

“I think what I’ve done is more of a lifestyle .... It [career] doesn’t fit for me

because I think I’m just Maori aye... I call it career but it’s just to validate myself”

Career and culture remain intricately connected. The dominant Westernised culture continues to influence careers both by ‘legitimizing and determining the career patterns and practices in society’ (Thomas & Inkson, 2007). It is hoped that through a Maori culturally based attitude to and perception of career an alternative way of understanding career meaning and behaviour will have much to offer career theorists and researchers.

Career has been used to refer to the work experiences of some privileged groups of people and not others, and thus considered to be an elitist term. The notion of the term career being available to some and not others was supported by Warnath (1975) as inherently biased in favour of middle class populations. As a consequence the construction of career has been inextricably linked to specific workers such as the ‘professional’, those in limited and selective entry positions usually with a recognizable ascent of the organizational ladder.

Ultimately it has been the rise and fall of social institutions and the implication for the quality of people’s lives that have seen the concept of career change shape, form and meaning (Arthur, 2008). As an early vocational theorist Hall (1976) led the way by adding the dimension of personal learning to his definition: “a series of lifelong work-related experience and personal learnings”. More recently ‘career’ has been referred to as “the patterns and sequences of occupations and positions occupied by people across their working lives” (Young & Collin, 2000). Others (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989) agreed to the definition of career as the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time. The focus turned toward the internal, subjective career, a person’s perception and self construction of career.

It was the University of Chicago sociologists who used career as a lens for peering at larger social processes known as institutions (Barley, 1989). The sociological approach owes much to the

work of Hughes (1937) who theorised career in a broader framework including all life roles and experiences over time. Using the institution as the central level of analysis allowed Hughes to focus on the structural forces that constrain and shape human behaviour, while remaining attuned to how individuals continually create the meaning and norms within those institutions. For Hughes and his students career had simultaneous directions. On the one hand career pointed to those institutional forms of participation which constituted the objective face of career. While on the other, career pointed to the individual's experience of the career unfolding, the subjective face of career. Vocational theorists remained more focused on the individuals making productive career choices rather than on the organisation deciding on the most productive placement for itself.

Hughes insisted that career's two faces were inseparable. The fusion of career counselling and personal counselling also spoke of undividable boundaries. The view that individuals can separate out career issues from personal issues was based on the premise that holism was a preferred way to view individuals (McMahon & Patton, 2000). The juncture between personal issues and career issues increased the need to consider subjective and emotional processes experienced by clients. The role of the career counsellor became focused on issues of contextual importance as well as identifying the content of career.

Attempts within the career literature to the application of career to the experiences of the culturally different, has met similar critiques to that from feminist theorists. There are three major critiques of the application of mainstream career processes to diverse groups (Leong & Brown, 1995, cited in Walsh & Ospiow, 1995). They are that theories are based on a restricted range of persons, secondly they are based on limited assumptions of race and ethnicity, and thirdly the theories ignore sociopolitical, socioeconomic and sociocultural realities.

What has occurred within the career theory and career industry is the 'adaptation' of Western models. Some efforts have been made to extend extant theories to the career development of cultural minorities (Leong & Serafica, 1995; Gool & Patton, 1999; Li & Wright, 2000; Cook, Heppner & O'Brien, 2002). The effects of race/ethnicity have also been acknowledged (Roe, 1956; Super, 1957; Holland, 1985) within dominant and emerging theories, but have generally not been fully integrated within, nor received further inquiry from within a cultural perspective.

Defining career continues to create debate due to the multiplicity of disciplines and perspectives involved. There are very few studies that have specifically set out to inform practitioners and theorists about other cultural groups career related experiences (Prideaux & Creed, 2002).

Continued research is needed to broaden the understanding of career beyond established Western career concepts and their relation to cultural variations. It is imperative that such research is developed from within particular cultures (Tams & Arthur, 2007; Parham & Austin, 1994).

The opportunity to highlight career research to those practicing in the field of careers continues to be a focus in New Zealand (NZ). An examination of NZ research topics by Inkson et. al. (2002) identified a primary focus on organizational issues. More recent career research conference (2008) saw a much broader range of topics being researched. This conference included three presenters discussing their research on Maori women and new immigrant populations (Thermasseelan, 2006; Pio, 2006 & Humphries, M & McNicholas, P, 2005). Such research indicates movement toward listening and reporting on the career experiences of women from indigenous groups. Similarly a paper presented at the Australian Association of Career Counsellors conference introduced Maori myths to identify important life themes (Stirling-Hawkins, 2006). Myths and stories offer valuable insights into cultural values and practices and an understanding of distinctive worldviews and support systems. Other Maori values and concepts which play out in the process of career meaning are inclusiveness, connectedness and a

collective life. Emphasis is placed on people, their connections to each other through 'whakapapa' (genealogy) and principles practiced when together such as 'karakia' (prayer), 'manaakitanga' (hospitality) and 'koha' (giving and receiving of a gift). Attachment to the environment and spirituality is also a part of everyday life. Despite these recent developments, many questions remain about the career experience of Maori, such as how cultural values and behaviours impact on career choices and development. Further questions about the relevance and appropriateness of existing career development theory and practice prompted this study. Within this paper are responses from Maori adults about their meaning of career and related ideas.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative approach was selected to contextualise phenomena and allow for the exploration of participants experiences in their own voice. In the present study in-depth, semi structured interviews were used to explore the meaning of career by this sample of Maori adults. These interviews were carried out with the spirit of 'Kaupapa' Maori research. 'Kaupapa' Maori research is a research paradigm that acknowledges historical experiences that Maori have had with research. 'Kaupapa' Maori approaches to research are based on the assumption that research will seek positive and improved outcomes for participants and their wider communities. Smith's (1999) work theorising 'Kaupapa' Maori research argues that Western researchers collect, classify and then represent to the West, knowledge about indigenous peoples. In contrast 'Kaupapa' Maori research enables knowing and understanding theory and research from Maori perspectives for our own purposes. Approaches such as "involving Maori", "employing Maori", "research by and for Maori" (Bishop 1996, Cram 1997) are some examples that build on the 'Kaupapa' Maori research paradigm. It is with this intent this project sought to gather career narratives from Maori as neglected stakeholders in the context of the subject, the meaning of career. This project also sought to contribute to the improvement of career practices for Maori

and to advance the theorising of career from a Maori perspective. The interview method is consistent with the principles that underpin a 'Kaupapa' Maori research framework.

Life story interviews (Olson & Shopes, 1991) were chosen to encourage a reflective, narrative style where the interviewee sets the pace and the interviewer listens, clarifies, probes and possibly brings up topics that have not arisen spontaneously in the course of the interview conversation. According to Bishop (1996), storytelling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the diversities of experience within which the storyteller retains control. The description 'career life stories' was coined in recognition of the topic and chosen data collection method. Phrases, styles and descriptors used during the life story interviews were understood by the researcher and often reflected shared stories across other participants and the researcher herself. Being Maori was taken for granted, what was being validated and acknowledged was each participant's worldview of what this meant to them. This method encouraged the participants to reflect upon and talk about their experiences in a biographical manner (Edwards, McManus & McCreanor, 2005). While Drury (2007) expands this description to Maori talking of the loosening and binding of stories.

The interview began with the participants being asked to outline their early working life experiences. The key question "what does career mean to you" was presented typically within the middle stages of the interview. Further questions were asked on significant events and relationships, and influence of being Maori on their career. Demographic questions included age, tribal affiliations, highest level of education and personal identification with rural or urban living. These generally occurred at the end of the interview as some information had already been revealed during the answering of more substantive questions.

The twenty two participants were aged between 23 to over 60, thirteen were female and nine were male, and from both rural and urban backgrounds. Selection of participants was

made to span career life stages (Super, 1980). However this concept was adapted to include an integration of age, life stages and Maori cultural responsibilities. Three broad life stages were identified, 'rangatahi' (youth), 'pakeke' (adult), and 'kaumatua' (elder). The description 'career cultural stages' was coined for this sampling strategy.

Participants represented a wide geographic and occupational distribution to reflect the diversity of Maori. From the eight major occupational groupings (Census, 2001), three participants were Managers, four professionals, three technician and trade workers, four community and personal service workers, seven clerical and administrative workers, and one a sales worker. Participants had responded to an editorial on this study in the newsletter *Kokiri Paetae* (now *Kokiri*) published by the Ministry of Maori Development. Some participants were also selected purposively through established networks. All interviews were conducted by the researcher 'he kanohi i kitea' (Mead, 2003). In the context of research this means being prepared to show one's face and share of oneself. It was important for example, for the researcher to share 'whakapapa' (genealogy) and 'whanau' (family) connections within the interviews.

Participants chose the venue for interviews which included their private homes, workplaces and public spaces, e.g local cafes. Appropriate rituals of encounter such as 'karakia' (prayer), sharing of food, 'mihi' (personal introduction), 'koha' (gift) and 'manaakitanga' (hospitality) were practiced. Such practices ensured a wealth of strength and integrity to the joining of people on spiritual, physical and mental dimensions. The connectedness of why we were together at this point in time was immediately acknowledged.

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Copies of the transcripts were bound, printed on quality paper and sent back to participants to check for accuracy, errors and information they wished to have deleted. The returned transcripts were literal translations as not every word and thought had come from a unique individual. As such the interview in its raw

state is 'tapu' (sacred) to that person. Participants responded with corrections, comments and deletions, and this process continued until each was satisfied with the transcripts. Some participants requested copies of their original tape recording as well.

## **FINDINGS**

The qualitative data analysis software NVivo 7 was used to manage the data. A node was created for data on meaning of career. A node acts as a 'filing cabinet' for ideas and as related data emerges it can be collected in to that particular file. Themes were identified using words and related phrases and the frequency they were expressed by each participant. The major themes are described, primarily, using quotes from participants.

### **Enjoyment**

The vast majority of participants identified a career as being something they 'enjoyed':

"I think a career you enjoy, a job's just a job, you get paid you go"

"If you're passionate about it, it will work, doesn't matter what it is"

".. jobs are just jobs, I've had jobs but a career is something you enjoy"

Participants were both men and women, although most who expressed this sentiment fell within the 'rangatahi' (youth) and 'pakeke' (adult) career cultural stages.

### **Movement**

It was also typical for participants to respond to this question with a strong emphasis on moving forward:

"..just moving forward...in my mind its what moving forward is"

“..to advance in your employment, going up, accumulating more responsibility,  
people relying more upon you for your, I guess your experience, your knowledge base”

“..move up or out and still take the skills that I’ve learnt here to my next job  
or if I get a promotion”

Once again participants were both men and women primarily from the ‘rangatahi’ (youth) and ‘pakeke’ (adult) career cultural stages. A career was expressed as progression and a projection upward toward a goal. Movement was also determined as transporting your career ‘out’ of a sector or organization as well, “it’s like a goal to reach in whatever it might be for you”.

### **Learning**

‘Learning’ was a key characteristic of career for a number of participants too. It was particularly expressed by female ‘kaumatua’ (elder) participants. The culmination of learning was the attainment of specialist knowledge, also described as ‘skills’ by others. Accompanying specialist knowledge was the expectation was an ability to determine where further career opportunities would present themselves:

“I see career as specializing in something”

“I’ve developed a skill, met people, I understand processes ...been paid for it

.... I can see there’s opportunities that’s popped up within the same industry

that have allowed me to grow ... it enables me to use and develop skills”

“I was aware of the environment .....what did I need to do to keep my knowledge

base up .....to stay informed and I need to know what’s going on”



For some participants the acquisition of specialist knowledge would only occur by staying in one place and on the same path, “career for me is staying on the same path and going through”.

Yet another participant also saw continued opportunities were available to him beyond what he was currently doing or sector he was in, “I see career as you know, as progressive and, but always mindful that there are other opportunities or other challenges out there that might suit or be of interest to you”. Participants here were from the ‘rangatahi’ (youth) career cultural stage and included both men and women.

### **Identity**

A number of participants described career as a personal statement and claim of who they were, “it a profession that I would be dedicated to”. A small group also commented on how they enjoyed the control and self determination of directing their career:

“I’d have a direction where I want to go”

“it’s a decision you make early in life”

“Oh good I can do this and do that..I wonder what I want to do with my life ....

I’m not sure, so I kept working and saving money and as I was working I was learning”

These participants were from the ‘pakeke’ (adult) and’ kaumatua’ (elder) career cultural stages.

Some participants also saw unique identifying points in career for being Maori:

“career means tohunga tai, ...watching our characteristics”

“its in our whakapapa .....people need to know there is a specialty about you”

“its just part of those things” [whanau, friends]

These participants were from the 'pakeke' (adult) career cultural stage and focused on identity within the workplace and sector and being Maori in their organization and sector.

### **Personal conflict**

The most salient feature to the stories told by the participants while describing career was a hesitant response. The uncertainty was amplified by a number of participants attempting to justify what they did have, in contrast to a career. Descriptive characteristics of career provided by participants also saw them trying to distance their own career from some unspoken idealised description but at the same time expressing expectation that they should have a career:

“it didn't mean anything to me because no one else [in my whanau] had it or had done it”

“I've stayed on the same path but the jobs have taken me into different areas”

“I fell into things ..... it wasn't a planned, deliberately planned goal setting”

“No I don't [have a career] because of my work experiences have been relatively short term”

“career for me was like, okay, you've mucked around for the last you know forty odd years. Right you've bought up your family, done the whanau thing”

Yet there were also participants who did not feel compelled to justify what they had, it was simply what they did. The majority of participants here were from the career cultural stages of 'pakeke' (adult) and 'kaumatua' (elder), with the latter group being dominant.

## DISCUSSION

The question of this project was “what does career mean to Maori adults?” Career appears to be a concept among Maori in this sample that they were familiar with even though there is not an equivalent Maori translation. Specific words such as ‘path’, ‘progression’, ‘staying in one area’, ‘specialty’, ‘goal’ and ‘focus’ are consistent with traditional career models, or in Kanter’s (1989) terms as professional advancement within one or two firms. Participants used descriptions of career as “company constructs designed to facilitate stability, commitment and the development of desired employee skills and behaviours” (Parker & Kerr, 1999, p.78). There were some hallmarks of the ‘boundaryless career’ whereby portable skills, knowledge and abilities across multiple firms. These factors combine to suggest that participants may still view the responsibility of their career to be that of the organization.

Yet an uncomfortable marriage also exists for participants who were aware that their experiences in ‘career’ were different and unique to them. They expressed a strong desire to claim this experience but yet felt conflicted as to the validity and loss of personal identity and ‘mana’ (personal status) that this reunion may create. The societal ideal of what a successful or typical career should look like, did not match up with participants experiences. This is consistent with the lack of indigenous voice provided to individuals in the meaning making of their career.

When prompted to develop the meaning of career to what they have or had, participants used a different dimensions. Many participants reverted to a Maori worldview to locate career. Each description became more personal and subjective as the story began from a personal identity of being Maori. Career appeared subordinate and hidden in the background of who they are.

Participants were confident and eloquent when placing career within a career framework of being Maori. Being Maori was the validation and cornerstone to what they had experienced in their career. Participants spoke of how embedded career was in being them, being Maori.

Participants spoke of and created a cultural concept of self within the emerging career self. This is consistent with culture acting directly on individuals, influencing their work values, perceptions, beliefs and personal attitudes to careers (Thomas & Inkson, 2007).

Time has been inextricably linked to the definition of career as the evolving sequence of a persons work experiences over time. Yet participants in this project did not equate what they had accomplished over time to career. Their use of time was as an allocation for necessary activities such as child rearing, short term work experiences, learning new things and having new experiences. Time was seen as a passage that they passed through for the development of experience and knowledge on many levels.

Finally, the meaning career held different messages for participants across the career cultural stages. Those described as 'rangatahi' (youth) and 'pakeke' (adult) referred to career as the development of skills and progression and advancement. While 'kaumatua' (elder) welcomed learning and the seeking of knowledge, as the core meaning of career. Participants within the 'pakeke' (adult) career cultural stage were more likely to be remorseful at their inability to secure a career, while at the same time they were adamant that taking personal control of career was important. In contrast to this 'kaumatua' (elder) saw what they had experienced as the norm, they did not refer to it as career. They were simply experiences in life they had enjoyed. 'Rangatahi' (youth) were more likely to be confident in descriptors for meaning of career and in describing what they had as a career.

Career remains a central concept in the dominant Westernised culture. The value to Maori means that cultural relevance must be recognised first as it may be in direct opposition to the value placed on the concept by the rest of society. Knowledge needs to be expanded and made inclusive if managing in the pacific century is to become a reality.

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