Reaction Paper on Nine Lives

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Nine Lives is an informal career assessment that eliminates the practical barriers people face in choosing their careers, including pay, skills, qualifications, and social and cultural expectations, so people can freely choose or even wildly construct their dream jobs. This paper summarizes the reactions of the author after experiencing the assessment in class, discusses how the tool can be helpful with clients by integrating with trait-and-factor and person-environment-fit (PEF) converge model and proposes concrete next steps in achieving the client's career goals.

Personal Reaction

During the activity, participants were instructed to think about nine careers they would like to have if they could have nine lives without some practical barriers. The author noticed that some participants were quick in coming up with the nine careers, whereas others, including the author, had difficulty coming up with all nine. At the first attempt, the author could only think of three. During the discussion, when prompted to think about childhood interests, the author was able to retrieve some fond memories related to art and beauty; like a moment of epiphany, the author suddenly became capable of coming up with the rest of the careers and experienced a sense of joy of being able to re-connect with a vital part of her who was long gone. The difficulty in stripping out the pragmatic considerations to reveal the long-hidden desire of the heart reflects a deep-rooted familial and cultural influence on the author to be pragmatic in choosing a career and her very practical and goal-oriented personality. The discussion continued with the author explaining the reasons behind each career choice. By verbalizing the rationales behind the options, the author could organize her thoughts and identify some common themes of the chosen jobs.

After experiencing the Nine Lives activity, the author finds the tool easy to execute and helpful in moving unspoken values and desires to an overt position for exploration. This creative exploration can lead to new insights and awareness, increasing reflexivity and self-knowledge. By removing the pragmatic restrictions and providing a space and acceptance for clients to be introspective, the Nine Lives activity not only allows a client to discover themes meaningful to them but also provides an emotionally fulfilling experience when the client can increase in self-understanding and even connect with the genuine self.

However, the critiques of this tool include disregarding a person's abilities and pay from the occupations may make career decision sounds too simple and unrealistic. Also, there may not exist a work to match the needs and values identified. Therefore, after the creative exploration of the heart's desires, the practical considerations of pay, ability, and sociocultural factors would still be considered when designing an action plan for a client.

Key Themes Processing

As the author analyzed the nine careers generated from the activity, three themes came through: experiencing the different lives of others, helping people, and valuing beauty and creativity. The author is always aware of a desire to help others which is a spiritual calling and why she is pursuing a counseling career. However, to the author’s surprise, when she verbalized that she included actress on the list to experience different walks of life, she suddenly realized the top two careers (counselor and life coach) also share the theme of being able to experience the lives of others. This theme is rooted in the author’s curious personality trait to explore and understand varieties in life. The third theme of valuing beauty and creativity has been a hidden theme buried by life’s pragmatics. The author grew up in a grass root family, which nurtured the author to have a practical and goal-oriented personality. She recalled how she used to love and

possess talents in art and music when she was little. However, she slowly gave up development in these areas. She was determined to pursue a career that guaranteed good monetary returns to provide for her family. Therefore, she sought a finance job as her first career. The author uncovered this long-lost passion for beauty and creativity through the current activity, which is vital in bringing her joy and fulfillment.

The author is now in pursuit of a second career in life. Her decision to become a mental health counselor fulfills two key themes identified in this activity, providing a certain level of comfort that she is making the right choice. Moreover, through the exploration in class, she learned that she could fulfill the last theme of valuing beauty and creativity through participating in other leisure activities and hobbies involving expressive art and music. This explorative process of Nine Lives activity has generated much insight for the author, and hence she believes it would be helpful for other clients in the same way.

Integration with Trait-and-factor and Person-environment-fit Converge Model

Assuming the author was the client, who has an identity of a devoted Christian and emphasizes the pursuit of a counseling career as a calling, the goals of the career counseling are to confirm if the client should pursue this counseling career and whether it will provide the satisfaction and fulfillment in life. The author will adopt the trait-and-factor and PEF converge model to help the client. According to the Work as Calling Theory (WCT; Duffy et al., 2019, p.337), “those perceiving a calling are likely to actually live out a calling because of having a great fit with their work, finding meaning in their work, and feeling committed to their work.” Therefore, identifying an occupation with optimal person-environment fit will likely facilitate the client in living out her calling and finding meaning and satisfaction in life.

The trait-and-factor and PEF converge model adapted some trait-and-factor methods to determine person-environment-fit. It posits that measured abilities, interests, and values can facilitate an individual's match to an occupational environment, fulfilling the individual's reinforcement needs and enhancing job satisfaction (Zunker, 2016). There are seven stages in the model (Dawis, 1996; Swanson & Fouad, 2010; Walsh, 1990): 1) intake interview, 2) identify developmental variables, 3) assessment, 4) identify and solve problems, 5) generate PEF analysis, 6) confirm, explore, and decide, and 7) follow-up.

Based on the Nine Lives results, the intrinsic values and interests found would be integrated into the assessment stage, where a comprehensive evaluation of the client's abilities, values, and interests are measured to determine a client's work skills and reinforcement needs in an occupational environment (Zunker, 2016). Nine Lives carves out the pragmatic factors, including pay, abilities, and environmental factors; however, meaningful and fulfilling work only happens when synergies exist between work and personal characteristics, including values, needs, passions, and abilities (MacKinnon, 2020). Therefore, a holistic understanding of a client is needed and will be obtained via assessments and clinical observation typically carried out from stages one to three in the trait-and-factor PEF converge model. The tasks involve collecting developmental information, assessing emotional status and cognitive clarity, understanding contextual interactions, environmental variables, abilities, reinforcer requirements, and information-processing skills (Zunker, 2016). Particularly, the client's abilities (work skills), which is a missing part in Nine Lives, will be measured with the General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB) (U.S. Department of Labor, 1970), while the client's values (work needs) will be further measured by the Minnesota Importance Questionnaire (MIQ) (University of Minnesota, 1984).

After the comprehensive information gathering, the next step is to generate PEF analysis, in other words, it is to help the client identify matching occupations that provide optimal adjustment based on two matching criteria: abilities-and-demand and needs-and-supply, which result in the individual's satisfactoriness and satisfaction, respectively (Valenzuela & Rogers, 2021). In this step, an occupation classification system, such as the Minnesota Occupational Classification System III (Dawis et al., 1987), will be used to locate occupations for abilities demanded and reinforcers provided. Specifically, the author will review the test data and analysis outcomes to determine if the client is comfortable with the results. If the client disagrees that the predicted jobs are congruent with her characteristics, further exploration of the missing links and recycling in the model may be needed. In this particular case, the results will likely confirm that a counseling job is a good fit for her, and may even widen the matching scope to include other occupational possibilities. Some potential questions to explore here may include finding out how much study it would require to obtain the degree required to be a counselor, how many years of interning, whether the client has enough financial resources to sustain the study, and if there are other obstacles standing in her way, the client may have to rethink her career choice or find ways to eliminate the barriers.

During the final stage, the client is in a position to decide on a career and can proceed to explore learning opportunities to increase knowledge and personally experience the career. For instance, if the client confirms that she wants to work as a counselor, she can start counseling courses, volunteer in a mental health clinic to observe how a counselor works, and connect with other counselors so the client can ask them career-related questions directly. Last but not least, regular follow-up meetings should be set up to evaluate progress made along the way, the satisfaction level, and determine if any additional intervention is needed.

Conclusion

The Nine Lives assessment, coupled with an explorative discussion with a partner, helps promote the author's reflexivity and reveals the author's deepest values and passions buried by life's pragmatics. Three themes were identified (experiencing different lives of others, helping people, and valuing beauty and creativity) for the author and can be fulfilled by potentially pursuing a career in counseling and supplemented with engaging in hobbies involving expressive art and music. The goals of the career counseling sessions are to confirm if the client should pursue this counseling career and whether it will provide the satisfaction and fulfillment expected. To achieve these goals, the trait-and-factor PEI converge model will be used to provide a holistic understanding of the client, including those factors disregarded in Nine Lives, including pay, abilities, and social-cultural factors, and identify an occupation with optimal person-environment fit with the author's unique characteristics. The results will provide further insights and potential confirmation to facilitate the client in living out her calling and finding meaning and satisfaction in life.

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