

The Future of Career Development Research: Roots, Xylem, Phloem, Cybernetics, and Cyborgs.

Peter McIlveen

I shall begin and end this playful prescient piece with two quotations, both from philosophers whose works are meaningful to my reading of my life, looking back and forward, or should I say into the abyss. Let me begin with Søren Kierkegaard's claim that "life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

Nowadays it is all too easy for scholars to scoff at ideas that were, in their own time, the avant-garde of science and technology. In the social sciences, the perennial victims of such *presentist bias* are the geniuses Sigmund Freud and Burrhus Frederic Skinner. They were neither vocational psychologists nor career development practitioners, but from their endeavours evolved theories and practices that are now regarded as paradigmatic, such as the social cognitive perspective, and, lauded as the new way forward in counselling, such as the narrative approach. With that apologia now behind me, I shall now present my Panglossian prophecy.

Art portends the future—truly an ironic empirical fact! Who could have predicted that the space-age, middle-class Jetson family's convenient meals of flavoured pills would manifest in the current rendering of what is mistaken for nutrition, all packaged and ready to be swallowed in one dismissive gulp? Thanks go to those champions of the slow-food movement who preserve the idea of savouring each mouthful.

It is true; art is the harbinger of our future for it expresses our unconscious intent to create life. When I look into the cinematic feature, "Avatar", I see a beautiful world; just beyond my intellectual horizon, it draws me onward to a new imaginary place for my being as a scientist-practitioner.

Cybernetics is not a word typically associated with career development; yet, the roots of this paradigm have grown deep into the psyche of Australian career development practitioners, thanks to the pioneering works of Wendy Patton and Mary McMahon, creators of the *Systems Theory Framework of Career* (STF), and Robert Pryor and Jim Bright, creators of the *Chaos Theory of Career* (CTC). Here and now, in our hands, are the intellectual acorns of the future. These are the works of our current great thinkers in the field. The cybernetic features of the STF and CTC, the complex of networks, recursive feedback loops, and self-same replication in the patterns of a person's career, are the filaments of theory that will lead us to an extraordinary technology for career development.

With an allusion to virtual life seen in Avatar, one may extend from cybernetics to cyborgs, to a vision of career in a world of virtual work in which humans and technology coalesce, as a cyborg, truly alive in consciousness—albeit a dislocated consciousness, mind and body literally separate, yet embodied seamlessly as one conscious being, fused by nano-bio-psycho-technology that transcends the fragile integument that we feel and know as our skin, and transgresses the final biological frontier, the blood-brain barrier.

Just imagine the RIASEC as a cyborg technology. A *type* may well become a vocational choice to wear, whereby one reaches into the wardrobe, and then

McIlveen, P. (2014). The future of career development research: Roots, xylem, phloem, cybernetics, and cyborgs. *Australian Career Practitioner*, 25(3), 15.

slips into a *RI-type* of silken costume; within its warp and weft are the fibres of nano-bio-psycho-technology that allows one to absolutely live the Person-Environment Fit. True to type, with this career development technology, one may do an RI job one day and an RE job on the next. Variety is the spice of life.

These are fantastic musings on the future of work, and it is in the cybernetic filaments of the STF and the CTC that I see an artistic metaphor for our science: Avatar's Tree of Souls. Paradigmatically essential to the STF and CTC is the precept that complex biopsychosocial systems interact with one another to produce a person's experience of life, just like the Tree of Souls' networks of roots, xylem, and phloem producing the energy of life. Let the Tree of Souls be our guiding metaphor to understand and explore the cybernetic complexity of career.

But, I am conflicted! I want to be there in the future, 25 years from now. Now! I want to be there, now. I want to see what is yet to be generated by the STF and CTC. I am existentially squawking "Are we there, yet? Are we there, yet?"

Thus, to conclude I shall defer to the sagely, salve of my soul, Friedrich Nietzsche: "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how." I know why.

AUTHOR NOTE:

Dr Peter McIlveen is an Associate Professor and Director of the research unit, the *Australian Collaboratory for Career Employability and Learning for Living* (ACCELL), at the University of Southern Queensland.
email: peter.mcilveen@usq.edu.au