Pride and Prejudice: How do they matter to career development?

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This paper examines the impact of occupational pride and prejudice on the emergence of varying orientations to work, career and livelihoods and the implications this has for careers research and the practice of career counselling in a rapidly globalising world. Dr Gideon Arulmani considers key issues to understanding barriers to inclusion, including the mindsets, attitudes and beliefs prevalent within cultures that differentially influence career choice. This publication is a transcript of the lecture given by Dr Arulmani in December 2006 for the Centre for Guidance Studies' 9th Annual Lecture at the University of Derby.

Dr Gideon Arulmani is a Clinical Psychologist and international expert on the multicultural aspects of career choice. He has worked in the field of Career Psychology for 12 years. He holds an M.Phil degree in Medical and Social Psychology as well as a doctoral degree in the field from the University of Portsmouth. Dr Arulmani's observations in the United Kingdom, as well in other European and Scandinavian countries, have consistently pointed to an apparent difference in the career counselling needs of the 'natives' of these countries and those who have come from outside. It seems possible that socio-cultural influences in the form of mindsets prevailing at 'home' continue to influence migrants' career preparation behaviour, even as they build their lives in their adopted countries.

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1. Introduction

1.1. 'I am confused. What is the meaning of career?'

The first time I presented the idea of career guidance and counselling at an important gathering was to a national curriculum reform committee in India. After having worked in this field for almost 10 years, making little impact at the level of national policy, I was excited by the prospect of being able at last to present the concept of career guidance and counselling to such a forum. I spoke about self-understanding, making linkages to the world of work, developing career alternatives and career planning. I thought it was quite a good presentation! The response to the paper however was startling and unexpected. My ideas were criticised as being simplistic, mechanistic and linear. Worst of all career guidance was written off as being too 'western'. Hardly anyone thought what I had been doing with many thousands of young people over the previous 10 years had any real relevance to the Indian situation. My initial reaction was one of irritation since I construed these responses to be a misinterpretation of what I was saying and a blind 'trashing of everything western', as has become so fashionable these days. But the experience proved to be a turning point in my thinking about career guidance for the developing world. One question, or rather the manner in which the question was raised at this meeting opened my eyes to the deeper issues at hand. It came from a young youth worker, who from the back of the room asked: 'Sir, I am confused. What is the meaning of the word "career"?' The reason this question struck me was not only because of its very fundamental nature, but because although the young man spoke in Hindi (the local vernacular) he used the English word 'career' in his question. I realised then, that most Indian languages (and have subsequently realised that indeed most Asian languages) do not have a word for the term 'career'. Examples of the closest equivalents are 'work', 'job' and 'occupation'. Ever since, I have tried to listen more keenly to what the common person (our client) says about work. Here are examples of what I have heard:

'As long as there are fish in the sea, there is no need to think of any other job' (Fisherman, Kudahuvadoo Island, Republic of Maldives).

'My mother says my future is bad, because of the tribe we belong to' (Adolescent, survivor of the genocide, Ruhengeri, Rwanda).

'I am a *maistry*. I learned this job without going to school. Why should my son go to school' (Self-taught mason, Pondicherry, India).

'I want to be a police officer. But I can't. Because my mother says it is not a job for a girl' (High School student, Bangalore, India).

'I must take up science. That's what you must study if you are intelligent. Then I must become a doctor or engineer and bring honour to my family' (High school student, Bangalore, India).

Embedded in these statements are reflections of prevailing philosophies, socio-economic influences, political factors, social practices and sanctions, all working together to mould attitudes and mind-sets toward work – that most fundamental of human preoccupations.

1.2. Orientations to work and career

The notion of a personal career emerged as a response to needs expressed within western, industrialised culture. This specific expression of human work behaviour appeared at a time in history when approaches to work in the west had been transformed by powerful movements such as the Protestant Reformation and the Industrial Revolution. By contrast, the idea of choosing a personal career was not intrinsic to the cultural and economic environment that prevailed in non-western contexts, at that time in history. Today however, against the background of westernisation, industrialisation and now globalisation, the situation is quite different. With the rapid breaking down of older social mechanisms for occupational role allocation, questions surrounding career choices, decision-making and career preparation have become a reality in the developing world as well. The fact remains though that career development occurs in a very different manner in these contexts and is influenced by distinctive factors that are specific to these situations.

These differences in orientations to work are the contemporary challenges that confront career counsellors and workforce development specialists. And today, these challenges manifest themselves both at the local and global level. At the local level, it is vital that the idea of a career is contextualised and woven into the broader socio-cultural fabric that shapes orientations to work. At the global level, an important development is the emergence of multicultural societies. Non-western families have made western countries their homes, their places of work and the context for their career development. In our attempts to support the career development of these individuals, it is vital to remember that just as the Protestant work ethic forged work behaviour in the west, so philosophies of the past have had a definitive influence on attitudes toward work in other socio-cultural environments. Such mind-sets prevailing at 'home'

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could continue to influence immigrants' career preparation behaviour, even as they build their lives in their adopted countries.

1.3. Scope of this paper

The edifice of career developmental theory rests on observations made in western (mainly white middle-class) cultures. However, the validity of using existing formulations to understand and explain the career behaviour of other cultural groups is not established (e.g. Arulmani, 2000; Watson, 2004). The need to examine and describe career development as it occurs in non-western contexts is an urgent one. To this end through our work at The Promise Foundation, we have over the last few years attempted to identify factors that could inform the discipline of career psychology and broaden its knowledge base.

I will in the following section present two constructs – namely, social-cognitive environments and career beliefs – that we have identified through our research and field experience in the Asian context. These notions could have implications for research, practice and policy action in a world that is becoming increasingly multicultural. Keeping in mind the issues of cultural diversity that surround career counselling today, these concepts will be discussed through a cross-cultural analysis of two Asian contexts, drawing from our experiences in India and, most recently, the Republic of Maldives. The paper will then present as a case study, a currently ongoing programme in the Maldives that attempts to create a contextually relevant platform for the introduction of a national career guidance and counselling system.

2. Social-cognitive environments

As with other human activities work occurs within a social context – a context characterised by patterns of beliefs and ways of thinking. This influence of the mind on behaviour is particularly significant when entire societies think in a particular manner, internalise belief structures and demonstrate certain mindsets. Albert Bandura (1989) uses the term social cognitions to describe patterns of thinking that have become habitual across social groups. Social cognitions are patterns of beliefs that exist within a community and guide the behaviour of the individuals in that community. Arbib & Hesse (1986) point out that beliefs held by the individuals of a community may cohere into a pattern of *commonly* held cognitions characterising an entire community or social group. Even if these belief structures may not be internalised within the minds of single individuals, they are embedded in the relational process of social exchanges.

Social cognitions seem to play a powerful and significant role in orientations to work as well. Mind-sets engendered by social and moral frames of reference give a particular colouring and interpretation to the meaning and purpose of work. We have extended the notion of social cognitions and propose that prevailing ideologies and the experiences of a community create *social-cognitive environments*. Within these environments, values (positive, neutral or negative) could be attributed to work in general as well as toward particular occupational clusters.

We have further postulated that social-cognitive environments foster the evolution of a *work ethic:* a set of social norms that describe a particular approach and attitude to work. For example, a certain work ethic may place a positive moral value on hard work based on the belief that work has innate worth and must be pursued for its own sake. Similarly another social-cognitive environment may promote a work ethic wherein factors such as social class, religion or caste may engender the firm belief that certain kinds of occupations are 'unworthy' of being considered. A work ethic, as referred to here, is thus a collection of social cognitions about work, which guide and influence people's work behaviour.

Cognitions and beliefs arise from a reciprocal interaction between the individual and his or her environment. The collectivistic nature of Asian cultures brings distinctive characteristics to these social-cognitive environments. Career planning in India is not a purely individualistic effort and beliefs and values held by the community can play a significant role in the career decision-making process. It is becoming increasingly clear that career development is not merely a function of the maturation and unfolding of personal interests and aptitudes or of the crystallisation of personal identities. Personal attributes unfold within a certain social-cognitive environment. The characteristics of this environment influence the manner in which personal attributes are linked to career development.

Our attempts at understanding social-cognitive environments have helped us clarify the real meaning of career development in the developing-world context and have provided useful guidelines for the development of services that are better rooted in contextual realities.

3. Career beliefs

We have tried to examine the interaction between social-cognitive environments and orientations to work and career by focussing our attention on a specific kind of social cognition: namely, *career beliefs*. John Krumboltz, when he initially introduced this idea,

pointed out that people make many assumptions and generalisations about themselves and the world of work based on their experiences. Beliefs can become so deeply ingrained that they may not even be identified by their holders as beliefs – they are more like unquestioned, self-evident truths. Whether accurate or not, career beliefs exert facilitative or inhibitive influences on individuals decisions and actions as they attempt to develop and implement career goals (Krumboltz, 1979; 1994). These patterns of thinking may or may not be grounded in rationality. Yet they predispose the individual to making career decisions in a certain manner.

We have tried to explore career beliefs further. Our initial observations have shown that a conglomerate of attitudes, opinions, convictions and notions seem to cohere together to create mind-sets and beliefs that underlie people's orientation to the idea of a career. The examples from three different cultural contexts cited at the beginning of this paper offer insights into how community-held career beliefs could influence the career development of the young within that community. It appeared from our field experiences that the impact of career beliefs on the career development process was marked and critical (Arulmani, 2000; Arulmani & Nag-Arulmani, 2004). Over the last few years we have therefore attempted to study the construct more systematically, and have investigated the possibility that certain kinds of social-cognitive environments foster certain kinds of career beliefs. Our methods have included both qualitative and quantitative approaches that have collected data through questionnaires and focus-group discussions as well as intervention studies. Our analysis has consistently thrown up three kinds of career beliefs that seem to interlock with career development, which I would like to describe briefly in the context of India and the Maldives.

3.1. The matter of education: proficiency beliefs

A consistent career belief theme that influences the nature of career preparation is the importance laid on acquiring qualifications, skills and personal proficiency for an occupation. It may seem obvious to some that acquiring qualifications and developing proficiency for a specific range of work skills is necessary for career development. In reality however, there seems to be wide variability in the manner in which social-cognitive environments actually nurture this attitude. For example, in certain Indian contexts, a *lower* emphasis is laid on acquiring work-skills proficiencies. Our research has found this to be particularly true for socio-economically vulnerable groups (Arulmani, Van Laar & Easton, 2001). The lower emphasis on acquiring work-skills proficiencies could be the result of the high degree of pressure on the economically disadvantaged

to have their children begin earning for survival. Conversely, the typical Indian middle-class family places an extraordinarily high value on acquiring qualifications. Great efforts and significant family resources are directed toward ensuring that the children in the family are 'properly qualified'.

There is a twist in the tale here that is interesting. We found in a recently concluded survey which we conducted in twelve different parts of India (Arulmani & Nag, 2006) that if given a choice and the necessary support, families from lower-income homes would be grateful for their children to acquire any kind of qualification. In contrast, middle and upper middle-class families were strongly pre-occupied by the prestige attributes that surround further education. Vocationally oriented courses were attributed low levels of prestige, while obtaining a college degree was a 'must' for any middle class young person. It was also observed that a large percentage of the middle-class groups linked no specific career goals to going to college other than 'I must have a degree'. The impact of prestige was such that a large number of middle and upper middle-class participants in this survey intended to pursue college education, even if this did not lead to direct employment.

Proficiency beliefs in the Maldives closely approximate the attitudes seen amongst the higher socio-economic status groups in India. A high level of importance is attributed to education, and virtually all children are in school, working toward high school and higher secondary certificates. Similar to the Indian situation, however, attitudes of pride and prejudice were strongly evident in the type of further education that was considered acceptable. Our surveys revealed that vocational courses were looked down upon, and post-school training that offered opportunities for vocational skills development was not much sought after (Arulmani, 2004). These prejudices were so strong that young people preferred to remain unoccupied rather than taking up vocational courses to pursue vocational careers.

Proficiency career beliefs have their obvious corollaries to career preferences. While certain social-cognitive environments leave the young person open (and grateful) for any kind of job, other social-cognitive environments foster career beliefs that restrict the young person's orientations to certain groups of career options.

3.2. Taking charge: control and self-direction beliefs

Situations and experiences influence the direction that one's life can take. This category of beliefs reflects the individual's sense of control over the trajectory of his or her life. Mind-sets in this category are linked to the

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career aspirant's belief that he or she could deal with the exigencies presented by life situations and the orientation to direct and take charge of the way in which his or her life progresses.

Here again the influence of social-cognitive environments is significant. In the Indian situation, young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds demonstrated a lower orientation to exercising control over the trajectory of their lives. Their responses reflected helplessness in the face of barriers to career development, with a tendency to view the future in terms of the deprivations they were experiencing in their present situation. The higher-income groups, on the other hand, showed a stronger orientation to creating opportunities for themselves and high motivation to actively engage with career development tasks.

Control and self-direction beliefs among Maldivian young people and their families showed interesting variations. This is a country where job provision has been a state responsibility for many years. Young people who did reasonably well at the high school level were, until recently, almost automatically absorbed by the government. Our assessments of attitudes toward work in this environment indicated that finding a job was not perceived as a personal responsibility (Arulmani, 2004). Young people's motivation to create opportunities for themselves and engage with career development tasks was weak. When faced with this life development task, Maldivian young people typically demonstrated a tendency to rely heavily on someone else (e.g. parents, government) to get them a job. Unlike the Indian situation, low motivation to engage with career development tasks did not seem to be mediated by social class and was found to be quite widespread across a broad cross-section of young people and their families in the Maldives.

3.3. Fighting the odds: persistence beliefs

Successful career development requires the individual to face and attempt to overcome difficulties and hurdles that punctuate progress toward a career goal. The third category of mind-sets toward career development extracted by our analysis, describes beliefs that foster persistence toward career goals despite difficulties and barriers that could emerge during the process of career preparation. Beliefs within this category reflect the resolve to persevere with determination toward career goals.

Once again, we have found that the social-cognitive environment that the individual was a part of coloured the quality of persistence. Persistence amongst young people from disadvantaged homes in India was lower

and less consistent. Their responses reflected a strong predisposition to sacrificing long-term gains for more immediate benefits in the here and now. If a career is to become a reality for an Indian young person from a poor home he or she would be required to make career plans, while simultaneously grappling with poverty, unstable family structures, inaccessible institutional support and financial constraints. Planning for what could come to fruition only sometime in the future may not be consistent with the reality perceptions of the young person from such a background. The middle-class groups, on the other hand, demonstrated a higher degree of persistence. Their responses reflected a long-term orientation to the future, with evidence of planning, setting goals and preparing for their future.

Trends similar to the Indian disadvantaged context were also seen in the Maldives. This difference, however, did not seem to be linked as much to survival issues. In the Maldivian context, the young person was cushioned by highly supportive parents and families and, until recently, a government that took responsibility for employment-provision. The young person was shielded from the realities of being unemployed in the long term. Their orientation to time was closer to the here and now, and their responses did not reflect a long-term orientation to the future. As a result, the overarching attitude toward career development amongst young people was one of apathy and indifference. The tendency to give up when difficulties arose, either when searching for a job or when performing the duties of a particular job, were markedly high (Arulmani, 2004).

Career belief themes vary across age groups, socio-economic status and cultural environments. The foregoing discussion of three such themes has served to illustrate how attitudes of pride and prejudice could influence career development. Our experience has consistently demonstrated that the outcomes of career counselling were often rendered meaningless when prevailing career beliefs were left unaddressed. The notion of social-cognitive environments and the career beliefs they engender have given us a useful framework within which to understand career development and to plan interventions that are contextually relevant.

4. Pride and Prejudice: how to they matter to career development?

This paper has attempted to articulate the interactions between social cognitions and orientations to work and career development. I would now like to highlight three applicational issues that could have relevance to researchers, practitioners and policy makers.

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4.1. The multicultural context

As stated earlier, patterns of immigration over many decades and the forces of globalisation over the recent past have led to multicultural societies becoming a strongly present reality today. This has increased the likelihood of the counsellor and counselee coming from differing social-cognitive environments, each influenced and guided by their own career beliefs. It is essential in such situations that counsellors are particularly sensitive to attitudes of pride and prejudice (their own as well as those of their clients), that could influence the career counselling process. Let me illustrate with examples of differences in world-views that have been documented by other researchers as well.

Career beliefs held by Asians tend to reflect stronger family and community orientations, with a preference for co-operative decision-making (e.g. Arulmani, 2000; Peng, 2004). In contrast, European-American orientations have been described to tend more toward individualism and competition (e.g. Lightbody, Nicholson, Siann & Walsh, 1997).

Another difference is the narrowing of career choices by Asian groups to a select group of occupational categories. For example, career preferences in India tend to be restricted by beliefs about the 'value' of a career. As a result, certain careers are perceived as 'good' careers (e.g. Arulmani, van Laar & Easton, 2001). American research has also found that Asian Americans are relatively more restricted in their approach to career choice and tend to pursue a limited range of occupations (e.g. Tang, Fouad & Smith, 1999). Beliefs about prestige and respectability play a powerful role amongst Asian families (e.g. Desai & Whiteside, 2000). Studies in the United Kingdom (e.g. Lightbody, Nicholson, Siann & Walsh, 1997) also found beliefs about the respectability of a career to have a stronger influence on Asian career choosers than on those of British origin.

A striking example of these biases is the report of an attempt to examine the cross-cultural validity of Holland's theory (Leong, Austin, Sekaran & Komarraju, 1998). These researchers found that the Vocational Preference Inventory could not be directly adapted to the Indian context. This was mainly because many of the participants in the study would not complete the VPI, since it included occupations that they considered too low in the caste system for them to even consider. It is essential that career psychologists and counsellors working in multicultural contexts are aware of the forceful role played by the community in the life of the individual in many eastern and developing world cultures. Attitudes of pride and prejudice that colour orientations to work and career development could be passed from one generation to the next, giving rise to career decision-making behaviours that are based on a structure of strongly-held beliefs validated by the community. My occasional observations of career counselling interactions with British youth of Asian origin is that, although these young people have grown up in Britain, the final decision is often made by the family rather than the individual. It is vital therefore that counsellors are sensitive to the role that the community and the family can play in the career decision-making process of a young person.

Having said this, I present for consideration the proposition that the notion of social-cognitive environments and career beliefs need not be restricted to multicultural contexts alone. A deeper understanding of social-cognitive environments, irrespective of their geographical locations or cultural contexts, would offer valuable guidelines for career counsellors and workforce development specialists. Culturally rooted career beliefs are not artefacts that only embellish the exotic east. The possibility of similar influences within western cultures is worth investigating. It is possible, for example, that specific attitudes of pride and prejudice toward career development characterise British working- class families and that these mind-sets are different from other sections of British society. We postulate that beliefs pertaining to career choice and planning are present in all families and communities and that the young person's orientation to further education, job acquisition and to the future as a whole could be influenced by these social cognitions. Becoming aware of and learning about these processes could sharpen career counselling's relevance to felt needs.

4.2. Career preparation and re-preparation

Most of our discussion so far has focussed on the interactions between social-cognitive environments and the young person who is preparing to enter the world of work. Our most recent work (Arulmani, 2006) has shown us that these ideas are also relevant to older age-groups. The nature of the world of work today is such that career preparation is no longer limited to the beginning of one's career. The idea that a career is a nine-to-five job, for life, is rapidly being replaced by career cycles that play out within a markedly shorter time-frame. As a result, retrenchment has become an increasingly common fall out of globalisation. What are the characteristics of the social-cognitive environment within families where erstwhile stable careers have been disrupted? Do these experiences engender attitudes of pride and prejudice which affect work orientations? There is of course the psychological fall-out of job loss, that could affect a person's self-

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esteem and personal confidence. In addition, there could be specific career development issues that come into the purview of the career counselling service. Helping an older worker cope with the trauma of job loss, supporting his or her efforts at finding another job, and sometimes helping the individual accept a position that is lower than the previous one, are examples of present-day issues that career counsellors are already dealing with. It is here that a deeper understanding of social cognitions could further support the client who has suffered a job loss and now has to re-prepare for a career.

Let me use the framework of the three career belief themes discussed earlier to illustrate the possible cognitions and mindsets that could attend the process of preparing for re-entry into the world of work. The requirement to acquire new qualifications, perhaps in areas for which the client has no past experience, may seem daunting to him or her and barriers related to the proficiency theme may manifest themselves. Contemporary working environments may seem too 'new-fangled' for the older worker, and beliefs related to the persistence theme may come into play. The requirement to consider non-standard jobs, be more flexible and take charge of career development may bring in barriers that originate from *control and self-direction beliefs*. This would be true particularly in the case of Asian workers who see a 'permanent' job as a sign of stability and achievement. In fact, the notion of life-long learning, which has become such a buzz word in the west, might be quite alien in the Asian context. Social cognitions in the Indian environment, for example, would describe education as having been completed at a particular stage in one's life and career development as belonging to *another* life stage. In-service training would be seen as the employer's responsibility and further education would typically be undertaken to secure promotions within the same career path. Self-directed efforts at continuing the process of learning would be rare. In our training programmes, we have often observed a sense of bewilderment, and in some cases resentment, amongst mature workers when they are required to 'submit' themselves to the rigours of continuing to be learners.

Attitudes of pride and prejudice affect the quality of career preparation. Certain kinds of minds-sets could easily become barriers to ongoing career development. Other kinds of career beliefs could facilitate smooth re-entry and open the individual to new horizons. It is here that the third applicational issue comes into focus: counsellor training.

4.3. Counsellor training

The discussion presented above argues that that strongly held beliefs (particularly when they could extend to an entire community) play a significant role in constraining or facilitating the expression of an aptitude or the realisation of an interest. Career interventions that focus on the more 'traditional' techniques such as aptitude testing and interest analysis may not address the felt needs of these client groups. The impact of career guidance may be maximised when techniques that address underlying cognitions about career development are incorporated into the counselling process. I will briefly outline examples of two core career counselling competencies that we have integrated into our training programmes.

The first relates to incorporating the family and community into the career counselling interaction. As I have discussed, the dynamics of career decision-making are not limited to interactions between counsellor and client alone. Particularly in the case of Asian clients, the family and the larger community play a critical role, and the outcomes of counselling are often subject to these processes. Skills to work with the leader of the community within the context of the counselling needs of the community, for example, could go a long way in enhancing the effectiveness of the counselling interaction. Similarly, including parents in the counselling process would ensure that the young person still benefits from the collective wisdom of the family and the community. I hasten to underline that the objective of counselling here is not to 'liberate' the individual from the family's wishes. Drawing the young person and the family into the career counselling process may have a far more effective outcome than focusing on the individual alone. An effective career counselling interaction would create an environment within which the young person and his or her family could consider career development in a collaborative manner. The task before the career counsellor, therefore, is to facilitate a strengthening of familial bonds rather than allowing career decision-making to weaken these important ties between the individual and his or her community.

The second competency relates to understanding social-cognitive environments and to eliciting and addressing career beliefs. We have developed both qualitative and quantitative techniques that are designed to help the counsellor and the client gain deeper insights into the social-cognitive influences on orientations to work and career. The 'quantitative' techniques include structured questionnaires; the 'qualitative' approaches address specific interviewing skills. Counselling focuses on facilitating insight into the kind of career beliefs that are influencing both the client and the family and the

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potential impact these habitual ways of thinking could have on career planning. Counselling competencies include skills to address conflicts between the family/community and the individual's career beliefs. In multicultural contexts these conflicts could be located around differences of opinion between the client and his or her family's career beliefs. For example, a British Asian young person might want to pursue a career that the family believes is a 'low prestige' career. Career counselling challenges could also emerge in conflicts between the Asian family unit and social cognitions common within the society of which they are now a part. For example, deep-rooted prejudices that originate from religious beliefs and social customs (e.g. caste, interaction between genders) may predispose certain kinds of clients to particular orientations to work and career development. The career counsellor in such a context must be able to recognise these prejudices and then support clients as they address these issues, facilitate considered decisions and then help them take responsibility for their decisions.

5. Addressing career beliefs in the Republic of Maldives: a case study

This paper has focused on attitudes and mind-sets toward career development and has tried to articulate how pride and prejudice influence career development. It is well known, of course, that attitudes by their very nature are enduring and resistant to change. Achieving attitudinal change is easier said than done. Yet, as argued above, influences on career choices stem from these deep rooted stereotypes and mind-sets. Career counselling that is not attuned to these forces could in the final analysis be at high risk to fail.

I conclude this paper with a case study that presents an attempt to preface career counselling with a social marketing campaign designed to address specific attitudes of pride and prejudice in a small island nation, the Republic of Maldives. This programme is currently on going and I shall present our experiences in the first phase.

5.1. Background

The Republic of the Maldives is a nation of people living in an archipelago 820 kilometers long and 120 kilometers wide in the Indian ocean. As of 2002, almost half of the population (46%) was less than 15 years old. Twenty-seven percent of the population lives in the national capital island of Malé, while the rest live on 198 inhabited islands.

The core objective of the project of which we are a part is to assist the Maldives make better use of its human resources potential by increasing the number of Maldivians actively participating in the labour force. With this in mind, the project is designed to provide employment-oriented skills training in various occupations to make the prospective Maldivian employee more attractive to the employer. Career guidance and social marketing are positioned within the project as mechanisms that will contribute to making employment-oriented training attractive to Maldivian young people.

5.2. Analysis of the social-cognitive environment

We conducted an initial study to assess the social-cognitive environment and identify the prevailing career beliefs within this society (Arulmani, 2004). The three career belief themes of proficiency, control/self-direction and persistence were used as the framework for assessment. As described earlier in this paper, we found that while an exceptionally high value was placed on education and on acquiring proficiencies and qualifications, the strength of this belief was not reflected along the two other belief themes. We noticed that young people in the Maldives tended to demonstrate a lower orientation to exercising control over the trajectory of their lives and that their motivation to create opportunities for themselves and engage with career development tasks was weak. Similarly, the resolve to persevere toward career goals was also low. Responses reflected indifference and a strong tendency to give up in the face of barriers to career development. The motivation for self-directed job search efforts was low. An overwhelmingly large number of young people in the study indicated that they had neither applied for a job nor had they made any career plans, even after two years of completing their A-level studies. They were waiting on their islands to be offered a job. Furthermore, there seemed to be a strong tendency toward rejecting jobs that were perceived to be low in prestige and out of keeping with what the individual expected to earn from it. Voluntary unemployment seemed to be preferred to taking up a job that did not match expectations. We further noted that occupations requiring manual effort (blue-collar jobs) were not preferred. Training programmes that offered skills development opportunities for such occupations (e.g. masonry, electrical wiring, turning, fitting, carpentry, boat building and repair, waiter/waitress) tended to be actively avoided, although these employment sectors are currently booming in the Maldives.

The overall impressions of our assessment of social cognitions and career beliefs was that the young people in the study did not seem to experience urgency in relation to finding a job. Two factors seem to contribute to this mind-set. Firstly, the young person,

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along with his or her family, had high expectations of a job and tended to reject opportunities because they did not measure up to these expectations. Secondly, the young person was shielded from the realities of being unemployed in the long term by highly supportive parents and families. The willingness to take up a job with the view to building up one's life gradually over time was low.

This information indicated quite clearly that prevailing career beliefs placed the project's core objectives, namely, employment skills training, at significantly high risk of being rejected by the project's intended beneficiaries. It was also evident that a career guidance programme that was insensitive to this social-cognitive environment would almost certainly be an exercise in futility. The analysis also gave us clear guidelines for the content of the social marketing campaign that would preface and then work alongside the career guidance programme.

5.3. The social marketing campaign

5.3.1. Ethical considerations

Social marketing is the use of marketing principles and techniques to influence a target audience to achieve the goal of positive social change, for the benefit of individuals, groups or society as a whole (Hastings & Saren, 2003). A debate pertaining to the ethics of social marketing has continued since its inception for the last 30 years. MacFayden, Stead & Hastings (1999) have highlighted some of the most critical issues. One is that social marketing could be 'hegemonic' in character since 'causes' are identified by persons in positions of power and authority to be beneficial to both individuals and society. Perhaps the most serious ethical consideration is the possibility that these powerful techniques could become tools of coercion and 'hidden persuasion'. Aware of these and other ethical issues associated with any form of large-scale social change programme, the project clarified the activities to be carried through this effort as sharpening the target population's awareness of the consequences of certain ideas, attitudes, practices or behavior and simultaneously providing alternatives and avenues for change. While developing an attractive and youth-friendly image, this social marketing effort would constantly strive to maintain an 'informational tone' and avoid 'overselling' the benefits of recommended changes.

5.3.2. Formulation of objectives

The objectives of the Maldivian campaign are two-fold (Abdulla, 2006). One is to make careers information available in an attractive and youth-friendly manner. The other is to address the attitudes of extreme passivity and apathy toward career development that is

widely prevalent among Maldivian youth. While the young person is at the core of the campaign, two other target groups include parents and employers.

The guidelines for the campaign emerged from our initial analysis of social-cognitive environments and career beliefs (Arulmani, 2004). At the core of the campaign is the objective of creating a positive and affirmative image of work and career development. Accordingly, the campaign identified four key areas that it would address in its first phase (Abdulla, 2006):

*   Encourage young people to engage with training opportunities and develop skills that would prepare them for the world of work (proficiency beliefs).

*   Give young people confidence in themselves and their potential to choose a career path for themselves (control/self-direction beliefs).

*   Encourage young people to take charge and control of their lives (control/self-direction beliefs).

*   Promote the belief in starting small and reaching high (persistence beliefs).

5.3.3. Logo and slogan

The name of the career guidance programme given to us by the government was 'Youth Employment Services'. Keeping in mind the findings from our social-cognitive analysis, the social marketing team developed a positive and affirmative acronym. The rather dull and boring 'Youth Employment Services' was shortened to spell 'YES'! With the objective of addressing the widespread attitudes of helplessness, apathy and indifference, the phrase, 'Because I can' was added and the slogan for the campaign became: 'YES! Because I Can'.

5.3.4. Communication tools: a multi-pronged approach

A variety of communication tools have been developed around the 'YES! Because I Can' concept to heighten the feelings and images embodied by the slogan (Abdulla, 2006). These include advertisements in local newspapers and magazines (youth friendly inserts), Zocards (free postcards) with career development messages, short TV clips of role models, events (e.g. a fashion show of traditional Maldivian work costumes) and competitions (e.g. essay, poster, painting, collage competitions on themes related to job seeking and career development). Communication devices also include a 'YES!' website and a toll free phone line for careers information.

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5.4. Social marketing and career guidance: the interface

The key purpose of the social marketing campaign is to provide a platform for careers services by breaking through prevailing attitudes of pride and prejudice and stimulating interest and excitement around the theme of work and career development. Accordingly, the careers programme has been called 'Yes for career choices'. The content of the various career exploration activities gravitate around affirmative action for personal growth and development.

Initial trials have indicated that the idea of career guidance and occupational choice are imbued with freshness and excitement when located within the affirmative and challenging spirit of the campaign. The real challenge of course is to sustain this excitement when young Maldivian career choosers confront and engage with career development tasks. In the long term, it is planned that career guidance and social marketing will work in tandem with each other. We are presently building capacity within the country for personnel (e.g. teachers and counsellors) to carry out these duties.

6. Conclusion

I began this paper with a statement from a youth worker who said: 'I am confused. What is the meaning of career?' I have since learnt that the very concept remains notional until it connects with local realities. If theories of career development and the interventions that emerge from these theories are to be meaningful, they must be attuned to the ways of thinking and living that compose the fabric of a society.

I have often cited the story with which I conclude this paper. But since it so evocatively captures what I have stumbled to articulate, perhaps one more re-telling would not matter.

Quite some time after we had first met him a young man who had attended one of our counselling programmes came to visit us. Full of confidence, he walked in and said that he had completed his education and now had a regular job. Then, rather shyly, he said he had something to give us. He drew a crumpled envelope from his pocket and said 'I received my first salary today. I want you to use this to help someone else in the way you helped me.' Inside the envelope was a fifty rupee note. Moved, but curious, we asked him which of our counselling groups he had belonged to. He looked up and said, 'The group where we learned to think differently.'

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