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Career counselling and sustainable decent work: Relationships and tensions

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The concept of decent work is intuitively desirable, an ideal to strive for, and a human right. Awareness of the decent work agenda has been raised in career counselling and is posing challenges about what role, if any, career counselling can play towards the achievement of sustainable decent work for all. Feeding into the social justice values of career counselling, the decent work agenda has drawn considerable attention. To date, however, limited suggestions have been provided about career counselling's potential contribution toward the achievement of decent work for all, the focus of this special issue. In this article we consider the contexts of decent work, career counselling, and social justice and the relationships and tensions between them. In particular, we raise questions about what exactly is being asked of career counselling in the promotion of decent work. In view of proponents of the decent work agenda in career development questioning whether decent work is achievable for many people, especially in developing countries, the purpose of this article is to consider the potential role of career counselling in the contemporary and emerging labour market.

Keywords: career counselling; decent work; social justice; sustainable work

Introduction

Career counselling was born in the context of rapid change in the social and labour market where the social reform movement sought to assist people from disadvantaged backgrounds through vocational guidance. From that time, social justice has been a foundational value of career counselling. However, social justice has not always been evident in career counselling practice or in career theory (Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2019; Irving & Malik, 2005a; McMahon, Arthur & Collins, 2008; Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012). Career counselling finds itself once again in a time of rapid international change in the social and labour market where attention has focused on the nature of work in the context of the fourth industrial revolution and issues such as sustainable and decent work. The challenges facing career counselling in rapidly changing labour market contexts provides a stimulus for this special issue.

Decent work refers to dignified, safe, and secure work that is completed in a reasonable timeframe and is appropriately remunerated. Engaging in decent work is central to the well-being of individuals and communities (Blustein, 2019). The call for papers for this special issue poses eight questions related to the challenges posed by the context of the sustainable and decent work agenda for the career counselling profession. In this article we consider three of these questions:

- How can current career counselling models for promoting sustainable decent work for all be renovated and advanced to pre-empt challenges brought about by the fourth industrial revolution?
- Which new career counselling models can be designed to promote sustainable decent work for all at a time when automation and digitisation are increasing and contributing to major job losses?
- What are the career counselling theory, practice, research and policy implications of changes in the world of work?

While the authors believe in the concept of decent work as a right of all workers, in this article we consider the context of decent work and career counselling, and the relationships and tensions between them. In view of proponents of the decent work agenda in career development (e.g., Blustein, Duffy, Kenny, Gutowski & Diamonti, 2019) questioning whether decent work is achievable for many people, especially in developing countries, the purpose of this article was to consider the potential role of career counselling in this contemporary and emerging labour market.

We begin by considering the changing labour market context and subsequently describe recent trends in career counselling. We then reflect on career counselling's longstanding relationship with social justice in the context of the decent work agenda to consider the potential revision, renovation, renewal, or repositioning of career counselling in relation to its recent focus on the decent work agenda.

Labour Market Context

The labour market context has always been a focus of career counselling. Indeed, preparing people for entry into the labour market and supporting them with "planning, implementing and adjusting to work" (Blustein, 2019:vii) is the reason for the field's existence. Career guidance was a social reform response to the first industrial revolution, which transformed society from a primarily agrarian economy to an industrial economy. Subsequent industrial revolutions saw the emergence of mass production and then automation, with the fourth industrial revolution being a time of unprecedented rapid change brought about as a result of technological advances. Each revolution provides a foundation for the subsequent revolution which extends innovation and