



Career Guidance and Livelihood Planning

Gideon Arulmani

Director, The Promise Foundation, Bangalore, India

Abstract

This is a short note that aims at introducing the idea of livelihood planning. The history of work and the emergence of the idea of career are briefly traced and a holistic definition of career guidance is articulated. The meaning of livelihood is discussed and livelihood planning is described and proposed as an important dimension to career guidance, particularly for the developing world context.

Key words: livelihood, livelihood planning, career guidance, developing countries, culture

Over the recent past, the notions of career and livelihood have been increasingly juxtaposed with each other. Common beliefs about these fundamental human activities are that *livelihood* is related to survival needs and largely practised by those who are in lower income brackets such as farmers, artisans and skilled workers, mainly in rural areas. *Career* on the hand is seen as something more linked to urban contexts, to middle and higher social classes, with greater potential for better opportunities and higher incomes. Academic (school and college) education is viewed as concomitant to career, while traditional, non-formal forms of skills transmission are linked to livelihood. Furthermore, as Kalyanram, Gopalan, and Kamakshi (2014) point out, career carries stronger connotations of prestige than livelihood. Indeed, the drive to abandon rural livelihoods and move toward a “better future” in the city is a rapidly growing one.

What is the role of contemporary career guidance here? Would career guidance be relevant to the farmer, the cobbler, the silk worm producer, the

weaver, the traditional toy maker, the basket maker, the potter, the fisherman, the traditional healer and the shepherd?

In the past, the allocation of work roles seems to have been characterised across cultures by a high degree of automaticity. Skills and trades ran in families or within groups and expertise related to a particular profession was transmitted from the adult to the young within the family or through apprenticeships offered through guilds of professionals. Work-based learning seems to have characterised patterns of work behaviour across almost all civilisations (Donkin, 2010).

Historically, occupational role allocation has been influenced by significant economic, social and political revolutions. Marxism for example, transformed the then prevailing notions of labour, work, worker and employer. Similarly momentous social and economic transformations caused by the Industrial Revolution and the Protestant Reformation in Western societies led to the earlier, long-established customs of occupational role allocation becoming redundant. Within the capitalist political economy,

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Gideon Arulmani, email: garulmani@t-p-f.org

people could approach work as a vehicle for personal growth and development, closely connected with the fulfilment of personal desires. Thus was born the concept of career: an orientation to work that implies a movement away from the older notion of livelihood.

The notion of career tends in a Western context to be described as a personal engagement with the world of work characterised by the exercise of volition and the delineation of personal suitability, requiring preparation and specialisation for ongoing, lifelong development (Arulmani, Bakshi, Leong, & Watts, 2014). Such a description excludes from its purview forms of human engagement with work which are holistic and integrated with ways of living. Even today, all one has to do is to step a few miles outside the cities of developing countries to enter a world of work that is characterised by pre-industrial features, where work is intrinsically linked to a community's broader life. Work-based learning and a livelihoods orientation to occupations continue to prevail in such cultures.

It seems, therefore, that the manifestation of career can be seen in two broad contexts: contexts to which career is indigenous and contexts where it is, in many respects, culturally alien. In the former, the manifestation of career would be spontaneous and culturally congruent; in the latter, its manifestation could be the result of exigency induced by global transformations (Arulmani et al., 2014). An acultural approach to career development could transpose definitions of career that are not indigenous to the local context and *displace* already present, culturally-grounded orientations.

Questions surface here that could have a bearing on the contemporary practice of career guidance. Should career guidance be offered at all to the practitioners of traditional occupations, and more importantly to their children? Does career guidance become relevant only when economic development is such that non-traditional, non-livelihood oriented

occupations begin to appear within that economy? Is career guidance a replacement for traditional mechanisms of occupational role allocation? Finally, does career guidance in these contexts imply replacing livelihood with career? It is here that the notion of *livelihood planning* and a livelihood planning approach to career guidance could be discussed further.

The word, livelihood derives from the root which means: a way of life (Life + Course) from old English (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, n.d.). Therefore, a livelihood is not just a means of survival. It goes deeper, and is rooted in a *way of living*. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living (Chambers & Conway, 1991).

The notion of livelihood planning could also be linked to ideas proposed by Indian philosophers such as J. Krishnamurti and M. K. Gandhi. For Krishnamurthy, work was a manifestation of the individual's potential in the context of community (Krishnamurthy, 1948). Gandhi, contrasting word-based education with work-based education provocatively stated:

It is a superstition to think that the fullest development of man is impossible without a knowledge of the art of reading and writing. That knowledge undoubtedly adds grace to life, but it is in no way indispensable for man's moral, physical, or material growth. (Gandhi, 1935, p. 121)

The livelihood planning approach makes the point that while the notion of career is becoming increasingly widespread, it must be acknowledged that the nature of its manifestation, the meaning attributed to it and the manner in which individuals and groups engage with career can vary from one context to another. In one setting the focus of career guidance may be to help an *individual* discover in which occupational area (e.g., commercial art, biotechnology or law) he/she could specialise. In another,

career guidance may be to help a *community* identify and gain modern skills to manage their traditional occupations in a viable manner.

Keeping these multiple orientations to work in view, career guidance could be described as a service that aims, at helping the individual optimise personal potentials through the effective realisation of his or her social and economic role as a “worker” for lifelong development of personal wellbeing as well as the prosperity of the immediate community and society at large. To be effective, career guidance must be informed by a culturally-resonant interpretation of social,

behavioural and pedagogical sciences.

Extending these ideas to the context of livelihood, Arulmani (2009) has described livelihood planning to be an application of the principles of career guidance at the broader level of facilitating individuals’ traditional engagement with work such that it gains contemporary relevance. Within such a system, there would be a livelihood counsellor: a career counsellor who, wherever he or she works, has the skills to allow the context to define the meaning of career along with the capability to understand and optimise traditional occupational structures for modern work environments.

About the author:

Gideon Arulmani PhD., is a clinical psychologist with an M.Phil., from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences, Bangalore, and a doctoral degree from the University of Portsmouth, UK. He is a Visiting Senior Lecturer at the Canterbury Christ Church University, UK, and Visiting Professor at the Martin Luther Christian University, India. He has developed and standardised several methods and tools for career guidance in India and for other countries through assignments for the World Bank, UNICEF, International Labour Organisation and the Asian Development Bank.

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