

NATIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

CAREER DEVELOPMENTS

SUMMER 2015
VOLUME 31 NUMBER 3



Navigating Career Uncertainty and Change

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INTENTIONAL EXPLORATION: A HOLISTIC PROCESS TO NAVIGATE CAREER CHANGE AND UNCERTAINTY

BY MARK FRANKLIN



CAREER STATEMENT

Focus is on the present and future; opens you to change.

TRADITIONAL RESUME

Focus is on the past; can limit change.

Frameworks to guide effective, thoughtful and proactive career change and management are needed to counter reactive online job search methods and personality dependent advice-giving. According to Clifton (2011) there is a massive global shortage of 1.8 billion “good” jobs. He suggests that every individual is an economic engine and source of jobs energy. To win the coming jobs war, innovation, optimism, determination, creativity, hope and drive is needed for both job creators and job seekers.

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For too many people, career change is a reactive process of scrolling through online job postings with hundreds of others vying for the same position with one's past career activities listed one after another within a resume or LinkedIn profile. This passive process which initiates a few minutes of hope is typically followed by weeks of stress and frustration with little to no employer response.

HOLISTIC RESPONSE NEEDED

A framework that creates a compelling picture of the future, complete with authentic desires, clearly articulated strengths, grounded self-awareness and promising future possibilities, as well as highlighting past experiences, skills and assets is needed. The CareerCycles (CC) narrative method of practice (Zikic, Franklin, 2010; Franklin, Feller, Yanar, 2014) includes the process of *Intentional Exploration*, a focused process for exploring meaningful career and life possibilities that implicitly develops the navigation

of sustained career management with hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism.

Career counseling and development processes are moving beyond matching techniques, traditional assessments, and purely rational career decision making methods. Academic, evidence-based frameworks are emerging to support practice. Intentional Exploration follows a process of Career and Life Clarification as the two main processes of the CC method. Intentional Exploration within a holistic framework stimulates self-awareness and shifts emphasis to watching for clues to best support clients to take inspired action. The CC method facilitates client narratives that draw on insights and lessons learned in the past to foster self-awareness and generate relevant and promising possibilities for the future.

CAREER STATEMENT TO INTENTIONAL EXPLORATION

The *Career Statement* is the substantive output from the Career and Life Clarification process. Through guided facilitation, clients create a positively worded, concisely written statement that draws upon their own stories and experiences, highlights their relevant strengths, and

INTENTIONAL EXPLORATION

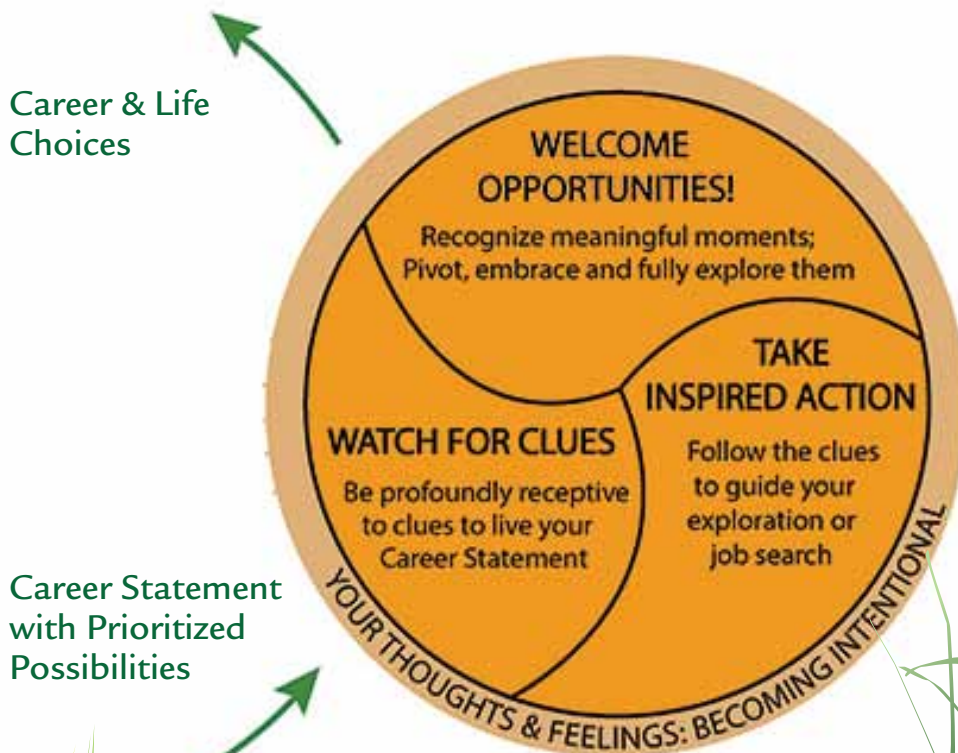


Figure 1. Input into Intentional Exploration is the client's *Career Statement*, embedded with priority possibilities and output is client choices. For the full model, see Feller (2014).

clearly distills desires for the future. Unlike the rear view mirror approach to career management where clients focus on where they have been in the form of a resume or LinkedIn profile, individuals with a *Career Statement*, or other written ‘purpose statement,’ are better positioned to confidently look at the road ahead and avoid overreliance on their past (see Figure 1). The confidence and optimism that emerges from the *Career Statement* empowers the client to move forward with the next stages of the CC process—the Intentional Exploration of promising new opportunities.

THE CAREER COUNSELING LANDSCAPE – SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Using the Career Statement as a personal guide, the process of Intentional Exploration allows clients to actively own and control their career pathway forward. Evidence from an outcome study of the CC method (Franklin, Yanar, Feller, in press) showed that clients experienced increases in Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, Optimism (HERO), collectively called psychological capital, (Luthans, et al., 2006), as well as curiosity and exploration (Kashdan, et al., 2009), and personal growth (Robitchek, et al., 2012). In the outcome study, these increases in personal attributes correlated with increases in satisfaction, clarity and person-job fit (Edwards, 1991).

When it comes to career exploration, clients often don’t know what to want, hence their career exploration trajectory may be guided and hampered by worries about employability, or unarticulated self-limiting beliefs (Gilbert & Wilson, 2005). Consider Haidt’s (2005) metaphor of an elephant (intuitive) and rider (rational) for the two decision making system.

Many clients’ career journeys are led by reactive, split second decisions of the elephant as it runs scared through the career landscape making choices not aligned with the strengths and desires of the rider, who communicates on behalf of the duo but is powerless to influence the elephant’s course, holding on for dear life. What’s needed is better attunement between rider and elephant.

Occupational engagement (Krieshok et al, 2009) identifies a means of optimal quality of decision making resulting from ongoing, focused contact with the people and the world around them. It is defined as taking part in behaviors that contribute to the career decision-maker’s fund of information and experience of the larger world, not just when a career decision is necessary. The CC process of Intentional Exploration is aligned with and deepens the concept of occupational engagement and the above influences to help clients know what they want and have the mindset to achieve it, which is how it is described to clients in session.

INTENTIONAL EXPLORATION HELPS NAVIGATE THE ROAD AHEAD

Intentional Exploration is a holistic process in part because the career and life possibilities that are its inputs have emerged from a ‘narrative assessment,’ rather than a list of occupations that are typically the output from traditional assessments. Clients may feel more confident and excited about career and life possibilities that emerge from a structured process that began with their very own story. The choices that clients make emerging from Intentional Exploration may be to enrich their existing career or employment situation, move to another employer, seek self-employment, begin volunteering, further education, travel or seek other personal choices.

Intentional Exploration begins with the client reading their Career Statement aloud in session. This may be the client’s first experience of articulating for themselves their most important truths in the presence of another. In so doing they begin to *own* their Career Statement.

Immediately after the client has read it aloud, the career counselor or specialist should affirm and validate the content of the Career Statement. The active listening skills required of the career counselor or specialist, to hear, affirm and allow, is a kind of art form, using Godin’s (2010) definition of art as “a personal gift that changes the recipient.”

By providing feedback and engendering a belief for the client that their Career Statement can realistically emerge, confidence and optimism become the engine required for Intentional Exploration and shifts the frustrating and paralyzing experience that career exploration and job search can be.

COACHING CAREER HAPPINESS INTO EXISTENCE

The client is then introduced to Intentional Exploration (Figure 1) as the method by which clients enact their *Career Statement*. An extremely important, but often elusive first step is learning to be open and watchful for internal and external clues that may emerge. For example, in *The Wayfinders* (2009), anthropologist Wade Davis researched the travels of the ancient Polynesians as they explored the South Pacific, finally settling over 10,000 islands. By accompanying a master Polynesian navigator in a journey on the Hokule’a, a functionally accurate replica of the ancient ships, Davis found that the ancient

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Polynesians used a combination of profound receptivity to navigational clues and a powerful belief system in the existence of the islands that allowed them to continue journeying a seemingly endless ocean. Even without any modern navigational aids the ancient Polynesians were confident that they would find new homes for their population.

The combined effect of profound receptivity to clues, and the mindset that as-yet-undiscovered islands existed, shifted the ancient navigators' perspective and paradigm. Instead of *pushing* to actively explore, they believed they *pulled* the distant islands out of the horizon toward themselves. The idea of being rewarded for paying attention to clues by having the object of your desire be drawn to you is alluring. It is relevant to contemporary career explorers to have senses fully engaged and a mindset focused on deeper career and life desires in order to inspire action and intuitively navigate career change.

Clients are encouraged to imagine how they would feel if they were to live their Career Statement, in other words if their desires were realized, their strengths utilized, and so on. The resulting positive affect triggers the broaden and build phenomenon (Fredrickson, 2001). Drawing on a key finding from the field of positive psychology—when a client feels good they are able to “broaden” the number of envisioned possibilities, and “build” on their internal resources such as hope and optimism. Having a Career Statement helps clients *believe* that a better career exists for them beyond their horizon, and that belief, or mindset, is a key part of finding it.

WATCH FOR CLUES – VITAL TO THE EXPLORATION PLAN

Clues are everywhere. Like the stars and wind and waves that the ancient Polynesians used to navigate uncharted waters, clues are found in all environments and in every interaction—from conversations with friends or family to unexpected moments of synchronicity between internal thoughts and external events.

Clues are an essential part of the Intentional Exploration process. For any career or life possibility, such as a job as a service manager, or starting a craft business, or moving to another country, clients can be asked, “What clues have you noticed about this possibility?” Emphasizing the notion of clues is powerful and effective for three reasons.

It is useful to distinguish between and promote both internal and external clues. Internal clues relate to things clients notice within themselves, such as, “I’d like to start a website business because I love to design and build things”. External clues are things that happen in clients’ lives, like a chance meeting with an acquaintance.

TAKE INSPIRED ACTION – WELCOME OPPORTUNITIES

Taking inspired action naturally follows from receptivity to positive clues and openness to happenstance. Buoyed by the clues emerging in their lives, clients feel more aligned with taking action. Inspired action relates to the intrinsic desire to act, for clients to use their *Career Statement* like a compass, and explore possibilities by conducting field research, crafting personal experiments, and investigating internal opportunities (see page 9 for more examples).

Ibarra (2003) warns against delaying taking the first step in career change until one settles on a destination. She urges clients to create and test possible selves that we bring to life by doing new things, making new connections, and retelling our stories. These career experiments allow us to ‘flirt’ with our possible selves and allows for the emergence of an unhampered defining moment that allows for clarity of next action.

While almost everyone knows of happenstance stories in their own lives or the lives of others, people often perceive the arrival of opportunities as luck or chance. Arming clients with a watchful eye for clues increases client likelihood of harnessing happenstance aligned with their Career Statement.

It can be suggested to clients that they will tell future stories that demonstrate the “strange links between events, links they describe as ‘just luck’ or coincidence” (Bloch, 2005), but are really the result of being watchful for clues and taking inspired action toward them. This is a more nuanced way of looking at planned happenstance (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999), that by explicitly asking clients to watch for clues, they are more predisposed to recognize meaningful moments, pivot, embrace and fully explore them, and thereby attract opportunities not otherwise noticed or grasped.

SUPPORTING CLIENTS TO TAKE INSPIRED ACTION

Intentional Exploration can be used throughout one’s life and career cycles of stability and change, in which opportunities and happenstance are predictable and reliable outcomes. An authentic process that leads to satisfying choices, Intentional Exploration primes clients with a positively worded Career Statement, then explicitly asks them to watch for clues which predisposes them to recognize meaningful moments at any time of their day. The model shared here provides an example framework to help clients navigate uncertainty and change, to make thoughtful career decisions.

REFERENCES

A complete list of references is available upon request from the author.

7 WAYS TO TAKE INSPIRED ACTION WITHIN INTENTIONAL EXPLORATION

1. Authentically communicate with your contacts. Share your Career Statement with them and ask for leads and ideas.
2. Craft experiments, implementing small probes and projects, that allow you to try out new professional roles on a limited but tangible scale without committing to a particular direction.
3. Take yourself on a field trip. Go somewhere new that interests you and is aligned with some of your possibilities.
4. Investigate an internal opportunity. If you're employed or volunteering, be attuned to and check out the opportunities that may exist within your current workplace. Speak to your manager, your HR professional, or a volunteer coordinator.
5. Organize field research. Talk to people who know about your areas of interest or who have relevant experience in an organization. This is an effective way to get a sense of whether a possibility aligns with your Career Statement.
6. Notice volunteer opportunities. Volunteering in the direction of your career possibilities makes for effective career development. Focus on building a specific skill or expanding your network.
7. Start a side project. Very often new career opportunities develop from small projects or activities you do out of interest.



Author Bio



Mark Franklin, MEd, CMF (mark@careercycles.com) leads OneLifeTools.com and CareerCycles, a career management social enterprise with 3500+ clients, co-authored Who You Are Matters! game, and received the Stu Conger Career Development Leadership Award.