

## Career Construction for Hephapreneurship<sup>1</sup>: Alternative Framework for Persons with Disabilities<sup>2</sup>

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n15p303

### Abstract

This article presents Career Construction for Hephapreneurship (CCH) and creates a roadmap of career choice/construction by people with disabilities, henceforth referred to as differently abled persons. The expression “differently abled persons” is a near-synonym of ‘persons with disabilities’. In this article, the idea of differently abled persons emphasises ‘positive difference’ and abilities instead of disabilities. The development of CCH was grounded in literature as well as the experiences of differently abled persons. A search for conceptual frameworks addressing career choice/construction by differently abled persons revealed gaps. This article outlines features of CCH constituting limited career choice, opportunities to learn, hephapreneurship and policy development. Particular emphasis is placed on the framework providing viable ways of assisting differently abled persons to participate actively in the world of work. The advantages of the framework centre on advocacy, policy influence and sparking further research on career construction and disability. The development of hephapreneurship is also possible.

**Keywords:** Career construction, hephapreneurship, public policy

### 1. Introduction

The spirit of entrepreneurship is spreading to address escalating levels of unemployment around the world today as a measure to reduce unemployment (Román, Congregado & Millán, 2013). Many unemployed people are forced into entrepreneurship as they find no alternative and therefore seek solace from it after long dry periods of unemployment. Although entrepreneurship is not new around the world, it is re-emerging and mushrooming in many economies of the world.

Never before has there been more need to re-focus entrepreneurship for it to be inclusive than in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is great need for differently abled persons to join the paradigm shift in mainstreaming disability issues (Miller & Albert, 2005). Within entrepreneurship, it is also vital to change the attitudes and language, and use new concepts that are in concert with inclusion. A search for an ideal and inclusive entrepreneurship model reveals paucity of frameworks that link career choice /construction and entrepreneurship through hephapreneurship. In this article, I review components of the conceptual framework, namely: limited career choice, opportunities to learn, hephapreneurship and policy development. I conclude the article by suggesting steps to be followed towards hephapreneurship.

### 2. Employment Exclusion of Differently Abled Persons

Employment exclusion is one of the most devastating obstacles facing differently abled persons in the new millennium (Barnes & Mercer, 2005). Employment landscapes are unfriendly and most differently abled persons experience exclusion from participating gainfully in the world of work (Grammenos, 2003). Despite the promise of inclusive employment, current disability and employment policies do not adequately map out feasible and sustainable ways to employ differently abled persons (Martz, 2007). Even with frameworks such as South Africa’s Employment Equity’s Code of Good Practice and Technical Assistance Guidelines, in many countries implementation remains a challenging stumbling block (Roggero, Tarricone, Nicoli & Mangiaterra, 2006). Sometimes the models used to screen differently abled persons for employment still emphasise functionality over abilities that differently abled persons possess. Thus, the

<sup>1</sup>Hephapreneurship is a process of fostering positive and meaningful existence that is anchored on subsistence entrepreneurship by differently abled persons and underprivileged persons, founded on the ethos of career choice/construction towards transformative social justice and change.

<sup>2</sup>This manuscript is based on a key note address read at the AfriNEAD symposium in November, 2011.

dilemma of employment and disability continues unabated unless alternative ways are sought to remedy it.

Meanwhile, excluding differently abled persons from employment may be counterproductive to self-enhancement and socio-economic development. By not allowing differently abled persons productive participation, countries may be depriving themselves of potential contribution regarding the reduction of unemployment rates, economic development and enhancement of livelihoods of many disadvantaged populations (Redley, 2009). Equally, psycho-social benefits may be forfeited through exclusion of differently abled persons from the labour market (Schur, 2002). Apart from the usually emphasised economic aspects of exclusion, I envisage that the psycho-social wellbeing of differently abled persons might play a pivotal role through subsistence entrepreneurship, allowing them to make significant contributions in society (McArdle, Waters, Briscoe & Hall, 2007). However, continued employment exclusion is likely to deepen poverty, promote lack of education and precarious living conditions for differently abled persons resulting in disproportionate unemployment rates between differently abled persons and those presumed fit for work.

Unemployment of differently abled persons seems to intensify in current societies (Mont, 2004), a fact which could be attributed to public policy that is not pro-disability and labour market inefficiencies resulting in an imbalanced and out-of-synch supply and demand scenario (Roggero, Tarricone, Nicoli & Mangiaterra, 2006). Unemployment in this article refers to the lack of access to work in the labour market and is considered a major factor that can often lead to life changes well beyond the period of non-work in the marketplace (Blustein, Medvide & Wan, 2011). Unemployment in relation to disability is associated with the employment exclusion of differently abled persons. Through CCH, I surmise that differently abled persons could choose and construct a career under the auspices of hephapreneurship as will be later demonstrated in the article. However, disability still plays a crucial role on career choice/construction by differently abled persons. Thus, development of models such as CCH could alleviate the problem of differently abled persons' employment exclusion. Below I provide a rationale for CCH.

### **3. Rationale for Career Construction for Hephapreneurship**

Employment of differently abled persons poses challenges in the world of work today than ever before. The current economic melt down exacerbates unemployment of differently abled persons (Kaye, 2010). Appeals to employer altruism in the 1960's and 1970's and thereafter, did not yield significant outcomes (Luecking, 2008). Many differently abled persons end up in precarious work arrangements as a measure to appeas and pretend to observe employment anti-discrimination regulations by many employers (Vick & Lightman, 2010). Precarious work arrangements imply non-standard forms of employment which are discriminative, exclusionary and stigmatising (Vosko, 2006). Many factors could be significant in this regard, but central to unemployment of differently abled persons seems to be limited career choice that may lead to a career (Wehman, 2011).

There has been a substantial amount of disability research in disciplines such as disability studies, rehabilitation, psychology, sociology and education, but such research remains limited in career psychology generally and in career guidance specifically. Research on differently abled persons and their career choice/construction continues to be insignificant. Unemployment of differently abled persons continues to be significant as demonstrated by lower employment rates (Riddell, Edward, Weedon & Ahlgren, 2010).

Given the above mentioned scenario, it is imperative that societies consider alternative ways to accommodate differently abled persons in the world of work while not exonerating employers and governments from their social responsibility to honour the right to employment of differently abled persons. In the light of this, I propose CCH to address career choice/construction of differently abled persons and transition towards meaningful livelihoods based on informed life-designs (Savickas, et al., 2009). Below, I articulate the features of CCH.

### **4. Features of the Framework on Career Construction for Hephapreneurship**

The proposed framework builds on the social integrationist discourse (1998) and emphasises hephapreneurship over paid work for differently abled persons through encouraging self-employment (Watts, 2001). The framework was developed from extant literature (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) and built on key concepts and processes gleaned from review of literature in career psychology (Chen, 2004), disability (Jones & Wass, 2013) and entrepreneurship (Misra, 2012). Below I present the features of CCH which further explain the essence of hephapreneurship. The features are explained from below, starting with limited career choice through to policy development.

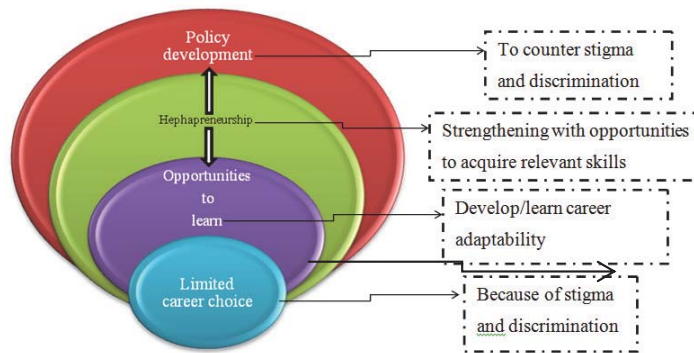


Fig. 1: Framework of Career construction for hephapreneurship (CCH)

#### 4.1 Limited career choice

Multiple factors render career choice for differently abled persons limited. Stigma and discrimination are central to limiting career choice by differently abled persons generally. Since career choice forms an axis of CCH as a fundamental step towards construction of a career, it should be a non-stereotypical choice of a productive way of life that enhances individual abilities towards 'self' and 'other' under hephapreneurship. Hephapreneurship encourages focusing on abilities and developing them to enable differently abled persons to live productively. It is however, noted that career choice of differently abled persons is limited by disability as one of the primary factors (Lindstrom, Benz & Doren, 2004). Another key factor in limited career choice of differently abled persons emerges as disempowering family attitudes, spreading to school and extending to the world of work (Björnsdóttir & Sigurjónsdóttir, 2013). It is generally accepted that parents serve as mentors and role models for their children's choice of a career. Nonetheless, depending on their attitude towards work and disability, sometimes parental expectations limit career choice of differently abled children (Wong, 2007; Zellweger, Sieger & Halter, 2010).

Schools as institutions are generally assumed to serve the best interest of the child (Miller, 2002). However, despite the best of intentions, stigma and discrimination are exercised by teachers who limit differently abled children, usually discouraging them to choose certain careers considered unsuitable for them without respect for individual choice (Ali, Schur & Blanck, 2011). Teachers however, play a pivotal role in influencing children's choices (Shumba & Naong, 2012). It is nonetheless, crucial that teachers do not impose themselves on children's choices, especially differently abled children. Anchored on hephapreneurship's spirit built on principles of positive psychology, emphasis of abilities of each differently abled child should form the bases for career choice. Construction of a career should be based on choice that is free from disability stigma and discrimination. Informed choices should pave way to accessing an inclusive world of work for differently abled persons.

The world of work equally forms a profoundly complex area that limits career choice of differently abled persons. For a long time, differently abled persons have suffered discrimination in relation to work and employment (Pothier, 2010). Currently many policies claim to promote or provide employment for differently abled candidates. Nonetheless, it proves difficult to absorb differently abled persons in the world of work as many of them would be inadequately educated, skilled and lacking competencies required by the employer, therefore discriminated (Luecking, 2008). Inadequate education, lack of skills and required competencies of differently abled persons aggravate the problem of limited career choice. Hephapreneurship addresses limited career choice by confronting issues of stigma and discrimination and encouraging opportunities for lifelong learning.

#### 4.2 Opportunities to learn

Limited career choice under positive psychology could inversely be regarded as fertile ground for opportunities to learn and participate (Jongbloed, 2003). Learning is fundamental to hephapreneurship as a lifelong process because it aligns with differently abled persons recognising entrepreneurial learning opportunities (Rae, 2000). Beyond equalisation of opportunities to learn, career choice is regarded as the cornerstone of career development and management (Patrick & Kumar, 2011). In order to reach acceptable levels of career development and management, many differently abled

persons require opportunities to learn. Such opportunities should be geared towards learning for living and work as a continuous process under lifelong learning (Koschmann, 2007) in promotion of learning communities (Pavey, 2006).

In today's technologically laden world of work, learning could be promoted through use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in order to promote advanced learning among differently abled persons (Sefotho, 2010). Technology today could potentially provide innumerable opportunities for differently abled persons. Some mobile technologies such as mobile phones have enjoyed extensive diffusion such that the majority of people own them (Cobcroft, Towers, Smith & Bruns, 2006). Learning could take place through radio-based approaches and educational television leading to learning by doing (Campbell & Oblinger, 2007). Learning by doing implies learning for self-employment by differently abled persons. While formal employment is encouraged, "self-employment is an important source of paid work for disabled people" (Boylan & Burchardt, 2002, p. 4). Thus, in this article, I encourage hephapreneurship as a step towards career adaptability for differently abled persons. The idea is to adapt to hephapreneurship as a new career path that provides alternatives to unemployment or underemployment. Career adaptability also promotes opportunities to learn about self through career exploration and planning (Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen & De Pater, 2011). Career adaptability becomes more relevant to differently abled persons who may need to make changes constantly to accommodate their context, "...considering options and alternatives" (Duys, Ward, Maxwell & Eaton-Comerford, 2008). Opportunities to learn provide a chance to learn about career information and self in relation to the career chosen. All learning under hephapreneurship aims to enable differently abled persons to construct relevant careers in order to live productive, interdependent and fulfilling lives.

### 4.3 Hephapreneurship

"Hephapreneurship is a process of fostering positive and meaningful existence built on subsistence entrepreneurship of differently abled persons and other underprivileged persons, founded on the ethos of career choice/construction towards transformative social justice and social change" (Sefotho, 2013, p. 23). Jones (2013) recognises subsistence as a right and alerts us that: "To subsist is to survive or to have the capacity to support oneself: subsistence interests, then, are interests in survival" (p. 61). The fact that most differently abled persons may not have the capacity to support themselves supports the argument for hephapreneurship. Interest in survival may be a wish of most if not all differently abled persons. They have an interest to subsist. Subsistence economies such as those of the Aztec maize preparation in Mexico (Biskowski, 2000), the nomadic economy of the Tibetan plateau (Manderscheid, Naukkarinen, Ning & Colpaert, 2002), African subsistence economies found in much of Africa (Bohannon, 1959) predate current market economies (Nelson, 2004; Prentis, 2013). Sub-Saharan Africa is equally characterised by self-employment in the face of high rates of unemployment (Gamberoni, Heath & Nix, 2012). Therefore, the quest for a better life by differently abled persons and opportunity recognition necessitate subsistence entrepreneurship within subsistence and market economies triggered by high unemployment (Lehner & Kaniskas, 2012). Building on subsistence economies, differently abled persons are likely to construct careers to bring about employment equity and transformative social justice. Smith (2004) emphasises the importance of subsistence entrepreneurship in both developing as well as developed countries highlighting that: "Subsistence entrepreneurship, particularly in a rural setting is about surviving and making the best of opportunities" (p. 46).

Although hephapreneurship may not be a panacea to unemployment problems of differently abled persons, it might be a beacon of hope in the era of escalating unemployment (Barnes & Mercer, 2010). Today, entrepreneurship is seen as a viable solution to the ever-growing problem of unemployment (Othman & Ishak, 2009). As observed by Smallbone (2010), "it is increasingly recognised that entrepreneurship is a global phenomenon, which is not confined to mature market environments" (p. xxi). While acknowledging an overabundance of problems surrounding entrepreneurship, self-employment is regarded as particularly outstanding to people living with disabilities (Ipsen & Arnold, 2005). Hephapreneurship therefore becomes pivotal as a model that unlocks entrepreneurial capabilities through active engagement and economic flexibility for differently abled persons (Hisrich, Langan-Fox & Grant, 2007). Features of hephapreneurship are explicated later in the article.

Hephapreneurship fosters a growth path towards life enriching and sustainable alternatives to differently abled persons' unemployment (Baldrige & Neubaum, 2008). Through hephapreneurship, differently abled persons stand to experience social, economic and psychological benefits such as freedom, flexibility, and independence (Cooney, 2008). Since subsistence entrepreneurship is used as anchor for hephapreneurship, similar benefits inherent to entrepreneurship may be expected from the hephapreneurial experiences of successful entrepreneurship (Osborne, 1995). Hephapreneurship however, envisages benefits that would transcend those found from entrepreneurship in general through mainstreaming differently abled persons' abilities, their own development and experiences to guide

action in fighting employment exclusion (Vick & Lightman, 2010).

#### 4.4 Policy development

Policy development engenders countering stigma and discrimination in order to open up opportunities for differently abled persons. Future public policy discourse encourages viewing pro-disability policy development that perceives informal self-employment as a potential asset to socio-economic development (Williams & Windebank, 2006). I suggest hephapreneurship as a framework to drive public policy development agenda regarding career choice and informal self-employment of differently abled persons. Although disability policies may form part of public policy in societies such as Canada (Jongbloed, 2003), in some less developed countries policy development may be fragmented and territorial (Johnston & Helms, 2008).

Through hephapreneurship, a call is made for cross and inter-ministerial policy development in order to encompass various types of disabilities, significant and persistent challenges faced by differently abled persons (Sin, Hedges, Cook, Mguni & Comber, 2009). All stakeholders need to strive towards public policy development with the aim of fighting against stigma and discrimination (Johnston & Helms, 2008). Every policy is contingent upon antecedents that caused it. Stigma and discrimination against differently abled persons if left unchecked might perpetuate inchoate and asynchronous policy development.

In the light of CCH, public policy needs to be developed to cater for self-employment needs of differently abled persons to allow programmes and projects to address different work and employment needs. Good practice examples, such as that of China, show radical changes of the employment landscape for differently abled persons regarding equitable employment opportunities (Huang, Guo & Bricout, 2009). Hephapreneurship is envisaged to promote the agenda of socio-economic transformation as well as supportive policies that cater for the welfare of differently abled persons, through changing attitudes of stigma and discrimination. The basic ingredients are the experiences of differently abled persons, advocacy and participation in productive activities.

### 5. Steps Towards Hephapreneurship

Pathways towards hephapreneurship are constructed through acquisition of requisite and relevant skills for differently abled persons. Hephapreneurship aligns with differently abled persons' ability to turn ideas into hephapreneurial reality, constructing careers based on abilities developed from subsistence entrepreneurship (Smith, 2006). It may perhaps be prudent for differently abled persons to consider aligning themselves with current developments such as inclusive green economies (Ofreneo, 2012) and technological advancement in addressing the need to participate productively in society (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008).

#### 5.1 Identification of a repertoire of skills and attitudes forming an entrepreneurial personality

Differently abled persons need to identify their career personality that aligns with an entrepreneurial personality (Caliendo & Kritikos, 2012). Individuals must find their special gifts, talents, competences and abilities. Based on contemporary careers approach, differently abled persons' required repertoire of skills could include being value-driven and self-directed, as well as having physical and psychological mobility (Segers et al., 2008). The emphasis should be on requisite knowledge, skills and abilities. Hephapreneurship promotes the following among a large repertoire of skills needed for a hephapreneurial career:

##### 5.1.1 Soft/people skills

Hephapreneurship cultivates thinking creatively, communicating, making decisions, solving problems, and analysing, giving feedback and cooperating (Murphy, 2010). These skills could also be seen as functional life skills, sometimes referred to as skill mix (Fulton et al., 2011). Entrepreneurship may not be an easy field for differently abled persons to venture into inadequately prepared. While skills mentioned above are fundamental, central among them are communication and networking skills (Rahman, 2010). Given that most differently abled persons may be living in less privileged habitats, it becomes crucial for them to communicate with the world, to expose their talents, express their needs and let society know that they are part of the human race, deserving of all that is good for humanity. In this information age, optimisation of communication technologies could form part of skills development for differently abled persons since some of them may have inadequate mobility. With improved access through technology, differently abled



persons' outreach stands to benefit hephapreneurial endeavours they may embark upon under the banner of boundaryless careers (Savickas, 2011). Through information technology, communication skills ought not to be confined by space or time. These skills should be developed to enhance the hephapreneurial personality that helps business grow through building networks.

### 5.1.2 *Entrepreneurial and business management skills*

Entrepreneurial and business management skills encompass social perception (the ability to perceive others accurately), expressiveness (the ability to express feelings and reactions clearly and openly), impression management (skill in making favourable first impressions on others), expressiveness (the ability to express emotions clearly and openly), and social adaptability (proficiency in adapting one's actions to current social contexts) (Baron & Tang, 2009). Mayer, Roberts and Barsade (2007) encourage that, "as skills grow in one area (e.g., perceiving emotions), so will skills in other areas, such as understanding emotions and being able to regulate them" (p. 513), which is fundamental for differently abled persons. Understanding is fundamental, especially self-understanding of differently abled persons who need to know their abilities as well as weaknesses and how to compensate for them. In order to develop a working personality, differently abled persons have to know and understand their functioning in the work environment under different circumstances. They need skills to manage themselves, their career as well as their businesses (Yusuf, 2013).

### 5.1.3 *Technical/hard or core skills for work*

Technical/hard or core skills for work are skills differently abled persons need to perform multiple functions that will assist them to develop hephapreneurial careers. "Technical skills are those which equip someone to undertake a particular task", (ILO, 2008, p. 22). Since most differently abled persons would have experienced career choice limitations, it may equally be possible that they do not possess requisite skills for performing jobs. Depending on a case-by-case approach, core skills for work need to be identified and developed. Such skills should be identified on the bases of a purpose for a chosen career; however, the requirement would be to aspire for more generic skills or skills mix (Fulton et al., 2011). Where possible apprenticeships and learnerships should be utilised in order to expose differently abled persons to the right skills; especially those who have less or no working experience. Skills for work form part of a skills package all workers must have, but more importantly differently abled workers.

## 5.2 *Career construction and training*

Career construction is based on the constructivist approach to psychology which acknowledges that individuals construct their own reality (Patton & McMahon, 2006). In this article, constructing one's career is regarded as tantamount to constructing one's reality. The reality of career construction for differently abled persons implies a crucial step that should be taken against many obstacles from self and society. For Savickas (2011), career construction can be perceived as constructing self and identity. Enshrined in this article, constructing a career entails constructing hephapreneurial self and identity, otherwise referred to as "self-construction (Guichard, Pouyauud & Dumora, 2011, p. 57). As differently abled persons construct multiple selves, it is fundamental to prioritise training (Mkhize, 2011).

Hephapreneurial career construction can benefit from training and apprenticeship as emphasised by Baron and Tang, (2009); Hisrich, Langan-Fox and Grant, (2007) as well as Samuel (2010). Differently abled hephapreneurs could benefit from training to prepare for starting new business ventures (Baron & Tang, 2009) and developing entrepreneurial attitudes (Hisrich, Langan-Fox & Grant, 2007). "From a constructionist viewpoint, career denotes a moving perspective that imposes personal meaning on past memories, present experiences, and future aspirations by patterning them into a life theme" (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 246). Differently abled persons may be likely to construct a career in hephapreneurship prompted by their memories of the past, current experiences and future aspirations to enhance their lives, therefore, likely to start business ventures.

### 5.3 *Starting a business venture*

The last step towards career construction for hephapreneurship is starting a business venture after earlier preparatory stages. Hisrich, Langan-Fox and Grant (2007) document that entrepreneurship is a major source of employment, economic growth and innovation, promoting product and service quality, competition, and economic flexibility (Yang, 2012). It is also a mechanism by which many people enter society's economic and social mainstream. Thus, differently

abled persons could be included into society via starting business ventures and enjoying the economic flexibility while participating in the social sphere.

Starting a business venture has many triggers depending on individuals and their circumstances. However, disability alone sometimes suffices to be the main trigger for differently abled persons to face insurmountable obstacles that prevent them from accessing meaningful employment (Sayce, 2012; Ormerod & Newton, 2013). Nonetheless, differently abled persons have to recognise entrepreneurial opportunities to start a business venture (Lehner & Kansikas, 2012). Thus, starting a business venture sometimes is forced by circumstances such as loss of a job, being laid off and companies restructuring or relocating. For differently abled persons, starting up a business venture may be a necessary alternative given that most are poor, uneducated and unemployed. Under hephapreneurship, starting up a new venture is encouraged as a deliberate career choice once supported by policy (Bygrave, 2003).

## 6. Conclusion

The conceptual framework on Career Construction for Hephapreneurship can be seen as an instrument of advocacy and encouragement of subsistence entrepreneurship for improvement of the lives of differently abled persons. In this article, I have described a comprehensive conceptual framework that may be used to guide, encourage and assist policy development towards career construction of differently abled persons. Particular emphasis was placed on abilities possessed by differently abled persons and encouraging self-employment. I wish to offer my ideas to colleagues in various fields such as career psychology, disability employment and policy to test and critique them in their own practice.

## 7. Acknowledgements

This paper is part of a large-scale PhD research, which was funded by the University of Pretoria.

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