirations during adolescence can have significant effects on their future career success (Perry & Raeburn, 2017). This indicates that there is a need for students to have exposure to career development early on, as their aspirations may be set at a relatively young age.

Workers in the skilled trades are currently needed in higher demand (Schaffhauser, 2024), and the Toolbelt Generation has been readily filling those positions. While workers are needed in those areas, a de-emphasis on college for young men may have a variety of negative impacts. Career and college professionals are in a unique position to let

male students know that they are still needed in college, and several career development tools and frameworks, including Trait and Factor theories, SCCT, and systems theory can be used to assist in that task.

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REIMAGINING CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS: AN INDIGENOUS-INFORMED APPROACH

Trinity Vang

"Career narratives are shared acts of survival and hope."
— Kedibone Diale-Tlabela

As students graduate from college, they may ask themselves: "Now what?" As a first-generation college graduate who works to support students navigating higher education, I have seen firsthand how challenging it can be to pursue a path that was created by a system with students like me in mind. By 2031, 72% of jobs will need some kind of college education (RTI International, 2024). This makes it even more important to rethink how career development professionals support first-generation college students (FGCS), especially in ways that reflect their lived experiences and values instead of traditional Western career advice that is often geared as a one-size-fits-all.

First-generation college students are typically defined as students whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree from a four-year college or university. It is important to acknowledge that this group of students is not a monolith (Jehangir et al., 2015). Within the United States, 56% of the undergraduate population identifies as first-generation (RTI International, 2024). When first-generation college students are entering the work field today, these students face challenges in navigating the hidden curriculum of professional environments. University support services and structures often fail to adequately address the complex needs of first-generation students. First-generation students are not only navigating academia but also frequently balancing family expectations, financial stress, and unfamiliar systems while simultaneously trying to figure out who they are and where they belong (Jehangir et al., 2015). Career development is one area where the issue is evident among first-generation college students (Buford & Flores, 2024; Jehangir et al., 2015). Traditional Western career development models often assume access to resources, mentors, and networks that many first-generation college students lack. These models also center on individualism and linear career planning, which may not align with how many students from culturally diverse or Indigenous backgrounds see themselves or their future. For many first-generation college students, their sense of purpose is tied to community rather than individual success, which often renders traditional Western career development models irrelevant (Jehangir et al., 2015). In order to truly support first-generation students, career development models need to reflect the values and lived experiences of those students.

There is a need to reimagine career development models that include more than just rewriting existing ones that push for more culturally centered frameworks and include the lived experiences of students (Buford et al., 2024). Concepts such as balance, interconnectedness, and community alignment are not extra components to how we develop a sense of our career, but are central for students making career decisions. There are other frameworks outside of Western thinking that already exist in various forms of knowledge. Indigenous knowledge systems may offer holistic, relational, and culturally grounded approaches that can better support first-generation students

in exploring careers that reflect their full identities, not just the available job opportunities. When we include Indigenous perspectives, we create space for more culturally grounded and community-centered approaches. It is more than just about career preparation. It is about identity, purpose, and belonging. This shift offers a future where first-generation students feel seen, supported, and empowered.

Understanding the Layers of the First-Generation College Journey

Within the United States, about one-third of all undergraduate students identify as first-generation, though this number can be higher at specific institutions or among BIPOC populations (RTI International, 2024; Oxendine, 2025). These students are often navigating overlapping systemic barriers tied to race, class, and educational access, which all shape their experiences in ways that require more nuanced and responsive support. First-generation college students represent a wide range of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, with disproportionately high representation among Latinx, Black, Indigenous, and Southeast Asian communities (RTI International, 2024).

First-generation college students often enter college with significant preparedness gaps, especially when it comes to navigating unfamiliar academic environments and norms (Payne et al., 2023). They may feel behind their peers in what may seem like common tasks in higher education, such as knowing how to reach out to professors or instructors, attending office hours, or balancing their academic workload with responsibilities at home (Payne et al., 2023). While these tasks may seem minor, they can have a profound impact on their academic confidence and willingness to ask for help (Buford et al., 2022). In addition, many first-generation college students are excluded from high-impact opportunities, such as unpaid internships or networking opportunities, due to financial constraints, cultural barriers, or family obligations (Jehangir et al., 2020). These missed opportunities can limit their access to social capital and professional exposure, which only further widens the gap between their generation peers (Jehangir et al., 2020).

First-generation college students face not only academic hurdles but also distinct career development challenges as they transition into the workforce. Many of these students lack the career social capital that their more privileged peers have access to, such as professional mentors, exposure to diverse careers, or an understanding of a hidden curriculum of networking and workplace behavior (Buford et al., 2022). *Hidden curriculum* in this context refers to the unspoken norms and expectations that are often assumed in professional and academic spaces (Jehangir et al., 2022). Without access to this knowledge, first-generation students may enter these spaces feeling unprepared or out of place within their career and academic journeys (Jehangir et al., 2022).

Social capital refers to the networks, relationships, and social knowledge that provide individuals with access to opportunities and resources (Jehangir et al., 2015). Students whose parents have college degrees or professional careers may receive informal guidance on how to navigate job interviews, build connections, or gain internship experience, which are all advantages that are not as readily accessible to many first-generation students (Jehangir et al., 2022). Without these resources, first-generation college students often struggle to envision their career paths and future. There are also distinct cultural transition challenges that first-generation college students face, such as cultural differences between their identity at home versus their identity in professional settings, which often lead to code-switching, identity tension, and pressure to conform (Carter et al., 2024). However, it is essential to recognize that these students also bring significant cultural wealth, multilingual skills, and aspirational capital that are often overlooked in traditional career development models (Yosso, 2005). Still, many first-generation college students may feel like they are living in two worlds, navigating family expectations while trying to meet institutional and professional workforce norms (Jehangir et al., 2015).

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Career Development

Indigenous knowledge systems provide a powerful alternative to traditional Western career development models, which often prioritize individualism. Indigenous knowledge systems are rooted in holistic worldviews, viewing life as a web of relationships between people, land, ancestors, spirit, and the environment (Christian et al., 2021). Growth is not linear, nor is it solely based on our achievements. It is a continuous cycle grounded in balance, harmony, and connection (Christian et al., 2021). When we consider career in this context, it is not just about personal advancement. It is about walking a path that reflects one's responsibility to community and ancestors (Diale, 2022). Career decisions are not just about self, but for the collective. The value of wisdom passed down through elders, connection to land, and spiritual guidance all play an important role in shaping a person's career journey (Diale, 2022). Indigenous scholarship challenges Western career development models by honoring multiple epistemologies and decolonial aspirations (Huaman, 2022). By integrating these perspectives into career development models, it allows for more relational and culturally grounded approaches.

The whole-person approach views the mind, body, spirit, and emotions are all intertwined (Christian et al., 2021). The approach emphasizes that students must be viewed holistically rather than one-dimensionally. Career development cannot be separated from the multiple layers students hold, such as their identities, values, or cultural backgrounds (Christian et al., 2021). This is why Indigenous frameworks rely on storytelling, mentoring, and experiential learning as foundational tools. Storytelling has become a core means of passing on knowledge and envisioning future paths. The emphasis on storytelling has supported theories such as Narrative Career Theory, developed by Mark Savickas and Donald Super (Savickas et al., 2012). In Indigenous contexts, storytelling is more than a pedagogical strategy but instead a way of life and method of passing down generational wisdom and values (Diale, 2022; Christian et al., 2021). These stories are often shared in community settings, grounded in lived experiences, and used to help support decision-making, including career and life paths (Diale, 2022). Narrative theory views career as a process of creating identity through the stories we tell about our lives and transitions (Savickas et al., 2012). In our everyday lives, people use themes to describe their careers and give them personal meaning (Savickas et al., 2012). Narrative Career Theory honors the realities of first-generation and Indigenous students whose lives are shaped by intergenerational knowledge and systemic barriers. This may allow students to reclaim their authorship and center their stories around resilience, identity, and connection. This approach aligns with culturally grounded frameworks that include storytelling, holistic development, and the importance of community shaping career pathways (Christian et al., 2021).

To truly understand and support first-generation college students, there must be a will to decolonize career development itself. This is an active practice for practitioners to consider. This means questioning the dominance of Western career development models and making space for Indigenous knowledge frameworks in education and career development. Student career success requires honoring multiple ways of knowing and redefining success not as a linear path but as a relational process that centers on care, culture, and collective well-being (Burgess et al., 2022).

Integrating Career Development Theories

Career development is not a one-size-fits-all approach, especially for first-generation college students navigating multiple systems that were not built with them in mind (Diale, 2022). Traditional Western career development models are not as applicable to the lived experiences of first-generation college students (McMahon & Patton, 2018). It is not to say we can completely disregard traditional Western career development theories, but instead expand upon them with more inclusive frameworks that center

identity, context, and intersectionality (Buford & Flores, 2024). We can still recognize theories while honoring other diverse ways of knowing and being.

Systems Theory Framework

The Systems Theory Framework provides a foundation for understanding how career paths are shaped by multiple interconnected systems, including the self, family, community, institutions, and societal factors (McMahon & Patton, 2018). This aligns with Indigenous worldviews, which also view life and purpose through a relational lens, where decisions are made with consideration for the community and future generations (Diale, 2022; Christian et al., 2021).

Chaos Theory of Careers

Another reference is The Chaos Theory of Careers, which rejects the idea that career journeys are linear and predictable (Pryor et al., 2012). Instead, the model encourages reflection and exploration, providing an opportunity for first-generation college students to reimagine their career planning (Oxendine, 2025). It allows students to view careers not as a fixed outcome but as an evolving path that can accommodate their whole being. The emphasis on storytelling among these theories can align with Indigenous oral traditions, which center on voice, memory, and ancestral knowledge (Oxendine, 2025). These theories allow students to reclaim authorship over their stories and reframe their journeys through resilience and purpose. Traditional Western career development models can offer a framework that validates the complexities of first generation journeys that make space for multiple forms of knowledge and success (Burgess et al., 2022; Lent & Brown, 2020). If integrated with Indigenous-informed practices, such as mentorship, experiential learning, and community engagement, career development frameworks and practices can move closer to a more humanized and decolonized vision of career development (Burgess et al., 2022; Lent & Brown, 2020).

An Indigenous-Informed Philosophy and Future Plan for First-Gen Career Development

How do we envision Indigenous knowledge systems in the context of career development? This framework incorporates Indigenous knowledge systems alongside Western career development theories while centering on students holistically. It steers away from individualistic, output-driven models and instead moves towards career development that nurtures the whole person.

> **Recommendation #1:** Integrating cultural identity in career counseling and development should begin by honoring students where they are and where they come from. This includes validating their values, beliefs, and family histories. There should be space to develop tools for cultural reflection and to affirm cultural strengths. To achieve this, career educators need intentional training through both counselor education and ongoing professional development that centers space to develop tools for cultural reflection and affirmation within career exploration.
>
> **Recommendation #2:** Narrative and storytelling methodologies are a tool to benefit first-generation college students, but for all students. Narrative-centered counseling and storytelling can help students bridge the gap between home and academic lives while affirming both. Career educators should be trained to implement narrative-centered counseling approaches within their practice. These methods can include supporting students to bridge the gap between their home and academic lives, affirming both, and allowing them to explore career paths through the lens of identity, culture, and lived experience.
>
> **Recommendation #3:** Career planning should view students holistically, considering their mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. This includes honoring students' multiple identities and roles as workers, caregivers, and community members.

Career planning should reflect those identities, not ignore them. The First-Gen Plus framework emphasizes the importance of addressing these layered experiences to provide more inclusive and impactful support (Whitley, 2018).

Recommendation #4: Decolonizing career services is key to developing relevant career development for students. This means hiring diverse staff, including Indigenous elders and leaders, as well as culturally relevant practitioners, into career spaces. This also means relearning what a "career fair" or "resume workshop" might look like, as well as other traditional career models.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

Considering future implications, there is a clear need for more research on Indigenous-informed career development models, especially those that track outcomes for first-generation college students. The practice should focus on community-based approaches that respect and honor the lived experiences of individuals. In career development practice, career professionals need ongoing training grounded in Indigenous frameworks, which is not a one-time workshop but a continuous process of learning and growth. This also includes training grounded in trauma-informed care and cultural competency. This training must be ongoing, reflective, and a relational process. From an institutional level, policy and funding decisions must align to build sustainable and culturally relevant career support for students. We must be intentional about integrating tools that amplify and preserve culture rather than erasing it. Frameworks in the future must move forward, remaining adaptable and inclusive of the diverse realities within first-generation student communities.

Conclusion and Reflection

Reimagining career development for first-generation students is not just a possibility; it is a promising path forward. We cannot continue to expect students to fit into applying one-size-fits-all models to career development. First-generation college students deserve practices that affirm their cultures, acknowledge their realities, and honor their potential and future. By integrating Indigenous knowledge systems with career development theories, we can create more holistic pathways that help students move forward. As a first-generation college graduate myself, I understand what it means to navigate systems that were not built with my story in mind. That is why the work matters. It challenges educators to reimagine models that see the students they serve, reflect upon their lived experiences, and make space for who they are becoming.

Pursuing a career is not just about getting a job. It is about discovering who you are, where you come from, and how you want to present yourself in the world. We owe it to ourselves and our students to meet them where they are in that truth. Career development should be grounded in identity and community.

Through this project, narrative theory and systems theory because resonate strongly with me. They create more space for complex identities and storytelling. These models provide a different perspective to support students not just as learners but as whole people. This course reminded me how many students are navigating uncertainty and systems that were not built for them. If I can continue to root my work in both theory, practice, and community, then I would consider myself to be doing right by the students I serve.

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EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH: AN EXAMINATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP APPROACHES

Yenming Peng

In recent years, employee mental health has increasingly become a serious concern in many workplaces, with significant implications for organizational outcomes (Kelloway et al., 2023). *Organizational culture* refers to the shared values and beliefs that shape how members interact within an organization (Lubis & Hanum, 2020). Large companies must manage many employees and adapt to global trends. Therefore, a healthy organizational culture plays an important role in a company.

Centralized power, bullying, and psychological pressure within an organization can contribute to serious mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and burnout (Blustein et al., 2021; Reed, 2004). This issue is not hypothetical, especially in Taiwan's high-tech industries. Taiwan is famous for high-tech industries such as semiconductor manufacturing and information technology firms. A tragic incident was the highly publicized death of a Chief Technology Officer (CTO) in Taiwan, which followed a confrontation with the company's chairman after the CTO had stepped down. Prior to the incident, the CTO had reportedly revealed experiences of workplace bullying and humiliation (Liu & Younger, 2025). The incident raised public concerns about leadership behaviors, particularly authoritarian control, poor communication, and psychological pressure. This tragedy reflects the severe consequences of toxic leadership and an unhealthy organizational culture. *Leadership style*, which refers to the behaviors and strategies leaders use to guide, support, and influence their teams (Northouse, 2021), is another critical factor shaping workplace experiences. Employees usually bear a high-pressure environment and a performance-driven culture. Companies are encouraged to support employee career development and retention, as doing so can enhance organizational efficiency and reduce costly turnover. The increasing prevalence of burnout and stress-related turnover across global industries indicates that addressing employees' mental health problems is a critical issue and a key factor in an organization's long-term growth (Kelloway et al., 2023). Reports by the World Health Organization (2024) show that unaddressed workplace mental health concerns result in billions in productivity losses annually. Clearly, this is an area where HRD engagement is urgently needed.

This chapter explores how organizational culture and leadership style directly affect employees' mental health and career development paths and provide insight and suggestions for Human Resource Development (HRD) practitioners.

Background and Issue Analysis

Taiwan's tech industry, notably the semiconductor and software industries, usually follows strict performance standards, long working hours, and a hierarchical organizational culture. Recent studies show that these work conditions restrict opportunities for social interaction and cause significant psychological stress, worsening employees' physical and mental health (Lu et al., 2020). According to Aon's *2024 Taiwan Employee Wellbeing Report*, 42% of employees reported that overwork negatively affected their mental health.

Toxic leadership refers to a self-serving behavior that leads to long-term damage to employees and the organization (Reed 2004). It also causes serious challenges in a high-

pressure industry. Reed emphasized that toxic leaders usually prioritize short-term performance and pleasing superiors while ignoring the well-being of their employees. These dynamics are relevant in Taiwan's high-tech sector, where hierarchical structures and performance-driven cultures can cause negative outcomes. This culture can cause fear, mistrust,and emotional exhaustion, ultimately weakening morale and contributing to mental health problems.

Moreover, in many East Asian workplaces, cultural values such as maintaining harmony and deferring to authority may lead employees to remain silent rather than criticize problematic leadership behaviors. Research by Peng and Tjosvold (2011) showed that many employees face concerns — worries about maintaining dignity, reputation, and social harmony — causing them to avoid open conflict, especially when interacting with their leaders. Similarly, Zhang and Wei (2017) indicated that employees choose superficial harmony rather than directly addressing tensions because they are worried about negative effects. This situation may lead employees to hide their real emotions and thoughts in their workplace, which can eventually affect their work performance and mental health.

Theoretical Frameworks

This chapter uses four career development theories as a framework to analyze how organizational culture and leadership styles influence employees' mental health, particularly within Taiwan's high-pressure technology sector.

Systems Theory Framework

Systems Theory Framework (STF) provides a holistic framework to explain how individuals, organizations, and cultural systems affect employees' mental health and decision-making (McMahon & Patton, 2018). STF helps to clarify the relationships between leadership behaviors, organizational norms, and employee mental health. It is useful in Taiwan's tech industry because hierarchy and performance pressure deeply affect employees' daily lives. For example, in some tech companies, even mid-level leaders may feel limited in their decision-making, which decreases their ability to support intervention. From an STF view, HRD professionals can identify the system problem to help them solve it. Additionally, they can use STF to examine feedback between leadership behavior and mental health. From there, they can design more effective interventions, not just surface-level fixes.

Career Construction Theory

Career Construction Theory (CCT) explains the role of personal narrative and meaning-making in career development. Under toxic leadership, employees might struggle to make sense of their career path (Savickas, 2020). CCT illustrates how a positive organization assists with mentoring, career coaching, and leadership transformation to rebuild employees' career narratives, career adaptability, and long-term well-being. For example, in my previous company, my boss tried to incentivize employees. He held meetings with each employee every Friday. Employees were free to talk about anything such as career planning and the current problems they were facing. Through narrative-based career coaching, the employees were able to reshape their goals and professional identities. This supports CCT's idea that people can rebuild their career stories (Savickas, 2020). Employees who experience suffering from work or sudden changes can benefit from interventions based on this theory. Narrative approaches can help them understand what happened and find new motivation when they feel a loss of meaning at work.

Hope-Centered Career Development Model

Hope-Centered Career Development Model (HCMCD) emphasizes the importance of fostering hope, establishing self-clarity, and setting career goals to help individuals respond to uncertainty and enhance resilience (Clarke et al., 2018). It provides a holistic framework to explore how individuals, organizations, and cultural systems affect employees' mental health and

decision-making. Therefore, company policies that emphasize goal-setting and personal development are very important. For instance, organizations can set clear goals to support and encourage employees. When leaders follow these policies, they can also develop their leadership skills and help employees gain clarity and confidence about their career paths. This model supports the design of goal-setting workshops because setting clear and attainable goals can enhance employees' agency and hope, which are essential for career adaptability. In these workshops, employees can clarify their short-term and long-term goals.

Chaos Theory of Careers

Chaos Theory of Careers (CTC) focuses on the uncertainty and complexity of modern careers (Pryor & Bright, 2012). The theory explains how negative organizational events such as bullying and unhealthy power dynamics create chaos in individual career paths. CTC's focus on flexible career paths is useful in fast-changing tech companies. In those companies, employees may face leadership changes or restructuring, which can lead to poor performance. Building adaptability and resilience is an important strategy to support them. Moreover, HRD can provide adaptability training and real-world scenarios to assist employees in getting ready for unexpected changes and see them as chances to grow.

Applications and Strategies

HRD professionals, organizational leaders, and managers can implement various strategies to support employees' mental health and career development outcomes. These approaches can effectively foster employee well-being and career growth.

Create a "Psychological Safety Leadership" program to teach managers and encourage them to develop their skills such as open dialogue, active listening, and empathy. The training should combine feedback systems and role-play to help leaders recognize each team member's condition. Moreover, building on Edmondson's (2019) concept of psychological safety, HRD professionals can collaborate with leadership development specialists to incorporate psychological safety principles into the "Psychological Safety Leadership" program. This approach can help organizations develop a more supportive workplace culture.

Strengthening and clarifying mental health support is a critical organizational approach. Maintaining confidentiality and collaborating with external mental health specialists can help employees relieve their stress. Additionally, organizations can organize events to enhance awareness, such as promoting available supportive resources, holding resilience workshops, and offering stress management seminars to encourage employees to recognize and use these important services (Kelloway et al., 2023). These efforts not only address employees' mental health concerns but also develop a preventive care culture.

Implementing career coaching and narrative career interventions can help employees rebuild meaningful career paths, especially those experiencing mental challenges due to organizational pressure or toxic leadership. Narrative career interventions, through structured coaching sessions or career workshops, can provide a space for employees and encourage them to reflect on their experience, helping them rebuild meaningful career paths (Savickas, 2013). Employees can attend narrative coaching, and they can also talk to mentors rather than their direct manager. These actions can assist by giving them a space to reflect and speak honestly without fear of judgment. Additionally, organizations can formulate a plan to align with career values, personal strengths, and well-being goals to enhance these projects.

Finally, organizations should engage leadership in systematically addressing toxic elements within the culture through transparent communication, employee feedback systems, and zero-tolerance policies on workplace bullying. Organizational leaders can design a anonymous feedback about company culture and leadership styles. It is essential to ensure effective communication and respect throughout the process.

Role and Stance

In the future, I will advocate for comprehensive mental health and career development strategies, including designing complete training sessions for leaders, creating strong mental health resources, and supporting organizations to take responsibility for employee well-being. This aligns with Tang et al. (2021), who indicated that mental health and career well-being are closely connected rather than independent fields. I will also bring STF, CCT, and HCMCD to promote organizational development, help employees reach their potential, and support their mental and professional growth. Additionally, I hope to conduct internal needs assessments and lead small-scale pilot initiatives (e.g., mental health peer circles) to identify barriers to psychological safety and test solutions before scaling up. As someone who values preventative practices, I also want to design culturally responsive measures that reflect the perceived inadequacies and voices of employees in the program.

Conclusion

Paying attention to organizational culture and leadership plays an important role in supporting employee mental health, particularly in high-pressure settings like Taiwan's tech sector. By drawing on career development theories and HRD practices, companies can strengthen employee well-being, improve performance, and promote adaptability in the workplace. As noted by McDonald and Hite (2023), integrating HRD approaches into career development initiatives is critical for fostering both employee growth and organizational effectiveness. Overall, mental health is not just a benefit but also a significant strategy for talent development and organizational success.

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THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN SHAPING FUTURE CAREERS

Sally Spreeman

When I worked as a K–12 educator, I frequently asked students about their future career aspirations or plans after graduation. Looking back, and considering my graduate studies and research, I now realize that there was much more I could have done to prepare students for careers and the workforce, beyond foundational academics. In the United States, the K-12 public education system can improve the integration of career development into its curricula and teaching practices. All school personnel play a role in preparing young people for careers that will provide decent work with a livable wage in a safe workplace and have growth opportunities to support themselves upon graduation. According to Kosine and Lewis (2008), integrated and intentional career and technical education (CTE) curriculum will engage students early in setting and pursuing work and career goals.

Young people are essential to local and state economies. Young people taking their first step into the workforce often face barriers that curtail their education and entry into meaningful employment. For many students, public institutions and safety nets are insufficient and inadequate to overcome the education barriers. They often lack resources available from their families, making the chance for successful employment difficult. School districts that prioritize a robust CTE curriculum throughout the K–12 continuum enable students to engage in their education early, build essential skills and competencies, explore and pursue career pathways, and ultimately contribute meaningfully to their communities.

A Changing Workforce

Until now, comprehensive career development for youth has had limited success, "in part, by a long-standing, firmly held assumption that the only way to be successful in career and life is by obtaining a 4-year college degree" (Brown & Lent, 2021, p. 645). In the 20th century, finding employment only required a high school degree; a young adult could find steady work that did not require post-secondary enrollment. Employers and employees both assumed that: "(a) people possessed stable work characteristics that could be measured and then used to match with jobs that were also stable and predictable; (b) job requirements were slow to change, making training and anticipating future work needs relatively uniform and straightforward; and (c) work opportunities existed in organizations that provided structure and meaning" (Lent & Brown, 2021, p. 645). Now, with a global economy, structural shifts in the job market, and the rapid pace of innovation and technology, education and training are not keeping up, "leaving many youths without the knowledge, skills, and credentials employers expect them to have when they enter the workforce" (Rockefeller Foundation, 2013, p.10).

Laying the Foundation

Public schools and educators today have a lot to manage as they respond to students' diverse needs, interests, and abilities. With some vocational courses and work-study options in high school, early career exploration programs during elementary grades are rare (Ellot et al., 2024). A lack of comprehensive career development and exploration for all grades in public schools results in many youths missing out on work and career preparation opportunities.

Systemic school factors (e.g., middle school students are required to make academic decisions that affect educational and career opportunities) can exert considerable influence on the future career paths of young people (Brown & Lent, 2021). While Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WOIA) programs focus on disengaged teens and young adults, youth workforce staff in a study by Collins (2023) indicated career exploration should begin at a younger age, introducing fields of work broadly and creatively. By first taking a holistic social work approach that meets young people's physical, social, and emotional needs, educators and adults can then engage youth in identifying their strengths and meet young people where they are currently in their school/work experience (Collins & Spindle-Jackson, 2023).

"Optimal career development ensures that young people are: (a) aware of their personal interests, abilities, and aspirations; (b) knowledgeable about the world of work; and (c) able to use information when considering academic and career-related choices" (Brown & Lent, 2021, p. 649). Applying Donald Super's Life-Span Life-Space theory in K–12 means designing career education as a gradual, age-appropriate process that supports students in forming self-concepts, exploring life roles, and making informed choices. Incorporating Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett, K-12 career awareness focuses on how self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals shape students' career interests and choices.

Reaching Every Student

Key factors impacting youth success in graduating high school and fulfilling their personal goals are socio-economic and quality of education. Experiencing low income or poverty is a barrier to the successful transition of youth and young adults (YYA) to the workplace, interfering with learning, and developing work attitudes required for the job (Wentling & Waight, 2001). Trauma from poverty can lead to issues such as anxiety, stress, and burnout affecting youths' ability to make informed career decisions. "When parents are unemployed or earn low wages, their access to resources to support their kids' development is more limited, which can undermine their children's health and prospects for success in school and beyond" (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2024a, p. 24). There are disparities in access to quality education and schools in the United States, particularly for students from lower-income communities or underrepresented backgrounds. According to a 2024 report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, "among fourth graders nationwide, 84% of Black students, 82% of American Indian students, and 80% of Hispanic students did not read at a fourth-grade proficiency level" (2024b, p. 4). Youth disconnected from school and work identified school personnel's lack of understanding of different cultures as barriers to their educational success. It is "essential that school personnel be cognizant of the different cultures of their student population if there is to be a ripple effect of productive behaviors and outcomes" (Wentling & Waight, 2001, p.77). The research supports creating inclusive cultures in classrooms and schools, and teacher awareness and training regarding diversity and equity.

Effective Career Development Theories

Although each career theorist and career perspective frames the stages of a career somewhat differently, they share common themes such as, "the need (a) to be self-aware of career-related interests and skills, (b) to exert self-management skills, (c) to recognize and act on unplanned opportunities, and (d) to view career decision-making as a continual process rather than a single event in late adolescence" (Brown & Lent, 2021, p. 647).

Stages of Becoming

Any school, in any neighborhood, with a goal of better serving students, can integrate career development activities into the existing school curriculum and academic content (Ellott, 2024). During the growth stage of Donald Super's Life-Span Life-Space theory, elementary students learn about various occupations within their family, school, and community (Ellott et al., 2024). As students

progress through elementary school and this growth stage, they develop an awareness of themselves and the world of work, explore and identify careers that fit their skills and interests, choose and generate a plan for achieving their desired career, develop and refine essential work-related skills, and implement these skills to obtain their job of choice (Ellott et al., 2024). From roleplaying with dress-up clothing and a mock market in the kindergarten classroom to having responsibility for a classroom job, the scaffolding of career awareness occurs. As educators reference work or careers found in literature, an image of that worker is added to a career wall, displaying a broad visual range of options that spark interest and inquiry. Positive improvements in students' career awareness, self-efficacy, and school engagement have resulted when adults share about their profession and work during elementary school career day events (Ellott et al., 2024). Youth participation in career-related after-school programs like robotics and Lego leagues offers another option to supplement formal school curricula without drawing time and effort away from required academic coursework (Brown & Lent, 2021).

Belief, Behavior, and Beyond

During middle and high school, educators can model and embed key factors from the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), such as self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, interests, and curricular exposure (Brown & Lent, 2021). While in their teen years, students explore careers of interest and focus on the steps to achieve career goals, developing a positive personal and vocational self-concept (Ellott et al., 2024; O'Rourke, 2020). Teachers of subjects like math, science, language arts, and social studies can integrate career awareness and exploration into their lessons, offering support and encouragement to students who express an interest in related career fields. A positive personal self-concept and self-efficacy are the foundations of both Super's Life-Span Life-Space Theory and SCCT. Supportive and trusted adult relationships provide social capital to strengthen work readiness skills in youth, especially for those disconnected from these assets "due to systemic oppression and the unequal allocation of power and resources" (Boat et al., 2021, p. 3). All adult school personnel play a role in the success of each student. By encouraging students to do well, holding them to high expectations, and supporting them as they plan and make choices, students feel empowered about their life purpose and optimistic about their future (Search Institute, 2006).

The entire K-12 school experience for a student uses aspects of SCCT to grow and develop the foundational human-centric or soft skills employers look for in employees.

Interaction with peers strengthens collaboration and teamwork skills. Adults support student growth in goal setting, time management, conflict resolution, and overcoming challenges and obstacles. These relationships with trusted adults during adolescence influence motivation and progress toward successful integration into the workforce or pursuit of post-secondary opportunities and spur the implementation of career choice with post-secondary options (Kosine & Lewis, 2008).

Building a Career Path

For an adolescent without background knowledge of science-related careers, an engineering, computer science, or bio-medical career may seem complex and too difficult to pursue. Especially if educators' attitudes and presentation of mathematical and science courses influence middle and high school students' pursuit of science and engineering career exploration (Starobin et al., 2013). Generating interest in science and technology fields led to the development of the Project Lead the Way (PLTW) curriculum, consisting of "activity, project, and problem-based (APB) instructional design that centers on hands-on, real-world activities, projects, and problems that help students understand how the knowledge and skills they develop in the classroom may be applied in everyday life" (PLTW, n.d.). Completing a PLTW engineering or bio-medical course not only expands upon career interests in a STEM field, but it also allows students to build skills as they perform real-world tasks, strengthening their belief in their capabilities and interest in pursuing

post-secondary education in STEM fields. High school students who participated in the PLTW curriculum had increased enrollment in higher education compared to their peers who did not participate in the program (Starobin et al., 2013).

Conclusion

Intentional career development during the K-12 school years can play a significant role in preparing students for work life after high school. With the support of teachers, counselors, school staff, and a learning environment centered on career awareness and development, students are encouraged to explore their interests and build the skills and competencies essential for postsecondary work realities. Ultimately, embedding career theories into the school curriculum fosters career readiness and self-empowerment, equipping students with the skills and growth mindset needed to thrive in a competitive and changing world.

Sally Spreeman is an experienced public school educator and youth development specialist. She transitioned her career to a role in human resources with the State of Minnesota where she found a talent for working with young adults as they pursued internships and enteredthe work world. With a passion for lifelong learning, at the age of 62, she enrolled at the University of Minnesota, earning an M.Ed. in Adult Education in May 2025.

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APPLYING CHAOS THEORY TO NON-COLLEGE-EDUCATED AFRICAN AMERICANS

Christian Martin

Delving into the topic of non-college-educated African Americans is a subject that is important not only for the general population but also for me. The term *non-college-educated* refers to individuals who have not received a four-year degree or a two-year degree. Personally, along with being an African American, most of my family is not college educated. Understanding how to create pathways using career development theories could be the recipe for creating sustainable career paths for this population. The importance lies in the fact that non-college-educated Blacks represent a majority of the group. Around 73% have not completed a bachelor's or associate degree leaving a demographic where theories in career development, which were mainly focused on white men, do not provide enough effective assistance (Funk, 2022; Maree & Molepo, 2006). Due to the lack of research on this population, it is essential to discuss the aspects that may contribute to the application of certain career development theories.

Why This is Important

What makes discussing this demographic important is the research that could be provided to help shrink the number of negative outcomes that may arise in this population. Failure has many negative associations when people experience it because they often think of failures as the opposite of career success. Feelings like disgraced, discouraged, and demotivated may arise during these failures, which ultimately create a negative connotation towards failure (Pryor & Bright 2012). This may have more of an impact on non-college-educated Blacks than on Whites. Discussing these events and understanding how likely these events are to occur will allow practitioners to develop effective counseling to guide this demographic towards sustaining a successful career after failure. For example, understanding the implications and chaos that Covid-19 brought is an indicator of the importance of this need. During the pandemic in 2020, people experienced what Ankkermans (2020) described as *career shocks* which is "a disruptive and extraordinary event that is, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual's control and that triggers a deliberate thought process concerning one's career" (para. 2). Covid-19 was a major event that caused career shocks for many people, as careers changed and jobs were lost. Unemployment extended months after the initial spike of the pandemic. The pandemic was extremely unpredictable, but as with other chaotic events, certain populations experienced the harshest parts of it.

The Black population, college-educated or not, was one, if not the most, affected group as unemployment reached a high among other groups and decreased at a slower rate throughout the year (Hardy et al., 2022). For non-college-educated blacks in that pool, the lack of a college degree created employment instability during this time (Hardy et al., 2022). Research published in the American Academy of Political and Social Science suggested that Blacks with fewer educational credentials are more likely to have low-wage jobs that result in employment instability:

> By the end of the sample period, April 2021, the Black-white unemployment gap is roughly double for the most (6.2% versus 3.0%) and least educated (13.1% versus 6.7%). The unemployment shock from COVID-19 is disproportionately borne by

> workers with less education; and among these, Black and Hispanic workers fare worst of all. (Hardy et al., 2022, para. 20)

Analysis of the Population

The African American community, as it pertains to several aspects today, faces many barriers that inhibit them from advancing in their career development, including poor conditions/bad relationship with management, economic restraints, marginalization, and racism that influence career choice. This has and will create hardships for them to be able to progress and sustain (Pitcan et al., 2018; Zhang, 2023).

Similar barriers contribute to halting the career development process making it more difficult for African Americans to advance their careers. Career development alone is a very complex process that consists of different theories and frameworks that can contribute to guidance and make room for explaining the importance of failures. These very failures that are experienced by African Americans can be attributed to chaos and how the chaos in one's life may lead to failures in their career development. The African American community, based on the hardships, experiences a greater chance of failures throughout their career development. Additionally, understanding both the likelihood and the implications of these failures allows for better guidance in overcoming them.

Application of Career Development Theories

Chaos Theory

Chaos Theory integrates several complex dynamical system characteristics of complexity, connection, change and chance, specifically the interplay between order and disorder or predictability and uncertainty (Pryor & Bright, 2014). When looking at the complexity of reality, Chaos Theory proposes the acceptance of failure as a possibility when navigating through life (Pryor & Bright, 2012). Thus, failures should not only be accounted for in one's career development, but we must also move away from the negative connotation they have. Before determining pathways to advising African Americans on planning with chaos, it is vital to understand the most prevalent chaotic events that will influence their career development and how to promote positive outcomes through these events. One of the most significant chaotic events that is shown to affect non-college-educated African Americans is a layoff or losing a job. Job loss is an event that can greatly affect the career process for any individual and lead to many implications. In most cases, a lack of career preparation may leave many individuals lost when they need to be open to considering their options for the future. As it pertains to African Americans, these avenues are limited due to systemic barriers.

Along with those barriers, research has shown that African Americans face the disparity of losing their job more than whites in the United States. Shiro and Butcher (2022) researched the statistics on this population's job displacement focusing on the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). The PSID is used to determine the impacts of job displacement. They found that "Black workers are 67% more likely to be displaced than their White peers, on average. Workers without a bachelor's degree are also 67% more likely to be displaced than those with a bachelor's degree" (Shiro & Butcher, 2022, para.1). This research determines how likely it is for African Americans, compared to Whites, to experience job displacements and how non-college-educated Blacks experience a greater disparity on top of that.

Looking from the outside in, the chances for this failure to happen for less educated African Americans is significantly higher than Whites and should be viewed as more of a possibility than a spontaneous event. In major events like pandemics and natural disasters that could cause job loss and displacement, Akkermans (2020) explained the event systems theory, which suggests that stronger events that are more disruptive are more likely to initiate change in an individual and promote decision making. Utilizing event systems theory can contribute to altering the current mindset of non-college-educated African Americans to change from a linear

mindset where there is no consideration of the complexity of how career pathways can be affected, to an approach that incorporates this possibility. Individuals can mentally and physically prepare for that possibility allowing chaos to be incorporated into the career development. This also allows for the planning of a chaotic system as described by Cartwright (1991) as under-shooting and over-shooting through which the individual deliberately accounts for how complex situations may arise in the career development process and makes decisions that will cater to different outcomes. This is a more effective tactic than a linear mindset.

Chaos theory can also be applied to the schooling that non-college-educated African Americans have experienced. The absence of a bachelor's degree for African Americans poses chaos that is more likely to occur for them and focusing on the education that they may have received is an indicator of additional chaos that exists in their lives. Predominately Black public high schools specifically can create hardships that prohibit the acceleration of education for Black students as policies, actions, and the general procedures of the school can prohibit academic preparation in high school alone. Vernon Polite, who served as the Dean of Eastern Michigan University's School of Education, uses chaos theory as a framework to explain the chaos in these types of schools. Through a case study he found that high schools with a large population of African American students experience widespread chaos that results in unpreparedness on an institutional level and harmful patterns that prohibit students' education (Polite, 1994). This case study presents four indicators related to structures in chaos theory: the lack of parent's contribution to the education of their sons, peer pressure to resist schooling, the lack of caring from teachers, and the failure of instructional leadership from administrators (Polite, 1994).

In determining why this is significant in one's career development, Polite (1994) discussed the butterfly effect as it relates to chaos theory, meaning prior events could have had significant implications on the unpreparedness occurring in metropolitan public school districts. Brady (1990) also discussed the butterfly effect, describing it as "the fact that small causes can have great effects: these exponential repercussions are based on (hyper-) sensitive dependence on initial conditions" (p.70). Brady (1990) also stated that although long-range forecasting of the butterfly effect is practically impossible due to current technology and how nonlinear the approach is, it is still important to consider future implications and understand that some events could be more linear than other events.

With non-college-educated African Americans, the events that may occur due to the lack of preparedness in high school could likely be the cause of later chaos as seen in the students at the metropolitan public school district in Polite's case study. It is impossible to completely predict the outcomes of the chaos that has occurred during schooling in college. However, with the demographic of non-college-educated African Americans, it is reasonable to consider certain outcomes, such as likeness and chance, play a role in influencing chaos.

Planned Happenstance Theory

Planned happenstance theory, which Mitchell, Levin and Krumboltz (1999) defined as "a conceptual framework extending career counseling to include the creating and transforming of unplanned events into opportunities for learning" (p. 117), should also be considered. Planned Happenstance Theory can be utilized to incorporate change in an individual's career development. This approach is linked closely with chaos theory. Where this could be beneficial for non-college-educated Blacks is in the skills that they can develop through interventions based on this theory to prepare for unplanned events. Those five skills include curiosity, persistence, flexibility, optimism, and risk-taking (Mitchell et al., 1999). Developing these skills could be essential for this demographic and ultimately prepare them for the chaotic situations, career shocks, and failures that are most likely to have a major impact on their careers.

Planned happenstance theory could be utilized as a strategy in high schools. In urban

schools with predominantly Black students, for example, creating a career counseling course or meeting where educators and counselors can suggest planned happenstance may allow students to develop the skills they need before they go straight into the workforce. This is beneficial because it does not occur in the midst of the failures and chaos they may go through.

Implications

Although chaos theory can create a mindset that allows failures to be viewed in a different light that allows for preparation for events that may happen, there are aspects that need to be considered when understanding how to utilize chaos theory. Long-term predictability is very hard to achieve, and educators should not use chaos theory to predict any long-term events for this demographic. For example, although practitioners should promote the possible positivity of the failures that may have occurred, it is impossible to formulate what to expect in the future. Scholars suggest that chaos theory can have negative and positive outcomes but cannot predict what will happen exactly based on the chaos that an individual is going through. Long-term planning is very difficult to achieve and the notion of using long-term predictability for chaos is almost impossible and could create different implications for educators and organizations using it as a strategy (Levy, 1994).

Another implication for educators and counselors to consider is what forces drive individuals in this demographic in terms of work. As mentioned before, African Americans without a college education make up a lot of the low-wage sector in the job market which means that people in this demographic may seek these jobs to survive rather than to build and advance their career development process. *Decent work* as described by Nizami and Prasad (2017) could mean resorting to finding a job quickly to make ends meet during situations and chaos. Based on this, educators and counselors should be cautious and take time to understand why decisions are made.

Future Strategies

The steps that should be taken by practitioners, educators, and counselors will be important in influencing a mindset change to support this population. Specifically, they should engage in intensive research that will allow them to understand this group and be able to guide them in certain pathways amid all the common chaos that is experienced today. It is important for educators and counselors to prepare these individuals for the chaos that is likely to happen in their lives, and to help them create a new mindset when setbacks and failures occur.

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Training Programs

As the premier leader in career development training and education services, the National Career Development Association (NCDA) provides programming and credentials in a diverse set of training programs. Each program serves a specific audience and offers informed practices for research, development, and delivery of career development services.

NCDA training and education products, services and leaders are dedicated to providing the best career development training programs available.

FCD

What is the NCDA Facilitating Career Development Training (FCD) and Certification Program?

The NCDA FCD Training and Certification Program is NCDA's premier offering, encompassing all aspects of career development; it equips participants with essential foundational skills to deliver effective career services to diverse individuals and groups around the world. Training is 120 hours in length and is typically completed in 8-14 weeks. Training schedule and content can be customized.

SCDA

What is the NCDA School Career Development Advisor (SCDA) Training and Certification Program?

The NCDA SCDA Training and Certification program is tailored for professionals who support K-12 students in preparing for meaningful careers and managing their future work lives. Training includes 48 hours of instruction and is typically completed within 6-8 weeks. Training schedule and content can be customized.

CPS

What is the NCDA Career Practitioner Supervision (CPS) Training and Certification Program?

The NCDA CPS Training and Certification program is designed for individuals who currently, or aim to, supervise career development practitioners in a variety of settings. Training includes 45 hours of instruction and is typically completed within a 6-8 week time period.

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