

enriching careers and lives: introducing a positive, holistic, and narrative career counseling method that bridges theory and practice

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CareerCycles (CC) career counseling framework and method of practice integrates and builds on aspects of positive psychology. Through its holistic and narrative approach, the CC method seeks to collaboratively identify and understand clients' career and life stories. It focuses on their strengths, desires, preferences, assets, future possibilities, and the influence others have had on their choices.



The CareerCycles (CC) method of practice that we describe in this article (see Figure 1) uses career narratives as its point of departure. This constructivist model focuses on language, discourse, and theme development (Cohen & Mallon, 2001) with a central task of creating career stories that individuals narrate with the guidance and encouragement of counselors. By creating their own personal career narratives, clients empower themselves to make career transitions, focus on exploring new career possibilities, and, at the same time, clarify their career and life domains. A constructivist approach to careers also encourages clients to construct meaning, knowledge, and experience about their lives and work (Bujold, 2004; Young & Collin, 2004).

We describe a unique and holistic career counseling method of practice that builds on current theoretical approaches such as constructivism (Peavy, 1995) and the narrative or storied approach (Brott, 2001; Cochran, 1997) while focusing on positive psychology (Fredrickson, 2009; Seligman, 2002) and happenstance (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). First, the CC method's unique emphasis on positive psychology is based on supporting ways clients can attract, rather than seek, career and life enrichment possibilities. Second, it frames these possibilities as positive statements of what clients desire, rather than focusing on barriers and career obstacles. In using positivism, the CC method examines clients' life spans and moves away from objectivity and job matching toward self-defining stories that reflect the fulfillment of developmental tasks and occupational transitions (Brott, 2001; Savickas, 2006). According to Bloch (2005), stories that clients construct may initially be experienced



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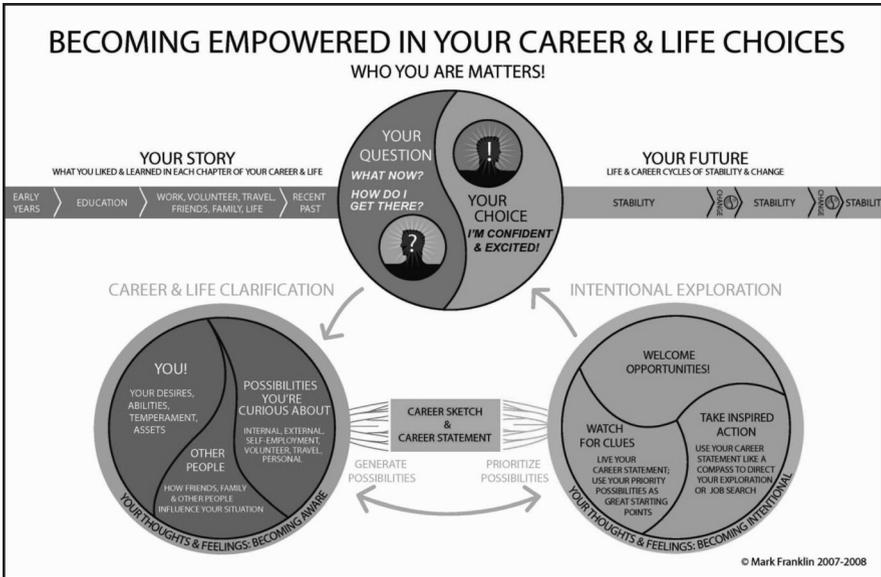


FIGURE 1

The Constructivist Model of the CareerCycles Framework and Method of Practice

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as illogical, having no clear relationships between actions and reactions . . . that is why many people seem to keep the real stories of their careers secret. They keep to themselves the strange links between events, links they describe as “just luck” or coincidence. In truth, it is the secret career stories that reveal the reality. (p. 198)

The CC method is different from traditional methods in four ways. First, it uses a well-defined, integrated, and tested method of practice, whose details will be described throughout this article. Second, its main processes and, in particular, its emphasis on the context of contemporary careers foster a holistic way of thinking about life-changing careers that is not commonly found in today’s counseling practices. Third, the CC method consists of two main experiential processes—Career and Life Clarification and Intentional Exploration—and their interactive practice tools: Career Sketch, Career Statement, and Possibility and Exploration Plan. These self-reflective tools are created as clients move through the CC framework and enable them to gather, organize, and understand their strengths, desires, preferences, and assets. In addition, these tools help clients identify the influences that others have had on their career and life choices. Thus, this difference stems from the clarification and exploration processes that shift away from placing the sole emphasis on job search and the accompanying negative affects related to career obstacles and goal anxiety that accompany it. Instead, the CC method focuses on developing a positive, holistic mind-set that encourages greater self-awareness, receptivity, and observation of both the internal and external environments. This integration of a wide variety of clues and acceptance of satisfying opportunities leads to the difference, namely, the integration

of positive psychology. Although many career counselors continue to use an intuitive approach, drawing on their personal learning and experience, the CC method attempts to bridge theory and practice by integrating positive psychology and Super's (1980) career rainbow into a comprehensive and well-documented method of practice while remaining aligned with the *Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners* (National Steering Committee for Career Development Guidelines and Standards, 2004). The CC method has been used by 10 practitioners with more than 2,000 clients who range from postsecondary students to adults in their 50s and 60s and who come from dozens of countries of origin. It is a method guided and informed by real practice.

THE CC METHOD AND THE CONTEMPORARY CAREER CONTEXT

To understand the CC method, it is important to briefly describe the contemporary career context (Amundson, 2003). Today's careers are moving away from traditional, hierarchical trajectories and becoming more irregular and "boundaryless" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 3). In many instances, individuals can more proactively manage much of their careers on their own (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). More focus exists on the specific interplay of work and family and of work and self, which, if viewed within the kaleidoscope metaphor, are dynamic and constantly in motion. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005, 2006) proposed that as workers shift the patterns of their careers by rotating different aspects of their lives to arrange their families and professional roles and relationships in new ways, control of their careers becomes less dependent on their employers and more of a shared responsibility between employees and employers.

The new career environment places much of the decision-making power with employees, but, at the same time, it expects employees to be prepared for sudden and unexpected changes, such as layoffs or organizational restructuring that have become permanent characteristics of the knowledge economy. Thus, individuals shaping their careers must continually adjust to these changes, navigate boundaryless career environments, and make ongoing professional choices (Amundson, 2003). The CC method builds on and incorporates this holistic notion of career, in which boundaries between work and nonwork, paid and unpaid work, and one organization and another become much more permeable. This approach resembles some of Super's (1980) early writing, especially his life-span or life-space approach and the life-career rainbow, which capture the idea that individuals play different career and noncareer roles throughout their lives and that these roles can be carried out independently or simultaneously. The CC method focuses on this holistic perspective by defining a *career* as the full expression of an individual's sense of self that may expand as the individual goes through natural cycles of stability and change. By discussing the notion of career in this way, clients realize early in the process that they possess the power to make choices that can be applied to their whole lives and not just to their jobs and occupations.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND THE CC METHOD

Positive psychology is the scientific study of positive experiences, positive individual traits, human flourishing, and the institutions that facilitate their development (Seligman, 2002). As a field concerned with well-being and optimal functioning, positive

psychology aims to broaden the focus of clinical psychology beyond suffering and its direct alleviation (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Whereas this study of human happiness has recently enjoyed great popularity, researchers have given little attention to developing positive psychology as an approach in the daily work of career counselors (see the exception, Harris, Thoresen, & Lopez, 2007). The CC method is a unique example of a positive psychology approach because of its strong emphasis on empowering clients and focusing their understanding on their strengths and assets. Furthermore, the CC method aims to reframe career obstacles and negative experiences as opportunities and learning experiences that could be used in finding more positive career choices. For example, the CC's Intentional Exploration process does not place emphasis on career goals and obstacles, which is so prevalent in many other career counseling methods, because doing so can unintentionally trigger the memory of negative experiences and make setting goals an anxiety-producing experience. Instead, the CC method draws on positive psychology that encourages clients and counselors to focus on valued career and life experiences: in the past, well-being, contentment, and satisfaction; for the future, hope and optimism; and in the present, flow and happiness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The CC method places strong emphasis on generating positive affect through storytelling, identifying strengths, recalling moments of feeling proud, and drawing on "perceived accomplishments" (Pomerantz, Saxon, & Oishi, 2000, p. 619) in a step-by-step process. These steps help clients remember and recount experiences of subjective career success (Mirvis & Hall, 1996). This focus is in stark contrast to the more commonly examined and tangible indicators of individuals' career situations, such as pay increases, promotions, and similar career goals (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005).

The two linked processes of the CC method (i.e., Career and Life Clarification and Intentional Exploration) and, in particular, the guided narrative intervention encompassing the whole process provide clients and counselors with moments when desires, strengths, and career possibilities suddenly emerge. This emergent quality of the CC method means that clients discover that the answers to their career questions do not depend on the results of interest assessments or personality inventories that could give them the illusion that the answers exist outside of themselves. Rather, in the CC method, clients' strengths, desires, and career possibilities emerge from the collaborative process itself, reinforcing a healthier career self-management mind-set.

The CC method draws on elements of cognitive therapy to help clients identify and change dysfunctional thinking and emotional responses (Freeman & DeWolf, 2000) and become more receptive to new ideas and changes in their careers and life pathways. This part of the process, called *Your Thoughts and Feelings: Becoming Intentional*, allows counselors to work with clients to guide change in their negative thoughts and feelings. By writing positively worded Career Statements, clients are encouraged to watch for clues pointing in new career directions that may surface in their statements.

By incorporating Super's (1980) notion of exploration and planning into CC's Intentional Exploration, clients gain greater career adaptability; that is, they adopt more forward-looking, proactive career behaviors aimed at coping with external and internal demands (Savickas, 1997; Super & Knasel, 1981). In addition, by engaging in this career exploration exercise, they learn how they can encounter new career opportunities that are a better fit and offer greater career satisfaction (Zikic & Klehe, 2006).

CC METHOD OF PRACTICE

The overall framework of the CC method is illustrated in Figure 1, which graphically depicts its two principal processes (i.e., Career and Life Clarification and Intentional Exploration). The CC method also incorporates working tools, client handouts, 40 documented interventions (at the time of writing) within those two processes, and a training program.

Career and Life Clarification

The CC method begins with the drafting of a key career question (e.g., “What should I do next in my career?” or “How can I be more effective in exploring my options?”) on which clients and counselors collaborate. Identifying their key career questions inspires clients and guides the overall career counseling engagement. Clients and counselors frequently return to their key career questions as a way to ensure that discussions are moving in a direction that best fits clients’ self-defined needs. The graphic representation, including the symbol for yin and yang (see Figure 1), acts as a map and, in part, helps to relieve much of clients’ initial anxiety regarding entering into unknown experiences. Thus, a unique part of this approach is in encouraging clients to feel a certain amount of relief and comfort as they realize that this method of practice can help them connect the dots and create their career stories, which do not begin with impersonal assessments and traditional career services such as job search assistance or résumé critiques. Rather, the CC method embraces this positive, holistic approach so that clients feel welcome and optimistic regarding working with counselors to generate answers to their key career questions and initial concerns.

The segmented time line depicted below *Your Story* in Figure 1 suggests viewing clients’ lives as narrative chapters. After Early Years and Education, the third segment of the time line encapsulates the multiple life experiences that can include career pursuits, previous employment opportunities, volunteer, travel experience, parenting, and other aspects of life. This segment fits with Super’s (1980) life-span, life-space approach, placing emphasis on the whole life perspective. The final segment is Recent Past, which is the current or most recent period of employment or unemployment. Clients are tasked with drafting their annotated time lines, showing years, ages, likes and dislikes, and lessons learned in each chapter of their lives. In this way, clients can enact their careers through the storytelling process (Cohen & Mallon, 2001) and revisit the past and feelings regarding using a new, more supportive framework.

The Career and Life Clarification process stems from *Your Story*. This narrative intervention is developed independently of Brott’s (2001) “storied approach,” though using elements of Brott’s “co-construction” and “deconstruction” (p. 306) tasks. Counselors support clients in narrating their career and life stories, using clients’ annotated time lines as a guide and visual aid to identify, gather, and organize relevant information. The next step in this process is to build the Career Sketch (Figure 2), which is a simple, interactive chart used to gather and organize important information. Clients’ relevant information relates to Bridges (1998) D.A.T.A. (desires, abilities, temperament, and assets), which is expanded in the CC method to include desires, strengths, preferences, assets (education, credentials, demonstrated interests, other skills, etc.), influences of other people, possibilities about which clients are curi-

YOU!		OTHER PEOPLE And Your Life Roles	POSSIBILITIES YOU'RE CURIOUS ABOUT
<p>DESIRE: What You Want & What's Important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reasonable workload Time for family, more than now Doing good giving back I want to nurture, support other people (the way Mrs. Kennedy supported me in kindergarten) Work with people, teams Stability: Money and lifestyle... want to be able to give to people in my life <p>PREFERENCES: Your Personality & Preferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People person Bleeding heart Tremendous sense of responsibility; reliable Experiential learner Organized Fair; Honest and clear Patient 	<p>STRENGTHS: Skills & Knowledge You Want to Use. (D)=develop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> teach, coach mentor interpersonal / verbal communication; developing relationships, trust coaching and managing others organizing coordinating thinking / planning, strategic, big picture Good listener, problem solver, Conflict resolution Client / customer service <p>ASSETS: Education, Demonstrated Interests, Additional Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> advertising, a/c management 6+ years experience in advertising art and culture: theatre, museums some university coursework cosmetician – loved it wedding planning College Diploma in Advertising Director of student advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> husband: supportive, wants me to be happy, make some money. Daughter: only young once Mom: teacher 	<p>INTERNAL to your organization</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> recruiting <p>EXTERNAL with an employer</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> post secondary, student services teacher: elementary or high school, maybe media studies moms/kids centre, daycare client side: sales, e.g. L'Oreal fundraising, event coordinator; corporate sponsorship for e.g. orchestra, ballet, venue ad agency with a focus on non profit communications, public relations <p>SELF-EMPLOYMENT</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> mom website <p>VOLUNTEER / SERVICE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <p>LIFELONG LEARNING / EDUCATION</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <p>TRAVEL</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <p>LEISURE, FAMILY & FRIENDS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">
<p>YOUR THOUGHTS & FEELINGS: burnt out, hopeful</p>			

FIGURE 2
Career Sketch

Note. This is used to gather and organize a client's data from his or her story.

ous, and clients' named thoughts and feelings. In the development of this narrative, clients reexperience their career stories as holistic and positive, whereas they may previously have experienced these stories as confusing and chaotic (Bloch, 2005). Drawing from narrative therapy, counselors work with clients to undo the negative effects of problem-saturated experiences and focus clients on reauthoring more positive futures (White, 2007).

A key outcome of this process is the creation of the Career Statement, which is a brief, positively worded crystallization of clients' emerging self-awareness of their career possibilities and a distillation of the Career Sketch. Clients typically report feelings of satisfaction when writing and reading aloud their Career Statements. For many, it is perhaps the first time that they are articulating what is truly important to them, what they authentically want to do, who they really are, and the possibilities about which they are most curious and want to explore. Their Career Statements capture their meaning-making process and focus on subjective career experiences that encourage clients to move forward in the process (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006). Naming and using one's strengths and desires is clearly an area of synergy between the CC approach and positive psychology (Côté, Saks, & Zikic, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). A sample career statement is provided in the Appendix.

Intentional Exploration

Clients' Career Statements provide a starting point for the Intentional Exploration process. To introduce clients to Intentional Exploration, counselors foster clients'

confidence by coaching them to slowly start imagining what it would be like to live their Career Statements. It is important that counselors feel excited for clients and imagine how clients would feel living their Career Statements, sharing aloud this excitement and confidence. This cognitive and affective platform, modeled by counselors, is an explicit part of the Intentional Exploration process (Figure 1). It is an ideal moment to share with clients the importance of generating positive thoughts and how these will generate positive actions and results (Fredrickson, 2009). Once this is done, counselors can help clients write their tailored positive thoughts that can be used throughout their career explorations.

With its emphasis on positive affect and clients' desires, counselors enact the Intentional Exploration process by first asking clients to Watch for Clues, suggesting that clients' positive mind-set will shift their focus onto evidence that supports their desires. This approach is different from focusing on the negative clues one often notices when focusing on obstacles, hearing bad news in the media, or experiencing career or goal anxieties. Positive clues that clients notice make it easier to Take Inspired Action, which is the second step in this process. The third step, Welcome Opportunities, suggests that clients remain open to both planned and unplanned opportunities. Introducing clients to the notion that they can allow opportunities to appear contributes to their positive mind-set and builds their confidence that attracting satisfying opportunities may be easier than they initially believed. For example, one client noticed clues that a new position was being developed within her organization; it was ideally suited to her, and she was offered the position.

Thus, the focus is taken away from simply taking action to thinking about one's career, reframing essential career desires, and being open to new opportunities. Counselors using the CC method will view an increased likelihood of clients taking advantage of planned happenstance and generating more "beneficial unplanned events" (Krumboltz, 2009, p. 135) and exhibiting career responsiveness (Neault, 2000) to transform unplanned events into career opportunities.

To keep track of clients' Intentional Explorations, counselors work with clients to create their Possibility and Exploration Plans (Figure 3), which clients can take and use for the next stages in their career journeys. This working document gathers and organizes in one place clients' career exploration information. Each career and life

My positive mindset question or statement:			
PRIORITY POSSIBILITIES I'M CURIOUS ABOUT	WATCH FOR CLUES: WHY I THINK I'D LIKE IT / HOW IT FITS WITH MY "CAREER STATEMENT"	TAKE INSPIRED ACTION: TO FIND OUT MORE: 1. ON MY OWN, E.G. INTERNET RESEARCH 2. WITH OTHER PEOPLE, E.G. FIELD RESEARCH	WHAT I NEED TO DO TO MAKE IT HAPPEN E.G. SKILL, DEGREE, EXPERIENCE...
<i>E.g. Pharmacist</i>	<i>Internal clue: what I really want is responsibility for patient External clue: first day at work as pharmacy tech I realized I wanted to be a pharmacist Desires: helping people, more authority Strengths: lead, interpersonal Preferences: Guardian, quiet, like 1-1 Assets: PT experience, interest in chemistry, languages</i>	<i>Research admission criteria to 3 Ontario universities Field Research with Lucy's friend Sophie who's studying biochem at U of T Field Trips to U of T and York U</i>	<i>University undergrad sciences, good grades High school credits to apply to university</i>
Client's priority possibilities are listed each in a separate row			

FIGURE 3

Possibility and Exploration Plan

Note. This organizes a client's intentional exploration.

possibility clients want to explore are listed in separate rows of their Possibility and Exploration Plans. Counselors guide the process and create a fun context for it by encouraging clients to picture each opportunity using the metaphor of playing in a sandbox to generate ways of taking inspired action, such as talking to a new acquaintance or researching a new professional association. Next to each possibility they put in their plans, clients list various clues encountered on the way, inspired actions, and new skills and credentials they might need to achieve their newly identified career possibilities.

CLIENT OUTCOMES

Clients may need four to seven sessions to work through the CC method. Ultimately, the “becoming empowered” approach leads to outcomes that can be organized into three categories, which demonstrate the value of this method of career intervention (Baudouin et al., 2007).

Learning outcomes (Baudouin et al., 2007) refer to knowledge and skills that can be linked directly to the program or intervention being used, including new self-awareness of one’s strengths and desires and clarity regarding how other people have influenced one’s career and life choices.

Personal attribute outcomes (Baudouin et al., 2007) are defined as positive changes in attitudes, intrapersonal variables such as self-esteem, motivation, and feeling more confidence and excitement regarding exploring career possibilities. In this category of outcomes, clients will feel confident enough to continue the process of making career and life choices on their own, believing more than before that “who you are matters” in making these choices. By being intentional with their thoughts and feelings, clients can attract more positive career opportunities.

Impact outcomes (Baudouin et al., 2007) refer to an influence that the learning outcomes or the personal attribute outcomes have on one’s life such as employment status, enrollment in training, improved social and personal relationships, and economic benefits. These may include career changes, for example, or choosing to stay at one’s job by changing thoughts and feelings concerning the work itself.

When their career counseling engagements are terminated, clients will have completed several components of the CC method: Career Sketch, Career Statement, and Possibility and Exploration Plan. Clients can use these tools, as well as the learning gained from the counseling process and through their narratives, as they continue their career journeys on their own.

The major outcome of the overall process for clients is *personal and career enrichment*, meaning that clients’ lives are improved, enhanced, and deepened. They discover how their mind-set, thoughts, and feelings help or hinder their abilities to move forward; in this way, clients are better able to integrate the past, present, and future. Although some clients make career changes, others realize they have much of what they want in their present career situations. Clients who choose to stay in their existing careers may still find enrichment by introducing into their lives activities, volunteer opportunities, further education, or travel. In this way, clients create new meanings and achieve a sense of well-being in their careers, which in itself is a positive long-term outcome (Seligman et al., 2006).

CONCLUSION AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although the CC method uses some of the elements found in other career counseling approaches, its main contribution and distinctiveness is its focus on shifting away from the emphasis on career obstacles and often-accompanied goal anxiety and toward developing a positive, holistic mind-set with more self-awareness, receptivity, and observation of the internal and external environment. The CC method as a narrative and holistic approach uses positive psychology and draws on other relevant theories and modalities to empower clients so they can take greater control of their careers and give fuller expression to who they are and how they want to be in the world. Clients whose thoughts and feelings can be nudged toward hope, optimism, and faith in good outcomes adopt a profoundly receptive mind-set and find clues that help them discover new opportunities.

Further research on the CC method could add to the quantitative data on the method's validity by measuring learning, personal attributes (e.g., confidence and self-efficacy), and impact outcomes. Another goal of further research is to gather empirical data that can establish the correlation between affect and the perceptions that clients have attracted desirable possibilities into their lives.

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APPENDIX

Sample Career Statement

- Here's what I want and what's important (Desires): to work with people; to have a reasonable workload; to have job advancement; to teach, mentor, and support other people; to do good and to give back. I want stability and more time for my family.
- These are the strengths and knowledge I want to use (Strengths): teach, coach, mentor, and manage; interpersonal and verbal communication; develop relationships; organize and coordinate; strategic thinking, idea generation, conflict resolution, client service, and advertising knowledge.
- Here's the kind of person I am (Preferences): tremendous sense of responsibility, reliable, bleeding heart, reader, introspective, either really on or off.
- Here's what I bring with me (Assets): 6+ years experience in advertising, wedding planning experience, university courses, director of student advocacy at college, cosmetician—loved it, diploma in advertising.
- (Other People) I'm mindful of how my role as a parent of a young child continues to influence my career and life choices.
- Here are the possibilities I'm most curious about: ad agency with a focus on nonprofit clients, fund-raising and event coordinator, self-employment in the form of a website for new mothers, a position in a postsecondary institution such as teaching or student services.