



ECSO6006: Skills for Life: Employability and Future Pathways

Theme 3 Post-Modern Career Planning:

Planned Happenstance, The Squiggly Career and the VUCA world

Post-Modern Career Planning

N.B. Theme 3 is partly based on CPD training delivered to the Training and Development Team of Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan and Powys by [Lianne Hambly](#) in 2007 and content is used with her permission.

Post-Modern Career Planning

'Chance favours only the prepared mind'

Louis Pasteur

*What do you understand this quote to be saying?
Take some time to consider this and then feedback
to the group.*



Planned Happenstance

Aim

- In this Theme we will consider;
- The role that **chance** plays in career planning and career choice
- Develop a concept of '**planned happenstance**'
- Contrast this with the traditional career matching model of career planning
- Explore the implications for your personal development planning

Planned Happenstance

Chance

What do you understand by the word chance?

Take some time to consider this and then feedback to the group.



Planned Happenstance

Chance – dictionary definitions

- 1. *noun* – the way things happen of themselves; the absence of design or discoverable cause
- 2. *noun* – an event that is without apparent cause or unexpected; a casual circumstance; an accident (OED, 2007, p.380)

Happenstance – dictionary definition

- 1. *noun* – chance; a chance event (OED, 2007, p.1203)

So how can you plan for an unexpected event?

Planned Happenstance

Career – dictionary definition

- 4. *noun* – a **course or progress through life or history**; an occupation or profession; a way of making a living and advancing oneself

(OED, 2007, p.349)

- The traditional view of a ‘career’ was that it was a planned, **teleological** progress through ones chosen profession

Can we recall what we mean by ‘teleological’?

Two examples of traditional career thinking



The Jobs Boys Aspire To



Jobs for Young Girls

Traditional Career Planning

- Theorists such as John Holland (1959) came up with what became known as 'career matching' models for career planning
- Using psychological assessments Holland argued that people fell into one of six personality traits, namely;
 - Realistic
 - Investigative
 - Artistic
 - Social
 - Enterprising
 - Conventional
- For this reason, it is often known as the RIASEC model

Traditional Career Planning

- Holland went on to argue that people who fell into each of the six categories had similar traits, interests and qualities
- These could be matched to groups of jobs for which these traits, interests and qualities made that person suited
- The jobs were grouped together because they had factors, elements or components in common
- This resulted in the assumption that 'By matching an individual's interests to occupational characteristics by Holland category, it is possible to identify potential career choices for career counselling' (Armstrong *et al*, 2008)
- This has become known as **rational** career planning

Trait and Factor Matching (Based on Holland, 1959)

People (traits, interests, qualities)	Jobs (factors, elements, environments)
Realistic: mechanical activities, objects, co-ordination, manipulating tools, physical	Motoric: Pilot, farmer, horticulturalist, builder, engineer, armed services personnel, mechanic, upholsterer, electrician, computer technologist, park ranger, sportsperson
Investigative: analytical, organising, curious, reserved, scientific/ scholarly	Intellectual: Science, research, medical and health occupations, chemist, marine scientist, forestry technician, medical or agricultural laboratory technician, zoologist, dentist, doctor
Artistic: performing athletically or artistically. Emotional, aesthetic, autonomous, unconventional, impulsive, imaginative	Aesthetic: Artist, illustrator, photographer, signwriter, composer, singer, instrument player, dancer, actor, reporter, writer, editor, advertiser, hairdresser, fashion designer
Social: helping, teaching, serving. gregarious, friendly, Co-operative, tactful	Supportive: Teacher, nurse, nurse aide, counsellor, police officer, social worker, salesperson, customer service officer, waiter, secretary
Enterprising: organising, directing persuading, exercising authority. Possess leadership, ambitious, and optimistic	Persuasive: Salesperson, lawyer, politician, accountant, business owner, executive or manager, travel agent, music or sports promoter
Conventional: Prefer orderly, structured situations; clerical, systems, precise, accurate	Conforming: Secretary, receptionist, office worker, librarian, bank clerk, computer operator, stores and dispatch clerk
	<i>N.B. This is still being used e.g. Careers.Govt.NZ</i>

Trait and Factor Matching

Do you have any thoughts on this model?



- Criticisms of Holland's model include;
- That the groupings of both personality traits and job factors are simplistic;
- That some of the occupational environments are open to interpretation; and,
- That women consistently seem to score more highly in three personality types (artistic, social and conventional) – this last point is acknowledged by the [New Zealand Careers](#) website

Trait and Factor Matching

- Such models are still widely used (e.g. in the U.S.A.) and they can help the **start** of the career planning process
- However, as well as the specific criticisms of Holland's model (see previous slide) it can be argued that such models do not meet the needs of people in a world where;
- Technological development is increasing exponentially (Moore's Law)
- Some work is being done by 'intelligent' machines (car production) and AI (creative writing and design)
- Traditional jobs are disappearing and new jobs being created
- New working practices such as Zero Hours contracts and the 'Gig' economy require greater flexibility
- This is where **Planned Happenstance**, **'Squiggly Careers'** and **VUCA** come into play – *have you heard of either of these three concepts?*

Planned Happenstance

So, thinking of your 'career' (i.e. journey through life), what role has chance played? for example;

- A company restructuring/ take-over?
- A company closing down / redundancy?
- Being in the 'right place at the right time'?
- Being given a lead by a friend, colleague or connection?
- Knowing the right person to ask?

All of these have played a part in my 'career' as illustrated in our second Tutorial on selection processes

Why work with chance?

- Life is complex and changeable therefore **rational** matching is not sufficient (Hambly, 2007)
- 'classical decision theory or rational decision strategies ... are simply no longer sufficient for today's complex changing world [...] changing one's ***mind*** will be an essential skill in the future'. (Gelatt 1989)
- People have **diverse decision making mindsets** ...these can be as effective (if not more so) as rational decision making (Hambly, 2007)
- Coping with uncertainty and being flexible are desirable employability skills (Hambly, 2007)

Planned Happenstance

So, in order to be able to adapt to the changing world one needs to adopt a mindset of;

PLANNED e.g. learning, planning, networking, work experience, volunteering, developing, researching

HAPPEN i.e. responding to unexpected opportunities as they happen rather than having a plan 'set in stone'

STANCE i.e. adopting an attitude or **stance** of curious enquiry, keeping an open mind (i.e. critical thinking)

Planned Happenstance in Practice

- How you can respond to **chance** events?
- By being ready and willing to take action
- By being open-minded and flexible
- By taking a risk and seizing the opportunity
- By networking being 'out there' talking to people
- By being involved ... voluntary work, interests, learning
- By exploring, being curious
- By staying positive/ optimistic

Planned Happenstance in Practice

The Mindset to adopt

- Curiosity:** Exploring new developments, subscribing to newsletters, asking how people got the job they are doing
- Persistence:** Exerting effort despite setbacks, learning from a negative outcome
- Flexibility:** changing attitudes and goals to meet the new circumstances
- Optimism:** Finding connections between your experience and new or different opportunities
- Risk Taking:** Willingness to take action in the face of uncertain outcomes

Planned Happenstance in Practice

- **Reframe out of date career myths:** e.g. instead of thinking “there is a perfect job out there”, think “what job can I adapt my skills and experience to?”
- Challenge the notion that you need to decide before taking action e.g. you don’t have to be certain that a job is for you to find out more / ask for a placement
- Adopt an attitude of **curious exploration** i.e. some avenues might not lead anywhere but you won’t know if you don’t go down them

The Squiggly Career

- These ideas have been adapted and updated by Tupper & Ellis in the podcasts and books
- As with planned happenstance, a **squiggly career** refers to a non-linear career path where individuals frequently change roles, industries, or career directions based on their evolving interests, skills, and circumstances.
- Unlike the traditional career ladder, which involves a steady progression within a single profession or organization, a squiggly career embraces flexibility, variety, and adaptability
- This approach allows people to pivot and adapt to new opportunities, continuously learn new skills, and pursue roles that align with their values and passions

The VUCA World and 'Careers'

- The concept of VUCA has developed in the fields of business management and **career development** as another response to the post-modern, **complex**, world.
- It has many similarities with both Planned Happenstance and the Squiggly Career in that it is an attempt to develop a **mindset** that allows one to adapt to a world of increasing change, which:
- '...is characterised by constant changes resulting from a series of economic, social and ecological crises' (Canzittu, 2022, p.1)
- And which aims at 'the objectives of sustainable development, social justice, human dignity, and decent work for all (Ibid, p.8)

The VUCA World and 'Careers'

- The VUCA world is characterized by four key elements:
- **Volatility:** This refers to the rapid and unpredictable changes that can occur in the world, such as sudden market shifts or technological breakthroughs.
- **Uncertainty:** This element highlights the difficulty in predicting future events, even when information is available, making decision-making challenging.
- **Complexity:** This involves the many interrelated factors that make it difficult to identify clear cause-and-effect relationships.
- **Ambiguity:** This describes situations where information is unclear or contradictory, allowing for multiple interpretations.
- These elements collectively describe the dynamic and often unpredictable challenges faced in today's world. How do you see these elements impacting your own 'career'?

More links to previous learning

- In many ways, what we have been discussing has strong links with our discussions on Reflective Practice
- Particularly our discussion regarding Schön's *Reflective Practitioner* and how we can extend his work to include **reflection for action**
- The planned happenstance mindset means that one can reflect on ones experience, skills and attitudes and adapt these, using research and sources of support*, to take advantage of changing circumstances and new opportunities

* Don't forget that you can access UWTSD Careers Guidance and references/advice from your Tutors at any time after Graduation

Advice from Career Practitioners

- Acknowledge that it is normal, inevitable and even desirable for unplanned events to influence careers
- Think of indecision not as a problem to be remedied but a useful state of exploration
- Develop skills that will enable you to take advantage of unplanned events

Final Thoughts

‘Careers are seldom planned but are often developed by being aware of and acting on the landmarks that appear on the way’

‘An unplanned career is full of opportunity’

Kathleen Mitchell: *The Unplanned Career* 2004

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