"Breaking through the morass": Narratives of resistance and persuasion by individuals in creative economy careers

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Abstract

Work has become a central part of the lives of individuals. Based on this, individuals are deviating away from traditional career paths to follow those that appeal to their artistic and creative talents. The creative economy is noted to be a net contributor towards development, with more individuals being drawn to explore creative careers. However, there are not many empirical studies undertaken to explore the career development processes of those individuals engaged in such work. This research aimed to explore the career development processes of individuals working within the creative economy in South Africa. To achieve its aim, this study identified and engaged 20 participants operating within the South African creative economy in semi-structured interviews. Data was analysed using three levels of meaning-making which were adopted in previous qualitative research. Based on data analysis, three narrative findings emerged. Firstly, the presence of structural constraints was found to affect individuals operating within the creative economy. Secondly, the study also revealed resistance as a tool employed by individuals in the formative years of their careers to navigate past constraints. Thirdly, it was found in the latter years of the individual's career, that resistance was replaced by persuasion in order to deal with constraints in creative economy careers. Based on the findings and narratives generated from this work, suggestions are made that affect individuals within the creative economy as well as those who counsel these individuals.

Keywords: Creative Economy; Narratives; Careers; South Africa.

1. Introduction

Work has become central to the lives of modern-day working lives. This has often resulted in work being classified as a calling (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Individuals who frame their work as a calling are believed to derive a sense of purpose and meaningfulness through the work they do (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010). However, in developing countries such as South Africa, the experience of work, including career issues, are noted to be complex (Chinyamurindi, 2012; 2016a; 2016b; 2017). This complexity is also a result of challenges such as high unemployment often resulting in individuals settling for any kind of work just to earn a living (Maree, 2017a). This state of being has resulted in behaviours such as career change (Chinyamurindi, 2016a), quests for career success (Chinyamurindi, 2016c); the need for career adaptability (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017); the questioning of career counselling in such a context (Maree, 2017b) and also a challenge of traditional notions of individual loyalty to one company (Doyle, 2017).

Within such a context, calls exist to understand the career development processes of individuals affected by such a context of change (Chinyamurindi, 2016a) and the processes (including skills) needed at such a time (Wolfe, 2017). An issue of paramount importance is to understand how individuals in such a context not only choose but also construct their careers (Savickas, 2007; 2015). This can play a useful basis for quality career counseling that is responsive to the needs of a changing environmental context (Savickas, 2015). Further, calls exist to understand contemporary careers deemed to place emphasis more on individual agency (Arthur, 1994) and understand careers that are not only mobile but also self-directed (Gubler, Arnold & Coombs, 2014).

The article starts with a brief focus on careers within the creative economy encompassing the theoretical and empirical literature review. The research design and methodology used are then given attention. The article concludes with a presentation of the results and a discussion of the findings with the empirical literature. Implications for the individuals within the creative economy, policy makers, and career counselors are finally presented.

2. Careers in the creative economy

The creative economy is viewed as consisting of those sectors that concern the supplying of goods and services associated with "cultural, artistic or entertainment value (Caves, 2002, p. 1). The creative economy emerges as a sector that is receiving currency and significant worth (e.g. Lampel, Lant &

Shamsie, 2000; Scott, 2010; UNCTAD, 2008). Through the implementation of their talent, creative workers enact their ideas that may assume a possible change in society (Montanari, Scapolan & Gianecchini, 2016). This places importance on studying the careers of those individuals operating within the creative economy and positioning individuals in such careers as a crucial human capital (Eikhof, 2014). Careers within the creative economy appear to mirror those aspects assumed within contemporary career theorising. This given their emphasis on the use of talents, abilities and individual self-management (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006; Menger, 1999). Further, careers within the creative economy also represent an enactment of career choice based on individual values and preferences (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). These careers can be thought of to be part of the idea of portfolio careers where individuals contract their skills and negotiate self-employment arrangements (Handy, 1995). Despite all this, there is empirical evidence showing how difficult it is for those in the creative economy to secure employment (Ashton, 2014). This can help bridge the links that potentially exist between the higher education sector and the creative economy for wider ramifications to policy issues (Ashton & Noonan, 2013). Further, the creative economy offers potential as an industry that can encourage innovation (Lampel & Germain, 2016).

The main question guiding the research was: what factors influence the career development processes of individuals within the creative economy in South Africa?

3. Theoretical & empirical postulations

This study considers two theoretical postulations as assisting in understanding the career development processes of individuals working within the creative economy in South Africa.

First, the focus is on the Systems Theory Framework (STF) framed within the careers literature (Patton & McMahon, 2006). The STF emphasizes the role and value of interconnected systems to the career development process as being those that are intrapersonal, those in the social context and factors specific to the individual (Patton & McMahon, 2014). These factors, by virtue of their location, play a part in influencing individual career development within a South African context (Chinyamurindi, 2016a; 2016b; 2017). Unlike other theories of career development, noted for their weakness in being fragmenting the career experience (Chinyamurindi, 2016b), the STF is praised for being eclectic and for incorporating other theories (Watson & McMahon, 2006, 2009).

Second, the Career Construction Theory (CCT) is also adopted as assisting to try and understand the career development processes of individuals working within the creative economy in South Africa. The CCT positions how individuals ascribe meaning and direction to their career paths (Savickas, 2005) and how individuals construct the resultant careers (Savickas, 2015). In achieving this, the use of a qualitative approach – such as narrative inquiry – assists in how individuals story their identities into work roles (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011).

Concerning the empirical literature, a number of factors can be deemed as influencing the career development processes of individuals operating within the creative economy. Linked to the STF, the environment in which the individual finds him/herself is significant and not only in their entry into the creative economy, but in every experience therein. For instance, a number of authors (e.g. Kong, 2009; Ho, 2009; Chang, 2015) trace the work of cultural producers in Singapore and illustrate the value and role of context in shaping their work. The thinking here is that such a context through the enactment of policy can assist in how individuals operate within the creative economy (Comunian & Ooi, 2016; Purushothaman, 2016). Further, Florida (2002) argues that encouraging the development of the creative economy is a useful investment for urban growth. Placing focus on the value of context in shaping the career development of individuals in the creative economy. Others (e.g. Comunian, Faggian & Jewell, 2014; Fleischmann & Daniel, 2014) find the role of technology as aiding especially how individuals within the creative economy progress in their careers.

Other researchers (e.g. Daniel, Fleischmann & Welters, 2017) find the role of distance and access to specialists in the creative economy to be key in influencing the career development processes of those operating within the sector. This has been found to happen through activities such as one-to-one advice, coaching, and skills development activities (Munro, 2017). Empirical work is emerging within the creative economy that shows the industry to be a developing ground for future entrepreneurs, particularly for those in disciplines such as fine art who have limited employment prospects (Carey, 2014). This has also led to calls for studies that investigate the transition journey taken by individuals in the creative economy towards becoming small businesses (Grodach, O'Connor & Gibson, 2017). Further, due to limited opportunities, some graduates in creative economy careers end up working and imparting their skills in the education space (Goldsmith & Bridgstock, 2014).

In essence, creative economy careers are characterised by portfolio working and the holding of multiple jobs (Throsby & Zednik, 2011). This often creates complications around the career paths and progress individuals in these careers make (Stoyanova & Grugulis, 2012). For some, careers in the creative economy can be worrying, as these have been shown to be less paying occupations. (Faggian, Comunian & Li, 2014).

4. Methodology

A qualitative methodology was adopted in the investigation of the career development processes of individuals within the creative economy in the precinct of East London in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. To achieve this, a narrative approach grounded in social constructionism was used to explore the experiences of these individuals as part of their career development. The use of narratives is gaining currency within higher education research in South Africa (Chinyamurindi, 2016a; 2016b; 2017). Narratives offer an opportunity to understand the emerging sense-making that accompanies individual experience, be it positive or negative (Chinyamurindi, 2012; 2016a; 2016b; 2017). Further, narratives allow for the researcher to maximise an understanding of those experiences for the individual (Loftus & Higgs, 2010) and can offer an opportunity to possibly explain such experiences (Chinyamurindi, 2012).

The 20 participants of this study were recruited through a snowball sampling approach where one participant would refer the researcher to another potential participant. This was done due to the ease of familiarity as most of the participants knew each other through the networks they belonged to. Table 1 provides a description of the 20 participants.

The research involved semi-structured interviews with the 20 participants. The interviews ranged from 1 hour to 2 hours. The data from the interviews were exported into QSR International's NVivo 9, a data analysis and management software package which is useful when dealing with a significant amount of text, graphic, audio and video data (Reuben & Bobat, 2014). The adopted data analysis procedure is based on three levels of meaning-making and was also used in previous narrative research in South Africa (e.g. Chinyamurindi 2012; 2016a; 2016b; 2017) and internationally (McCormack 2000).

Steps were taken to ensure methodological rigor and data integrity. First, ethical clearance was sought and granted by the participating institution where the researcher is based. Second, all participants taking part in the study through

the interviews had to give informed consent before participating in the research. Third, using the recommendation of methodological rigor (Tobin & Begley, 2004), some steps were taken for the purpose of maintaining data trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability). This included: a) pre-testing of the interview of the interview guide; b) audio recording of the interviews with permission; c) the researcher taking field notes as part of data collection; d) transcription being made within 24 hours of the interviews being conducted; e) use of pseudonyms to protect the participants and finally, f) participants having their transcriptions e-mailed back to them so that they could check the accuracy thereof.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

Participant pseudonym	Trade	Race	Highest qualification	Years work experience
1	Visual Artist	Black/Coloured	Master's degree	10
2	Creative Artist	Black/African	Undergraduate degree	10
3	Poet	Black/Coloured	Master's degree	10
4	Musician	Black/African	Honours degree	12
5	Film/Acting	Black/African	Honours degree	9
6	Choreography	Black/Coloured	Honours degree	10
7	Creative Artist	Black/Indian	Master's degree	10
8	Photographer	Black/African	Master's degree	11
9	Musician	Black/African	Honours degree	10
10	Creative Artist	Black/African	Postgraduate degree	8
11	Poet	Black/African	Master's degree	9
12	Musician	Black/African	Postgraduate degree	10
13	Photographer	Black/Coloured	Undergraduate degree	10
14	Visual Artist	Black/Indian	Master's degree	9
15	Choreography	Black/African	Honours degree	10
16	Creative Artist	Black/African	Honours degree	11
17	Poet	Black/African	Honours degree	9
18	Musician	Black/African	Master's degree	10
19	Poet	Black/Coloured	Honours degree	9
20	Creative Artist	Black/African	Honours degree	10

5. Implications for the creative economy

The aim of this study was to explore the career development experiences of individuals operating within creative economy. Three main narratives emerged as findings to the study. First, the presence of structural constraints was noted to exist in the creative economy as part of their career development. Second, a resistance narrative is illustrated as existing as part of this career development experience. Third, a persuasion narrative was used to try and navigate through any structural constraints that the individual faced as a result of following a creative industries career path. These findings are discussed next.

5.1. Structural constraints faced by individuals in creative economy careers

The first salient narrative common in the interviews was around the structural constraints that are experienced within creative economy careers. Table 2 details how the researcher arrived at this narrative and also includes quotes showing the initial codes supporting this narrative.

TABLE 2: STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE CREATIVE ECONOMY CAREERS

Structural constraints that individuals in the creative industry face affecting their career development	1. Creative economy careers as "pseudo-careers"	"The one question I hate after I tell people I am an artist is – OK – so tell us what exactly do you? As if being an artist is not a career path. The challenge we face as artists emanate from society not understanding what we do." P7
	2. The legitimization of creative economy careers	"Every day is a struggle and I got to roll on – the challenge is of seeking legitimacy around my persona and my calling." P5
	3. Lack of support in the creative economy	"I really think if we had support as artists our province as a mecca of creativity." P17

P = participant

In support of the first narrative finding of this research, stories emerged which support the initial codes that stem from the narrative finding. For instance, participant 10 worked as a Black choreographer and was based in one of the townships of East London, South Africa. Participant 10 narrated how society and their views deemed the work that she does as a choreographer as not being an actual career but really framed as a "part-time job" – the participant narrated this experience:

"Choreography is an art and one I enjoy as part of my passion as an artist. I also see choreography as my career, the thing that puts bread on my table for myself and family. So when I go around I have to be justifying to people

why choreography is a career path. Sadly, this justification not only extends to individuals but also institutions such as banks when seeking for loans."

Further, a general consensus amongst the participants was a perceived lack of support given to individuals in the creative economy. It would appear this support was framed to consist of monetary and also moral support. Participant 11, working as photographer narrated this challenge:

"I have tried to get funding from many sources when starting off. The government did not take my business and work seriously. As a result, my application for funding was always rejected. Family members also saw the value of my work on special occasions when the entire family was gathered. So support, if you like, was seasonal. At times it was not just about the money but also the kind words of appreciation of care and concern. This was all absent."

5.2. Resistance narrative

The second salient narrative common in the interviews was around the resistance narrative that is experienced within creative economy careers. Table 3 details how the researcher arrived at this narrative and also includes quotes showing the initial codes supporting this narrative. This resistance narrative was framed as a reflection of the participants of their career development experiences and especially at the onset of their careers.

Stories in support of the second narrative finding of resistance emerged and further stories supporting the initial codes that stem from the narrative finding became possible. For instance, participant 20 worked as a creative artist and explained how resistance formed a key weaponry in his life, especially when he started out in his career. His narrative also linked to the first narrative of structural constraints:

"When I started off, resistance had to be a tactic I used. I faced many challenges from those around me. One day an uncle went and even enlisted me to be a police recruit. I vehemently refused. Then, there was a time when the being a creative artist thing was not working. I secretly took a job as a waiter to get my career going. Why did I not tell people? I guess it was a method of under-cover resistance and not conform to society."

A final narrative to emerge from this study – and a counter-narrative to the resistance narrative – was the persuasion narrative. Whereas the resistance narrative was used in the formative years of a career in the creative economy, the persuasion narrative featured in the latter years of the individual's career.

TABLE 3: PERSUASION NARRATIVE OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE CREATIVE ECONOMY CAREERS

Persuasion Narrative	1. Self-Persuasion	"I Was My Best Fan, The Only Person Who Can Persuade Myself That I Can Do This Despite The Resistance." P19
	2. Persuasion With Significant Others	"When My Family Began To See The Changes, The Gigs, Appointments And Newspaper Features. It Was The Persuasion We Needed." P4
	3. Lack of support in the creative economy	"You Must Put Your Family And Community First. They Support Your Work But Are Not Your Work. Sometimes People Just Need To See What You Do That's All." P13

P = participant

5.3. Persuasion narrative

The third salient narrative common in the interviews was around the persuasion narrative that is experienced within creative economy careers. Table III details how the researcher arrived at this narrative and includes quotes that highlight how the initial codes support this narrative. This persuasion narrative was framed as either individual efforts of a) self-persuasion or b) persuasion directed towards significant others as part of individual career development.

6. Discussion

This research aimed to explore the career development processes of individuals working within the creative economy in South Africa. Three findings in the form of narratives emerge based on the data analysis. First, the presence of structural constraints was found to affect individuals operating within the creative economy. Second, the study also reveals resistance as a tool that individuals used in the formative years of their careers to navigate past constraints. Third, in the latter years of the career, resistance was replaced by persuasion to deal with constraints. The findings of the study attest to the centrality of careers in the creative economy as key in the lives of individuals (Duffy & Dik, 2013). The processual activities of persuasion and resistance give cadence to the enactment of agentic power and allows the individual to derive a sense of purpose and meaning in their vocational pursuits (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010).

The study, through its findings, also illustrates within the careers context the challenges faced by individuals within the creative economy in South Africa. This is and advancement from the previous theorising within South Africa by

using working samples, students and entrepreneurs (e.g. Chinyamurindi 2016a; 2016b; 2017). Through the identified processes of persuasion and resistance, individuals appear to be constructing their careers in order to effectively navigate environmental challenges around them. Thus, through persuasion and resistance emphasis is placed on individual agency (Arthur, 1994) and a form individual self-directed behaviours (Gubler *et al.*, 2014) resulting in the enactment of choice through the use of talents, abilities and creative efforts (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006).

Based on previous work using the same methodological approach (e.g. Chinyamurindi, 2016a; 2016b; 2017) the qualitative nature of this work usually relies on small sample sizes and do not assume a position of generalizability. This can be flagged as a methodological concern. However, some limitations exist in the current work. First, a bias existed in how the sample of participating individuals within the creative economy was selected. It appears through using a snowball sampling approach all the participants were in one way related to each other. Though this is a shortcoming, this arose due to struggles in getting a reliable sampling frame of individuals within the creative economy. Second, the results of this empirical study should not be seen as generalizable to the entire population of individuals within the creative economy in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Despite its limitations, this study aimed to understand the emerging sense-making (Chinyamurindi, 2016a; 2016b; 2017) around the experience of being an individual operating within the creative economy. To this end, this research has attempted to do so.

The study and its findings also appear to support the idea of a career in the creative economy as consisting of portfolio careers (Handy, 1995). Individuals in this study also placed emphasis on their journey of seeking other forms of employment to support their stay within a creative economy career. Again, this illustrates some form of individual career construction (Savickas, 2015) and the formation of a vocational identity (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011).

Some practical recommendations can be made based on the findings of this research. First, future research could focus on a specific category of the creative economy and understand the career issues that affect that specific category. Second, future research could use other research techniques outside the narrative inquiry used in this research. This could involve techniques such as photovoice elicitation methods, focus group discussions and also research techniques that allow for greater expression. This might be more appealing to participants, especially when dealing with the constituency of individuals

operating within the creative economy. Third, there is a need to unpack each of the three narratives that emerged as findings from this research. The research was merely exploratory in trying to understand the career development processes of individuals operating within the creative economy. Based on the findings, there appears to be plenty of room to expand further on these individual findings.

Future research could also explore how individual career development within the creative economy happens through other factors identified in this research. For instance, what role do government or non-governmental led institutions play in assisting the career development processes of individuals within the creative economy? Future research could explore the role of geographical location in assisting the career development processes of individuals within the creative economy and how this, in the long run, affects the creative economy. This may be an interesting basis for conceptualising issues of a career development framework in the South African creative industry. Finally, given the issues explored through the qualitative and narrative approach employed in this research, future research could adopt a quantitative and survey approach to ascertain determinants of career development amongst individuals (or even groups) operating within the creative economy.

7. Conclusion

The study highlights the value of narratives in understanding the career development experiences of individuals operating within the creative economy. The study not only identified those factors that impede the experience of a career in the creative economy, but also illustrated individual tools used to navigate or manage these impediments. Through resistance and persuasion, individuals are able to espouse their career paths.

Biographical Notes

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