

# CAREER CONSTRUCTION COUNSELING: A PRÉCIS

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**"Career is a story that people tell about the projects that occupy them."**  
M. L. Savickas (2013, p. 653)

Career construction theory and practice (Savickas, 2013) conceives of people as storytellers and life-careers as stories told. Career construction counseling uses narrative methods because it is the life story that connects experiences through time, fosters unity and intentionality, and shapes identity with regard to who one is and who one is becoming in work and other life roles (Savickas, 2011). Career construction implements life design as a new paradigm for career theory and intervention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Savickas, 2012; Savickas et al., 2009). Life design augments the vocational guidance (Holland, 1997; Parsons, 1909) and career development (Super, 1990) paradigms of 20<sup>th</sup>-century career science and practice. It does so by emphasizing human diversity, uniqueness, and purposiveness in work and career to make a life of personal meaning and social consequence (Savickas et al., 2009). Career construction finds its conceptual elaboration in a theory of vocational behavior (Savickas, 2002, 2013) and its practical implementation in a system of career counseling (Savickas, 2011, 2015).

## Career Construction Theory

With social constructionism as its base, career construction theory combines the psychologies of occupations (Holland, 1997), careers (Super, 1990), and life design (Savickas et al., 2009). In so doing, it incorporates and builds upon their respective traditions of person-environment fit emphasizing traits, lifespan development emphasizing developmental tasks, and narrative emphasizing life themes to comprehend career as story. This permits viewing individuals as, respectively, social actors who display dispositions that fit corresponding types of work environments, motivated agents who develop readiness to fit work into life, and autobiographical authors who reflexively form themselves and careers through self defining narratives (Savickas, 2011, 2013). Career construction theory translates to practice in the form of a counseling model and methods for helping people construct their careers.

## Career Construction Counseling

Career construction counseling entails an interpersonal process of helping people author career stories that connect their self-concepts to work roles, fit work into life, and make meaning through narratives about self and work. Using the narrative paradigm, career construction counseling begins with a Career Construction Interview (CCI; Savickas, 2011). The CCI contains a sequence of questions designed to prompt telling

of the life story in a sequence of small, micro-stories. From the telling of the life story, client and counselor co-construct a life portrait that entails an autobiographical narrative about the client's central life theme. Constructing a life portrait then relates the life theme to a career problem currently faced. Counselor and client use the life portrait to prompt the client to take action toward enacting self in a life-career. The three career construction counseling processes of the CCI, life portraiture, and action promote counseling goals of increased narratability, adaptability, and intentionality. Narratability means the capacity to coherently tell one's own life story. Adaptability means the capacity to make changes in self and situation. Intentionality means the capacity to purposefully shape a personal life-career story that imposes meaning on vocational behavior..

**Career construction interview.** As seen in Table 1, the CCI comprises six questions about goals, self, stage, script, solution, and perspective (Savickas, 2011, 2013, 2015).

Table 1. *Career Construction Interview Content.*

CAREER CONSTRUCTION INTERVIEW		
QUESTION	PURPOSE	PART
1. COUNSELING GOALS	set the SCENE	ACT
2. ROLE MODELS	portray the SELF	ACTOR
3. MAGAZINES/SHOWS WEB SITES	indicate work STAGE	AGENT
4. BOOK/MOVIE	provides a SCRIPT	AUTHOR
5. SAYING/MOTTO	offers SOLUTION	ADVICE
6. EARLY MEMORIES	state the PERSPECTIVE	ARC

1. **Goals.** Setting the scene for the current act in the client's life-career story, the CCI begins with the question "How can I be useful to you as you construct your career?" Answers to this question indicate the client's counseling goals and current problem and solution they already have in mind for it.
2. **Self.** To indicate the reputation of the client as lead actor in their own story, the second question asks "Who did you admire when you were growing up? Tell me about her or him." As clients describe three role models they describe themselves in terms of who they are and wish to become, their central life goal, and solutions to their main life problem.
3. **Stage.** The third question asks "What are your favorite magazines, TV shows, or web sites? What do you like about them?" Manifest interests reflected in these vicarious environments indicate potential educational and occupational settings where the client as an agent, or manager of their own career story wants to enact their self-concept.
4. **Script.** Linking self as actor to setting as agent, the fourth question asks: "What is your current favorite book or movie? Tell me the story." The story is chosen because it provides perspective on the current problem and contains a plot resembling the

client's own principal problem, preoccupation, or pain. The script connects the client's self-concept and preferred work environments into a life plan that the client can author.

5. **Solution.** To elicit self-advice, the fifth question asks: "Tell me your favorite saying or motto." The answer indicates the best inner wisdom and guidance the client has for dealing with life's problems.
6. **Perspective.** Revealing the client's perspective on the current problem and central preoccupation, the final question asks: "What are your earliest recollections? I am interested in hearing three stories about things you recall happening to you when you were three to six years old, or as early as you can remember." The counselor prompts the client to tell three early childhood memories that the person recalls in the present moment because they place the current transition problem in the context of central life themes and plots that structure the character arc of the person's life.

As the client relates self-defining responses to the CCI questions, the counselor listens closely, asks follow-up questions, and makes reflective statements to clarify meaning. Counselor and client then use the client's responses to all six CCI questions to co-construct a life-career portrait.

**Life-career portrait.** Using the answers to the CCI shapes a larger narrative, or portrait, that tells the career story with greater coherence, continuity, and clarity. Constructing a life-career portrait aims to promote understanding of the client's prevailing problem (arc), chosen solution (actor), preferred stage (agent), workable script (author), and action plan (advice). In turn, re-constructing clients' life stories aims to increase narrative identity, or who clients are as the lead characters in their own life-career stories, where in the world of work they would most like to be who they are, and what they believe it will take to connect themselves to possible work settings. Reflecting on the career story leads to setting goals and taking action for the next episode of the life-career.

**Action.** Having shaped the themes and patterns culled from the CCI micro-stories into a macro-narrative about the core problem or preoccupation, motives, goals, adaptive strategies, and self-view, attention turns to action. This involves constructing a formula for success and making a realistic plan to put the story into action. This plan involves reflecting on, telling, and performing the story. Reflecting on the career story leads to setting goals for the next chapter of the life-career. Subsequently, counselors encourage clients to tell their stories to valued audiences outside of the counseling context in their most cherished social relationships. Telling and talking about the career story and the conclusions drawn from the counseling process with valued audiences promotes making it more real and clear and feeling more confident in living it. Valued audiences typically include family members, friends, mentors, coaches, and teachers. Performing the story by identifying specific action to take increases exploration, commitment, and goal attainment.

## CONCLUSION

Career construction counseling helps individuals tell, hear, and enact their own life-career stories in terms of who they are, where in the world of work they would like to be, and what they think it will take to connect themselves to occupations they may like. It

involves reflexive autobiographical reasoning and goal-setting activities to promote successful career planning and action. Exploring individuals' personal career realities using narrative methods deepens the personal meaning of work and career. The theory and practice of career construction offers a comprehensive approach to understanding and assisting people to shape their life-career stories.

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