



Images of career: Nine key metaphors

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Abstract

This article examines theorists', practitioners', and workers' extensive use of metaphors in the conceptualization of careers. Metaphor constrains career thinking to powerful stereotypes, yet also extends views through the consideration of alternative metaphors and the creation of new ones. Morgan's (1986) method of multiple metaphor is used to develop an eclectic view of career studies. Nine key metaphors for career are considered—the career as inheritance, construction, cycle, matching, journey, encounters and relationships, roles, resource, and story. These metaphors act as frameworks for much career theory, and each presents specific career issues. Together they have the potential to advance thinking about careers beyond the framing of familiar metaphors, and provide a broader and more inclusive understanding of career phenomena.

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1. Introduction

For most of us, careers are figural. We watch our own careers avidly; narrate, compose, and analyze them in our minds; and try as best we can to make sense of the past, decisions for the present, and plans for the future. As parents, teachers, counselors, and managers, many of us also take responsibility for the careers of others. And in the academic sector, we run programs of education and research, in sociology, psychology, child and adult development, education, organizational

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behavior, human resource management, and counseling, all seeking to increase understanding of careers and to improve career practice.

Each of us, however, has our personal lens through which to look at careers, our own *image* of what a career is. Consider, for example, how we might understand the career of Darren, a thirty-six-year-old social worker, who stated:

I used to be idealistic, but after ten years, dealing with the very bottom rung of society all day, every day, I feel demoralized. My life seems to be full of drug addicts, alcoholics, underprivileged poor, child abusers—people who simply can't run their lives—and a society and a system that just doesn't care about them. My caseload has doubled over the years, and I'm accountable if anything goes wrong. Even if I wanted, I couldn't begin to provide decent service for all of them, and frankly I am ceasing to care. The pay is lousy, and the promotion prospects are zilch. Nowadays I frankly wish I'd never got into this. But my family relies on the income, and I don't seem to be qualified for anything else. I'm traveling in a rut, getting no-where, except a dead-end.

In his last sentence, Darren sums up his career in a metaphor—“in a rut. . . getting nowhere . . . a dead-end”—as a journey that is increasingly restricted by the terrain around it. However, this is only one interpretation of Darren's career situation. Darren's boss might see in Darren's career not a dead-end for Darren, but a “faulty cog in the machine,” a “downhill slide,” or “a good apple gone bad”—in other words a growing performance problem for the agency. A psychologist, aware of a lack of fit between Darren's true interests and the parameters of his job, might see “a misfit” or “a square peg in a round hole.” A social activist might see Darren's career restriction as part of the imprisonment many others share: “a life sentence in the ghettos of underprivilege.” Darren's wife might see an actor obsessed with his on-stage performance and unable to free himself for his off-stage roles: “always playing the martyr, never playing the father.” All of these views have implications for Darren's welfare and actions, not only in the here-and-now, but also over the past–present–future continuum which is a defining characteristic of careers. Most likely, each of the above analyses has a point about Darren and his career. None of them is the whole truth.

In these interpretations of Darren's career, metaphors have been deliberately used because that is the way people frequently talk, and even more frequently think. Much of our conceptualizing of the complex phenomena around us is framed in metaphorical terms (Grant & Oswick, 1996; Ortony, 1993). The terms used in the case are vivid, concrete, and in some cases emotive: “rut,” “dead-end,” “cog in a machine,” “rotten apple,” “misfit,” “square peg,” “slave,” “dungeon,” “martyr,” etc. But even where we use more neutral, abstract terms—for example if we replace “in a rut” by “restricted by current circumstances”—there may well be a concrete image behind our discourse. Metaphor thus provides a powerful tool for us to express ourselves, and at the same time betrays deeper constructs in our thinking.

2. The use of metaphor

Metaphors may underlie not only our thinking about specific careers such as Darren's, but our thinking about careers in general. This implies both problems

and opportunities. One problem is that our predilection for a particular metaphor may constrain our ability to see careers in terms of alternative, equally plausible, metaphors. A second is that metaphor may be used to persuade, to deceive, and to induce us to see things that are not there. But metaphor also provides opportunities. Our metaphors not only express our thinking, they help us to structure it. Listening to, and visualizing, metaphors coined by others may help us to broaden our vision. Metaphors describe the world in a vivid, lively, yet familiar way, enabling us to see events from a special perspective. The process of developing and working with metaphors stimulates creativity.

In 1986 Gareth Morgan made a landmark contribution to organization studies when he published *Images of Organization*. Morgan's contribution was to analyze organizations in terms of key metaphors such as 'machine,' 'organism,' 'culture,' and 'brain.' He then explored the implications of each metaphor, in the manner of "Suppose the organization were a machine . . .?" and teased out the implications of each metaphor for understanding and managing organizations. Conceptualizing the organization as a machine enables us to engage with a new imagery which helps us to understand its functioning, both strengths and weaknesses. When an organization is described as a machine, we see it as efficient, rational, rigid, and inflexible. But it is also apparent that an organization which functions *only* in a mechanical way is limited: other modes of operating are also needed. People who allow organization metaphors to become *stereotypes*—for example the ambitious corporate climber who mentally characterizes his or her organization *only* as a pyramidal political system—may gravely limit themselves in both personal accomplishment and fulfillment, and in corporate contribution. Perhaps those interested in careers— theorists, researchers, counselors, managers, and most importantly ordinary people like Darren—straitjacket their thinking and performance in a similar way.

Morgan advocated the method of 'multiple metaphor.' He argued that the metaphors of machine, organism, culture, brain, etc. can be applied to *any* organization. Each metaphor reveals a special truth about that organization, and about organizations in general. But no metaphor on its own tells the whole truth. Organizations, like careers, are complex entities. Every metaphor has its own strengths and weaknesses, its applicability and non-applicability to the specific situation. True understanding comes from considering a range of metaphors.

3. Metaphors and career studies

While some have experimented with the use of metaphor in career counseling (e.g., Amundson, 1998; Inkson & Amundson, 2002; Sagaria, 1989; Spain & Hamel, 1993), it may be when we educate ourselves about the overall nature of careers that the method of multiple metaphors has most to offer. This method enables us to identify key metaphors and to examine careers through their lens, thus incrementally increasing understanding. At the end, the views through the different lens may be appreciated as complements to each other, or may even be integrated into a more complete understanding.

Both formal career theory and everyday career thinking and discourse are rife with metaphor (Inkson, 2002). Commonplace metaphors are “career path,” “career ladder,” “career plateau,” “fast track,” “window of opportunity,” “square peg in a round hole,” “journey,” “glass ceiling,” “decision tree,” “story of my life,” etc. Influential academic concepts are also framed in metaphorical terms: “life-career rainbow” (Super, 1992), “career map” (Krumboltz, 1994), “career construction” (Savickas, 2002), “seasons of a man’s life” (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978), “vocational personality” (Holland, 1997), “career anchors” (Schein, 1978), “career tournament” (Rosenbaum, 1979), “protean career” (Hall, 1976), “portfolio career” (Handy, 1989), “boundaryless career” (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), etc. In such approaches the metaphors are framed in words which often elicit irresistible imagery, simultaneously enlivening and restricting our consideration of careers.

Career metaphors do not all have equal status. They differ both in what they refer to and from where (or from whom) reference is made. As Audrey Collin has pointed out, careers are abstractions, constructs open to construction and interpretation from many different sources. Some metaphors, such as “journey,” and “construction” are based on the individual’s understanding of his or her personal experience. Others, such as “seasons” and “resource” are based on external observers’ analysis of the situation (Collin, personal communication, 10/31/02). Some metaphors, such as “ladder” and “tournament,” do not describe the career so much as the conditions in which the career is enacted: thus, a ladder implies “climbing” and a tournament “competing.” “Anchors” and “personality” describe psychological conditions of the career protagonist, and “protean career” and “portfolio career” represent particular career forms.

Thus, career metaphors may with some justice be accused of representing something of an epistemological rag-bag. In addition to this diversity of foci for career-relevant metaphors, the choice of metaphor may well be dictated by the role of the chooser (for example, career holder, parent, counselor, employer, change activist, self-help writer). On the other hand, it is precisely this diversity of sources, statuses, and sponsors of metaphors that creates such a wide range of images and makes the views of, say, the career holder, the psychologist, the sociologist and the employer, such a contrast with each other. Each of us may, perhaps unconsciously, structure his or her world-view (or ‘career’-view) around a relatively narrow range of metaphors, perhaps even one single metaphor. Can we gain a more eclectic vision of careers by attending to, and trying to learn from, new metaphors which may be as commonplace to others as ours are to us?

Of course, multiple metaphors can become a morass, a confusion of ideas through which it becomes difficult to discern clear patterns. How do we make sense of such confusion? Morgan’s (1986) method was to limit attention to a relatively small number of important, overarching metaphors, such as machine, organism, brain, etc. What are the dominating, archetypal metaphors underlying the study of careers? Is the career an *inheritance*, passed on from our class, gender and ethnic origins and integrated into our being in childhood? Is it a *construction*, an ongoing piece of craftsmanship through which we simultaneously express who we are and endeavor to meet our ongoing needs? Is it a *cycle*, a sequence of predictable seasons, identifiable stages through which each of us progresses? Is it a *matching process*, a hole in a

pegboard shaped for us to fit into, for our own comfort and the benefit of society? Is it a *journey*, an exercise in mobility and immobility, ongoing travel through occupational and organizational space? Is it a series of *encounters and relationships*, a living component of the networks of social, organizational, and economic relationships from which the fabric of society is woven? Is it a set of *roles*, a theatrical performance based on our interpretation of the scripts of society, and of the complementary roles and performances of those around us? Is it a *resource*, a building block through which organizations can sustain ongoing performance and long-term growth? Or is it a *story* about the past which makes it easier to understand and explain our lives, or a piece of rhetoric about how people should live? All of these may be true. Each may provide its own unique insight.

4. Nine images of career

In this article, nine metaphors have been chosen, because they have the potential to express much of the current wisdom about careers. The list is, of course, arbitrary: different careers scholars might choose different metaphors. Other metaphors may further help us to understand both generic and individual careers. As a start, however, let us take the above nine overarching metaphors and briefly consider how, between them, they help to illuminate our understanding.

4.1. Legacy metaphor: Career as inheritance

Careers, like legacies, can be passed on to the next generation. Each career, in some way and to a varying extent, is inherited from the ‘families’ of which we are part. Career inheritance (Goodale & Hall, 1976) is framed in a number of ways. Sociologists emphasize the role of social class, gender, and ethnic category in delimiting the values and aspirations that children develop, the career modeling they experience, and the educational and financial opportunities they receive (Brown, Fukunaga, Umemoto, & Wicker, 1996). Thus, inter-generational occupational mobility, particularly between different occupational and socio-economic levels is to some extent circumscribed by social structures (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Kerckhoff, 1995), providing an inheritance, for good or ill, which may be hard to escape. In addition, females have historically been socialized to make their careers in poorly-paid ‘pink ghetto’ occupations such as unskilled factory work, retail service, nursing, and pre-school teaching (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Rubery, Smith, & Fagan, 1999). Ethnic minorities likewise have their career choices limited. The socio-economic status and occupations of family members frame pre-career childhood experiences and expectations. For example, self-employed careers appear to be modeled by parents (Cooper & Dunkelberg, 1987). Career inheritance is multi-faceted, being both sociological (e.g., social structure), genetic (e.g., inherited IQ), and psychological (e.g., parental attitudes to work) in character.

Some counselors prefer to accentuate the self-determining, proactive side of career behavior—the notion that each person is a free agent who can choose, plan, and develop his or her own career (see “Careers as construction” below). But inheritances

cannot be ignored. Through childhood and beyond, career actors grapple with them through the “circumscription, compromise and self-creation” of careers (Gottfreidson, 2002). Later they take responsibility for the legacies that they in turn will leave to their own children and others. Individuals’ consciousness of their career inheritance may empower them to decide whether they will seek to reject the inheritance and pursue their careers autonomously. Everyone who takes careers seriously needs to consider the extent and power of the inherited aspect.

4.2. Craft metaphor: Career as construction

This metaphor subsumes theories of career which emphasize the role of the individual in creating his or her own career and the psychological and behavioral processes involved. The term “craft” is chosen because of the way it balances considerations of functionality and creativity (Poehnell & Amundson, 2002). The classic sociological “ideal type” definition of craft includes a number of features which are apparently characteristic of the self-creation of careers: for example, unity of self and work, learning through work, and integration of the process and product of work in the life-space of the individual (Mills, 1951). The product (the career) simultaneously enables the individual to solve life-problems (such as earning a living) in a practical way, and to implement his or her personal sense of self.

Internal career development also has a number of craft-like characteristics. It is an ongoing process of construction involving constantly looking inside oneself, outside oneself and ahead in time. Since the founding work of Parsons (1909), theorists of career choice and development and practitioners of career counseling have implicitly adopted a craft/construction model of career development. This is true of aspects of Super’s (1990) life-span, life-space theory, Savickas’s (2002) vocational development theory—revealingly labeled “career construction”—and the cognitive theories of Krumboltz (e.g., Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1990), Lent (e.g., Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002) and others.

The craft metaphor also raises the issue of career planning, which is often conceptualized as a rational process, involving information gathering, goal setting, logical choice, etc. (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godschalk, 2000). However, as has been shown in relation to strategic planning in businesses (Mintzberg, 1985)—crafting may also involve intuition, incremental choices, and action driven by internal processes rather than toward external outcomes (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Finally, the role of external agents such as counselors and mentors can be conceptualized as that of master constructors or craftspeople facilitating the satisfying and effective practice of the work of assembling the career.

4.3. Seasons metaphor: Career as cycle

Since before Shakespeare posited the “seven ages of man,” theorists have conceptualized human life and careers in terms of a cycle and individuals have felt their energies wax and wane at different stages in their careers. Much of the imagery involved is akin to the passing of the seasons. In mainstream career studies this is

represented in “age/stage” theories such as those of Levinson et al. (1978) and of Super (1957, 1990) which describe careers in terms of sequential age-related phases such as “exploration,” “direction,” “mid-life transition,” “maintenance,” etc. Levinson et al.’s (1978) exposition of career-relevant human development is explicitly entitled *The Seasons of a Man’s Life*. Sheehy (1995) popularizes the same view in her notion of “passages.” Careers texts recognize that special problems attend different stages such as early-career, mid-career, and late-career (e.g., Greenhaus et al., 2000). The cycle metaphor—probably implicit in much day-to-day thinking about people’s roles at work and in society—may generate narrow and unfair stereotypes, particularly of older members of the workforce in careers environments that value dynamism and change (Paul & Townsend, 1993).

There has also been, in recent years, increasing recognition of the contribution of family roles in creating cycles, and the interaction and integration of career cycles with family cycles. There is a need to differentiate between the characteristic cycles—insofar as generalization is possible—of men and of women (Gallos, 1989). The problem of the dual-career couple can be conceptualized as one of recognizing and balancing complementary career cycles (Sekaran & Hall, 1989). Other literatures, such as those concerning work-role transitions (Nicholson, 1984) and ‘spiraling’ processes in career development (Boyatzis & Kolb, 2000) focus on more micro-level cycles, which are recursive rather than cumulative. More flexible and functional thinking about cycles in careers is called for.

4.4. *Matching metaphor: Career as fit*

This is an important career metaphor, demonstrated by the popular phrase, “you can’t put a square peg in a round hole.” To many, the key issue in career studies is that of “work adjustment” (Dawis & Loftquist, 1984), or “person-environment correspondence” (Dawis, 2002). Since Parsons’s (1909) first text of career guidance, the use and matching of information about people and about the work environment has been the “traditional cornerstone of career theory” (Betz, Fitzgerald, & Hill, 1989), as well as a key concern of those charged with responsibilities for vocational counseling and personnel selection. The metaphor of “fit” therefore has direct outcomes in career practice, and is clearly expressed in the underlying mental models and technologies that are the stock-in-trade of many career counselors. For example, the “vocational personality” theory and associated assessment devices of Holland (1997) are based on an impressive program of research on both individual make-up (“pegs”), and corresponding characteristics of occupations (“holes”). Career protagonists are also encouraged to identify with the “fit” metaphor, to assess themselves and environmental opportunities, and to find a close-fitting opportunity, usually an occupation. The Net is now rife with self-assessment devices enabling one to find one’s fit (Crispin & Mehler, 1998).

The metaphor of matching raises conceptual and practical issues. What characteristics of people and situations really matter, and how are they best conceptualized? How measurable are individuals and environmental opportunities and characteristics, and how accurate are assessments? Is fit achieved by matching people to posi-

tions or positions to people? Most crucially, does the fit metaphor induce static thinking about dynamic processes? The imagery of pegs and holes has a stolid character, and socializing institutions such as families, schools, trade, unions, and professional associations often emphasize permanence of fit. In contrast, Hall's (1976, 1996) concept of the shape-changing 'protean career' can be viewed as a means of adjusting fit to suit changing circumstance. In times of rapid external change the fit metaphor of careers may face increasing strain.

4.5. *Path metaphor: Career as journey*

This, the most common of all career metaphors, runs through many forms of career discourse, including the writings of career theorists and the day-to-day language through which people describe their careers (Inkson, 2002). The journey metaphor conceptualizes the career as *movement*, which may take place geographically, between jobs, between occupations, or between organizations. The journey metaphor is attractive because of its ability to incorporate two key underlying facets of career: *movement between places*, and *time*. The problem with the metaphor is the generic nature of the term "journey." The range of characteristics which a journey can have appears almost infinite. The journey may or may not have a destination. The route may be fixed by external agencies such as professional associations and employers, or improvised by the traveler. The direction may be upwards, downwards, forwards, backwards, sideways, or idiosyncratic. The speed may be fast, slow, or varied.

Theories concerning occupational careers (Roe, 1956) organizational careers (Schein, 1978), and typologies of career into various forms of movement such as "linear" and "spiral" (Driver, 1984), conceptualize careers in terms of movement along particular paths. They thereby adopt the journey metaphor. The vertical journeys implied by "career ladder," "career plateau," and "getting to the top" embody a functional model of career travel towards an objectively defined destination. Alternative career models stress that another goal for a journey is to enjoy the experience (Mirvis & Hall, 1994). Arthur and Rousseau's (1996) concept of "boundaryless careers" suggests that in a progressively less structured economic environment, boundaries restricting career journeys are becoming more permeable. As more open-ended career trajectories are apparent, the relatively purposive career "journey" is perhaps evolving into the more open-ended notion of career "travel."

Career journeys can be described from two perspectives: the behavior of the traveler (micro-behavior), and the overall route, form, and terrain of the journey traveled (macro-structure). Traditionally, career development specialists and counselors have focused on behavior and business school researchers on form. A rapprochement or integrated theory of career journeys is called for.

4.6. *Network metaphor: Career as encounters and relationships*

The embeddedness of the career within a series of overlapping social systems has recently been stressed by Patton and McMahon (1999). As we follow our careers, its various episodes are *social* and *political*. They are social in the sense that they involve

constant encounter with others, and often the development of longer-term relationships essential to the continuation and direction of the career. They are political in the sense that we attempt to utilize these relationships in pursuit of personal career advantage (not necessarily defined through the conventional parameters of money, status and success). If the career is a journey, then, it is a social rather than a solo journey. As indicated earlier, our single-minded pursuit of the career as an individual phenomenon should not blind us to its social connectedness. Equally challengingly, the conventional Western view that careers are necessarily individualized may be questioned, and cross-cultural images of collective, for example family-based, career behavior are presented (Granrose & Chua, 1996) from which much may be learned.

Through encounters and the development of relationships we integrate ourselves into wider systems and structures, which often shape and are shaped by the career itself. For example, even in an age of “equal employment opportunity,” getting a job appears to depend crucially in having contacts in the right places (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; Granovetter, 1974). The most valuable career networks involve developing “social capital” through a range of “weak ties” to overarching organizational, occupational, industry, and community networks (Raider & Burt, 1996). Networking becomes a way of life, a key skill. Moreover, as forces of power and domination of institutions are reflected into personal career environments, the micro-skills of self-promotion, organizational politics, impression management, reputation-building, and contact-hunting may be critical—they have certainly become a focus of the career self-help movement (e.g., Bolles, 2002; Keys & Case, 1990; Moses, 1998)—creating an additional image of the career as a political campaign.

4.7. Theater metaphor: Career as role

The social metaphor for careers can be developed further through consideration of the mediation of vocational behavior through social roles. The theater has been effectively used as a metaphor for the organization, for it lends itself to the use of such devices as theme, plot, costume, props, oratory, and symbolism so evident in organizational life (Mangham & Overington, 1987). Careers can be construed as performances, and career self-management as a performing art, drawing on many of the devices listed above. Career action is role behavior. The evolving work-role is enacted in response to role expectations of such people as employers, supervisors, co-workers, and professional associations, who define their expectations through job descriptions and formal and informal messages (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoeck, & Rosenthal, 1964). External and internal expectations are played out over time in a series of ‘psychological contracts,’ which are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated (Rousseau, 1995; Herriot & Pemberton, 1996). Role theory helps us to understand issues such as role overload and role conflict, which lead to periodic career crises.

Role behavior, extended over time, builds itself into career ‘scripts’ (Gioia & Poole, 1984) which individuals consciously or unconsciously play out in their ongoing demeanor. Examples are “committed company servant,” “young man in a hurry,” and “part of the union.” In addition, the broadening definition of ‘career’ and the recognition of the interaction of work and non-work draws attention to other roles, such

as those of home-maker, leisurite, student, and citizen (Super, 1957; Fletcher & Bailyn, 1996), which must be played simultaneously or integrated with work roles. Here, too, roles may evolve into strong overarching scripts: “caring parent,” “pillar of the Church,” etc. Thus, the career takes on the character of a lifelong theatrical performance, with multiple writers, directors and cues, and complex characterization.

4.8. Economic metaphor: Career as resource

Is your career a resource? If so, whose? This metaphor focuses on the potential of the career, in combination with other resources, to create wealth. A traditional managerial view is that labor is a cost: if so, then careers represent long-term overhead costs rather than short-term transactional costs. This kind of thinking has led to the late 20th century phenomenon of restructuring and downsizing, resulting in the fracturing of many careers (Heckscher, 1995).

More ‘advanced’ thinking now tells us that labor is not a cost but an asset. In recent years strategic management has emphasized the “resource-based view of the firm” (Barney, 1991). “Personnel management” has been replaced by “human resource management,” and it has become commonplace for managers to speak of “our people” as “our most important asset.” The metaphor becomes explicit in the new emphasis on “knowledge management” and the recognition that careers are “repositories of knowledge” (Bird, 1994). Moreover, it is not just day-to-day work that constitutes the resource, it is the whole career: the normative “commitment” model of management (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills, & Walton, 1985) emphasizes that organizations require a solid core, culture, and set of competencies based on capturing the commitment of people for long periods of their working life, i.e., through their careers. This is the basis for encouraging organizational careers and for subordinating careers to organizational designs.

Metaphor may steal your career from you! The notion of “human resource management” potentially expropriates and transforms careers for organizational purposes, reduces people to malleable inputs to productive processes, and entrusts career development to the superior knowledge of the company. Practices such as corporate career workshops, assessment centers, training, development and mentorship programs, and performance appraisal assist companies to manage their employees’ careers. They also provide opportunities for individual employees to use such activities proactively for their career development. But they leave open the question of career ownership as between individual and organization. Alternative models stress career self-management, individuals’ ownership of their own careers, and the personal cultivation of one’s own resource or ‘career capital’ (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). Awareness of the human resource metaphor and its implications is of benefit to career protagonists and managers alike.

4.9. Narrative metaphor: Career as story

Much of our imagery of careers is derived from the stories people tell, and the consolidation of these stories into the wisdom or the mythology of society. The story

metaphor considers the discourse of careers, by career protagonists, by educators, employers and managers, by counselors, by biographers and autobiographers, and by other socializing institutions.

Career stories abound. We narrate them in our heads, we tell them to our families and friends, we embellish them for effect in bar-room boasting, and we organize them neatly into resumes. Our accounts are often incomplete, shifting, and contradictory, yet they tell us much about the complex nature of careers (Cochran, 1998; Marshall, 2000). Stories invest events with meaning, granting us the psychological comfort of “retrospective sensemaking” (Weick, 1996). The act of telling our career story helps us to see new patterns. But how reliable are our accounts and interpretations? It may be that careers are myths, “fictions about the past to help us feel good about the future. . . talismans offering protection against the proximity of gaping uncertainties” (Nicholson & West, 1988, p. 94).

Beyond this, career stories represent, and assemble themselves into, career archetypes. For example, Osland (1995) finds, in expatriate vocational behavior, patterns of individual journeying, heroism, and return similar to the recurrent patterns in the narratives of ancient mythology (Campbell, 1968). More prosaically, the mid-twentieth century archetype of secure, status-driven “organization man” (Whyte, 1956) and its supporting rhetoric (Gowler & Legge, 1989) is, in a less stable economic environment being replaced by archetypes of “boundaryless” and “protean” careers for both men and women (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2002) and a vogue, in a market economy, for individuals to progress their careers by marketing themselves as ‘brands’ (Andrusia & Haskins, 2000). Meantime, the media continue to surround career protagonists with stories and images of celebrities, lottery winners and ‘pop-stars’ who find rapid and instant career success. In the somewhat fantastic world of career stories, myths, and archetypes, we need to develop a proper understanding of the processes involved, and a means to sort fact from fiction.

5. Conclusion: Integrating career studies

The broad field of career studies has internal differences of emphasis which make it difficult for students to gain an integrated understanding. By and large, the great literatures pertaining to careers, from the sociology of occupation and organization, from developmental and life-span psychology, from psychometric measurement and vocational placement, from guidance and counseling, and from organization studies and human resource management are not closely tied. The divergences may be understood by considering the underlying metaphors involved. For example, there is a major disjunction between the view of careers espoused by the counseling movement and that of the business schools. Consider, for example, these contrasting definitions of career development:

Career development is. . . a lifelong process of getting ready to choose, choosing, and continuing to make choices from among the many occupations available in our society (Brown & Brooks, 1990, p. xvii).

Career development is an ongoing formalized effort by an organization that focuses on developing and enriching the organization's human resources in the light of both the employees' and the organization's needs (Byars & Rue, 2000, p. 248).

The first quotation represents, perhaps, a combination of the construction, journey, and matching metaphors. It locates the career as the property of the individual, and implicitly defines the context as a set of occupations. It does not recognize the connection of careers with the organizations in which careers are usually developed. The second quotation represents the full-blown resource metaphor, but also pays some attention to the role metaphor. Other stakeholders additional to the individual are recognized, mutuality of individual/employer interests is assumed, and the construction of, and control over, the career is ceded to the employing organization. Each view has much to offer the other. But, as Collin (1998) has noted, the occupational development and choice movement in which career counselors are trained, and the organizational careers approach favored in the business schools by and large fail to recognize each other. More generally, approaches and models proliferate, sometimes with insufficient regard for each other.

These differences may be manifest in the underlying metaphors, images, and stereotypes, employed, both consciously and unconsciously, by the different groups. As shown in the case of Darren, the sociologist may see the career protagonist as a prisoner unable to escape from a cage of structural and institutional constraints such as class and gender barriers. The developmental psychologist may see her as a growing adult experiencing natural processes of development. The differential psychologist may conceptualize her as a unique but measurable 'peg' for which the right 'hole' must be found. The company manager may consider her a human resource to be harnessed to, and developed for, higher organizational purposes. These experts are like the mythical blind men, attempting to understand what an elephant is like by feeling different parts. Each expert experiences an important part of the whole picture. Each has something of real worth to say to the others. But each may become over-preoccupied with that specific view. Our metaphors focus our attention, but they also inhibit the breadth of our vision. As long as we stay within our disciplinary bases and familiar images, we will have only a one-eyed view of the complex, multifaceted nature of careers. Alternative metaphors may provide fresh lenses enabling us to see more of their wonderful complexity. For example, the "career development" programs of education and psychology faculty, (e.g., Brown & Associates, 2002) and the "career management" of business faculty (e.g., Greenhaus et al., 2000) might be united in "career studies."

In summary, this paper has argued that career studies is informed by many powerful and important metaphors. Careers may therefore be better understood, and theories better integrated, if we first learn to make explicit and to understand a *range* of the metaphors on which thinking—academic, practitioner, and popular—is based. This range of metaphors may enable us to examine career phenomena through contrasting lenses, triangulate the different views, and hopefully arrive at a synthesis which recognizes the validity of each viewpoint and its integration with others.

Metaphor is also an attractive means of engaging the attention of other groups—for example students, counselors and of course career protagonists themselves—and stimulating their thinking and creativity. The author is endeavoring to prepare a textbook of career studies based on the identification and unpacking of the key metaphors introduced in this paper (Inkson, in preparation). Such an endeavor cannot do justice to the depth of theory which career scholars and practitioners need to acquire, but it may serve the purpose, as supplementary reading, of providing a wider range of thinking on careers than is available in most sources, and the potential to move towards an integrated view. Encouraging all groups to extend their vision of careers, and perhaps to seek integration, by considering and developing alternative images of career seems well worth trying.

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