

Career metaphors essay examples

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Career Metaphors

As an introduction, it is vital to understand that Kerr Inkson (2007) proposes metaphors as a way to view careers. The following paper compares and contrasts Inkson's characterization of careers as inheritance and journeys. It also assesses whether this conceptualization expands my understanding of career. Also, Inkson places a reliance on metaphors to understand careers coupled with assessing this reliance in relation to the three metaphors of careers provided by Inkson; Career as actions, roles, relationships and resources. A logical argument will be provided to support the use of one of the metaphors over the other three metaphors.

Careers as inheritance and journeys

The main similarity between the metaphor of career as an inheritance, and as a journey is the fact that both metaphors imply that career is a movement between time. Career as inheritance states that just like a legacy, a career may be passed from one generation to another over a period (Kerr 2008). It explains that a career is usually passed through families that people form a part of in a number of ways. On the other hand, career as a journey expresses the fact that a career is a movement of a person through various fields, organizations or places over a period (Kerr 2008). Also, it refers to vertical movement of a person's career from one position to the next over a period. Therefore, both metaphors (career inheritance or journey), portray the aspect of movement in terms of time.

However, the two metaphors differ in their unique meanings. According to Inkson and Amundson (2002), career as inheritance is inclined to inter-

generational occupational movements particularly dependent on social and economic levels of the people concerned. For example, many women end up becoming nurses and other occupations related to compassion and care because it is an area other women have shown their strength. Historically, women have been known to work in such careers less demanding in terms of intelligence and physical strength; because this is what they inherited from their fore females. On the other hand, career as a journey does not refer to inter-generational occupation movements. The journey refers to the movement that can take place in someone's lifetime; especially, movements between fields, companies, towns or jobs ('Making sense of careers through the lens of a path metaphor' 2008). This is because a person may decide to shift from one job to another or transfer from one geographical area to another during his career path, not necessarily determined by the historical career paths of the people before him. Career as an inheritance is more of a legacy metaphor while career as a journey is a path metaphor. This explains the main difference between the metaphor of a career as inheritance or a career as a journey.

This conceptualization expands my understanding of a career. The fact that the two metaphors have some similarities and differences offers a basis for a clearer understanding of a career. One thing that is clear is the fact that a career is denoted by movement from one state to another over time. Claartje and Torsten (2010), assert that, as an inheritance, the career is seen as a legacy passed on from one generation to another. This explains why sociologists have always focused on delimiting most of the values that children develop, basing their arguments on gender, class, and ethnic

classes. These values that children develop usually grow into modeled career experiences, which may also depend on the educational and economical opportunities that they get from their 'families'. As a journey, career denotes a path that a career may follow when someone shifts between jobs, occupations or geographical places. This clearly shows that career follows a certain path during every person's lifetime. The route followed by the career person may have an unknown destination, and it is affected by externalities such as the employer, associations, and also the traveler may have a say in its direction through improvisation (Kerr 2008).

Kerr Inkson's reliance on metaphor to understand careers

Kerr Inkson places a reliance on metaphors to enhance people's understanding of careers. This reliance can be assessed in relation to the use of four metaphors of careers provided by Inkson namely: career as actions, roles, relationships and resource. Career as a role is a theatre metaphor that can be developed through consideration of behavior in social roles (Inkson 2007). Theatre is usually used to denote the organization and company that employees work in, while their careers are viewed as roles. Careers can be viewed as performances, and different roles are expected of all stakeholders in the organization. Career as a relationship is a network metaphor that refers to the fact that careers involve various encounters and relationships with others (Kerr 2008). After people get encounters (for example in organizations), they end up creating long term relationships that ensure their growth in the career choices. Career path is usually seen as a social journey whereby different people from different backgrounds meet and learn from each other. Career as a resource is an economic metaphor that shows the

relationship between a career and the creation of wealth (Kerr 2008). This way, employees are usually valued assets in an organization rather than long-term overhead costs. This is a decisive way of viewing an organization, and it is more so essential to managers and career protagonists too. Career as action refers to the role of a person in shaping his or her career through active processes. These processes can be in the form of psychological and behavioral actions. Through actions, and the individual is seen to utilize his creativity and functionality so as to grow his or her career.

Development of a case to support the position of Career as a resource

Career as a resource has strengths over the other three metaphors (career as roles, relationships and actions). This metaphor has more strengths than the other three metaphors because it is concerned with the current nature and context of careers. Jobs have been changing over time, and so should the view of all organizational stakeholders. In the earlier years, labor was viewed as a cost, meaning that managers viewed careers as long term costs (Peake and McDowall 2012). This led to various disadvantages to many employees once the managers started downsizing the workers, aimed at reducing the ' long term overhead costs'.

However, the fact that people have changed their view of careers as long term costs has led to the economic metaphor that views career as a resource. This is because managers realized that the earlier view was wrong, and it led to fracturing of a number of careers across the globe (Peake and McDowall 2012). The strength of this metaphor is that it has led to the replacing of personnel management with human resource management,

meaning that people are now viewed as resourceful assets. According to Ileana-Loredan (2012: 384), “ the notion of human resource management potentially expropriates and transforms careers for organizational purposes, reduces people to malleable inputs to productive processes, and entrusts career development to the superior knowledge of the company.” With the view of career as a resource, organizations are able to assist the career growth of their employees through workshops, trainings and performance appraisals that reflect well on the overall performance of the organization itself.

These strengths are unlike in the cases of careers as actions, roles and relationships where growth is not emphasized. Some people may argue that career as a resource is not the best metaphor because it shows as if a career is owned by both the organization and the individual (Understanding Careers 2011). However, it is important for such people to understand that even if the organization motivates the employees through career growth, much of the career ownership is entirely dependent on the individual. The individual can do this by using career self management or emphasizing on personal cultivation of the career capital.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that career as inheritance and journeys have some similarities and differences. The similarity is that both metaphors show that career is a movement over a period. However, they are different in that inheritance is inclined to legacy while the journey is inclined towards a path. Also, a career can be seen as actions, roles, relationships and resources

depending on the aspect of the assessor. Among the four metaphors, the economic metaphor that expresses career as a resource is the strongest of them all because it deals with the current nature and context of careers.

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