

## **The Cultural Preparedness Perspective of Career Development**

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## **Abstract**

This chapter describes the cultural preparation process model (CPPM) as a framework to understand how culture mediates the process by which individuals and communities engage with their careers and livelihood. The key propositions of the CPPM are presented along with its applicational dimension. The model as a template for intervention development is discussed and five guidelines, namely, recognising cultural leadership, expanding the definition of “client”, identifying and accommodating ways of living, valorising cultural symbols and integrating livelihood and career, are described. *Jiva*, a specific intervention based on the CPPM, its impact and outcomes is presented with evidence of outcomes from India and adaptations implemented in other countries. Applying the CPPM to assess interests and aptitudes is considered providing the Strengths and Accomplishments Questionnaire, as an example. In summary, this chapter provides a reference point from where culture could be drawn into the career development discourse.

*Keywords: cultural preparedness, career counselling, assessment, enculturation, acculturation, equilibrium, cultural leadership, livelihood, Jiva,*

## Culture and Career Psychology

Culture remains an elusive term to define perhaps because it has numerous meanings and has been viewed from a multiplicity of disciplinary vantage points. Today, career psychology is moving towards an increasingly greater focus on culture-resonant theories of development (e.g., Arulmani, 2014a; Leong & Pearce, 2014; Stead, 2004) and culture-concordant career interventions (e.g., Spokane, Fouad, & Swanson, 2003). There have been calls for: developing a multicultural mindset (Leong & Hartung, 2000) and viewing career psychology as a 'cultural enterprise' (Stead, 2007, p. 181). As a consequence, mainstream theories are being examined for their cross cultural relevance and modified to accommodate cultural variables (e.g., Leong & Hartung, 2000). Cultural constructs such as individualism-collectivism, locus of control, purpose of work, and perception of time are being studied (e.g., Thomas & Inkson, 2007). Theories are being extended to tribal groups (e.g., Albert, Porter, & Green, 2016). A number of culturally mediated career counselling models have also been proposed, some of which are: the integrative-sequential model (Leong & Hartung, 2000), the integrative multidimensional model (Leong & Hardin, 2002), the ecological model (Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2002), culture-infused career counselling (Arthur & Collins, 2011), and the cultural preparation process model upon which this chapter focuses (Arulmani, 2010, 2011, 2014a).

These developments have also been critically appraised. One concern emanates from a trend in the careers literature, of the term *culture* being confounded with proxy categorical variables such as race, ethnicity, language, religion, countries, and continents resulting not just in confusing usage but also oversimplification '...as if these referential groups are monoliths' (Stead, 2004, p. 392). Within the understanding that culture is integral to the ways of living of all human beings, work itself becomes a construction of culture (Arulmani, 2014a). Therefore, it is important to decipher the constitutive dynamic between psychological

processes and socio-cultural contexts and acknowledge the bi-directionality that exists between the person and culture.

### **The Cultural Preparation Process Model (CPPM)**

The CPPM takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing upon constructs from biological anthropology, social and developmental psychology, and economics to provide a vantage point from which the career practitioner could understand these dynamics. Cultural preparedness is described to be:

The accumulation over time, of the learnings and experiences of a certain group of people, so assimilated and systematised into the group's ways of engaging with the world that it can be said to exemplify that group and distinguish it from other groups. These ways of engaging rest upon a social cognitive environment typified by an interconnected system of beliefs, values, rituals, social organisation and mores, that have become deeply embedded within the conventions and routines to which a given group is habituated. (Arulmani, 2019a, p. 197).

The approach rests upon four important constructs: cultural learning, enculturation, cultural preparedness equilibrium and acculturation. The interaction between these constructs describes the cultural preparation process model which is outlined below. In addition to the examples provided below, we also present a case study extracted from a series of in-depth interviews conducted by Kumar, one of the authors of this chapter (see Box 1).  
Insert Box 1 around here.

#### ***Cultural Learning***

This is a construct adapted from biological anthropology which emerges from the observation that human beings are biologically prepared for culture in ways that other primates are not. This is seen in the cognitive development that underlies the sequential emergence of learning through imitation, instruction, and collaboration (Tomasello, 2000).

Here, the cultural context is understood not merely as ‘...a facilitator or motivator for cognitive development but rather, a unique “ontogenetic niche” (context for development) that actually structures human cognition in fundamental ways’ (Tomasello, 2000, p. 37). Cultural learning is not the result of genetic mediation nor does it result from a conscious engagement with a formal, pedagogical, instructional framework. It is an unconscious absorption of cultural practices resulting from the child’s immersion in a certain culture. While it is usually one way and it is not the result of reasoned thinking, cultural learning is undergirded by an intention to learn and a strong identification with the source of learning embedded in the child’s cultural environment (e.g., parents, elders). Here it must be noted that the culturally anchored symbolic artefacts mentioned in the section on cultural learning, vary from one culture to another. Therefore, what a child in one culture learns could be very different from what a child in another culture learns. An important observation that Tomasello makes is that individuals acquire the use of cultural practices in a relatively faithfully form and this relatively exact learning, ‘...serves as a kind of ratchet – keeping the practice in place in the social group, perhaps for many generations, until some creative innovation comes along’ (Tomasello, 2000, p. 137).

Looking at the case study in Box 1, Harish the metal worker is part of an ancient tradition of work-based learning (similar to European apprentice systems). A wide variety of culturally embedded ways of learning (e.g., viewing his father as a *master*), are examples of how culture mediated his learning of the family occupation.

### ***Enculturation***

Cultural learning facilitates enculturation, the second important construct within the cultural preparedness framework, whereby people absorb the tenets of the culture that envelops them, internalise and accept its values as *correct* and learn to practice the behaviours sanctioned as the way of life within that culture. Three factors, namely, social

organisation along the individualism-collectivism continuum, patterns of value attribution, and the processes of role allocation further characterise the enculturative process (see Arulmani, 2014a for details). The cultural preparedness paradigm suggests that it is this orientation toward culture mediated learning that transforms the human being's engagement with work into a manifestation of culture.

In the case study, Harish's pride in the family occupation, the *thaal* as a cultural symbol of goodwill as well as a representation of *God's blessing* are examples of enculturation. Of particular importance is the spontaneous support given by the extended family when Harish's family was in financial distress. In most collectivist cultures this is almost taken for granted.

### ***Cultural Preparation Status Equilibrium***

The bidirectional and reciprocal workings between cultural learning and enculturation bring the individual/group to a unique state of equilibrium to engage with career development. This is referred to as the individual/group's cultural preparation status equilibrium. This equilibrium '...reflects an internal stability and the mental and emotional balance that results from the habituation of doing something in a certain way' (Arulmani, 2014a, p. 94). It is critical to note here that this equilibrium does not rest upon what may be judged by another culture as being right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate. It merely reflects the '...equipoise engendered by how one has been brought up to behave' (Arulmani, 2019a, p. 200). This equilibrium would be seen in all aspects of a given culture's way of life including notions of time, orientations to gender and sexuality, food habits, marriage, child rearing, death, and the afterlife. Accordingly, a unique cultural preparation status equilibrium would characterise a given people's orientation to work.

In the case study, the association of metal working to the Thathiyar community over many generations illustrates equilibrium. The prestige of their profession is augmented by

legend as well as what it brings to their society. It is most likely that Thathiyar children would be *expected* by the larger community to follow the family profession.

### ***Acculturation***

While enculturation describes a within-group, endogenous dynamic, between-group, exogenous processes are also present and exert an acculturative influence. Individuals' and communities' engagement with careers and livelihoods takes place against the background of global conditions, macro-trends, and larger transformations which are beyond their control. These external factors could include changes in social orientations and philosophical discourses, economic transformations, political upheavals, technological advances, or natural disasters. The forces of acculturation can affect the original state of enculturated equilibrium. Consonant acculturative forces would support, enhance and further stabilise the existing career preparation status equilibrium, while dissonant acculturative forces disturb the equilibrium. Every milestone in the history of work has altered an existing equilibrium calling for the emergence of a new equilibrium. Responses to this disturbance could lie along a continuum of establishing a new equilibrium to rejecting acculturative influences to retain the original cultural orientation.

The inexorable, acculturative effects of the Industrial Revolution seem to be felt even deep in the Himalayan niche described in the case study. Initially, with the replacement of handmade with machine made metal items, the Thathiyars' equilibrium was severely affected. They experienced dissonant acculturation. However they were able to rally, and create a new equilibrium for themselves.

Historically, it may be said that the notion of personal career was born in a Western, individualistic, industrialised context, heralded by the Industrial Revolution and undergirded by the protestant work ethic. However, not all cultures and economies came directly under the influence of the Industrial Revolution and the protestant reformation. In many (mainly

non Western) societies, people continue to work as they have for centuries. Occupations run in families and an individual acquires skills mainly through work based learning. The question of choosing between opportunities and constructing a career does not arise. Therefore, as Arulmani, Bakshi, Leong, and Watts (2014, p. 2) argue, the manifestation of career can be seen in two broad contexts:

contexts to which career is indigenous and contexts where it is, in many respects, culturally alien. In the former, the manifestation of career would be spontaneous and culturally congruent; in the latter, its manifestation could be the result of exigency induced by global transformations. It could thus be hypothesized that the delineation of career from work lies along a continuum. At one end is 'career' in its fully developed form. At the other end is an almost complete absence of this notion of career. And along the continuum are various manifestations of the idea of career.

An important point that emerges here is that the movement from pre to industrial and postindustrial forms of work is not merely a function of the passage of time or economic development. Preindustrial, industrial and postindustrial forms of work exist simultaneously in many economies. Some of the largest workforces in the world are located in developing economies. Although these are societies to which the notion of career is not indigenous, the need for career development support is rapidly emerging as a strongly felt need in these contexts. Yet, not enough consideration has been focused on understanding orientations to work and the manifestation of career in these settings. Career guidance continues to be coloured by definitions of career that have been transposed upon these cultures. As a result, those involved in workforce and career development in these contexts are trained in ideas, methods and theories that do not equip them to effectively address felt needs.

It is this gap that the CPPM tries to address and the following sections describe some of the ways in which the model has been applied.



## **Applications of the Cultural Preparation Process Model**

The following section describes two ways in which the CPPM has been used to develop applications for career guidance and counselling.

### ***The Cultural Preparation Process Model as a Template for Intervention Development***

Intervention research has consistently shown that outcomes are poor when universal principles are applied without adapting them to the particular characteristics of a culture (e.g., Reese & Vera, 2007; Arulmani, 2019b). Conversely, the effectiveness of an intervention could be higher when the ideas and concepts that lie behind an intervention cohere with the history, values, and beliefs of a particular community (Arulmani, 2011; Griffin & Miller, 2007). A salient application of the CPPM, therefore, is to facilitate intervention development such that it is grounded in the local culture. Five salient conceptual guidelines based on the cultural preparedness framework that can guide such a process are outlined below.

#### ***Recognise cultural leadership***

The role of external agents: a career development specialist or a theory or model of career development can only be secondary to the already present leadership structure within a cultural system. The group's elders and leaders must be acknowledged as the culturally sanctioned mediators of cultural learning. Their experiences, ideas, and views must be acknowledged and inform intervention development. For example, these individuals could participate firstly in the development and then in vetting of the activities, tools, and methods of the career guidance intervention.

#### ***Expand the definition of "client"***

Almost all existing career development models emerge from individualistically oriented epistemologies. However, as discussed above, in collectivistically organised cultures individuals are expected to conform to the norms and wishes of the community. In such contexts, the group (e.g., the family) rather than the individual, may be the client. This is

important also because conflicts could arise between the young individual and the community. Therefore, it is important when interventions are designed for a collectivistically enculturated culture, that the family (particularly parents) are drawn into the guidance and counselling process. A guidance target from the cultural preparedness viewpoint would be the facilitation of family-based decision making whereby *client* comprises both the individual and the family. The aim would be to strengthen engagement between members of a community and mitigate estrangements.

#### *Identify and accommodate ways of living*

As per the CPPM's principle of equilibrium cultural learning and enculturation have led to an equipoise in the manner in which a culture engages with the world around. Let us take decision making as an example since it is closely related to the guidance and counselling process. The nature of freedom to exercise personal volition to make a decision varies along the individualism-collectivism spectrum. In some contexts the individual's decisions are expected to align with the values of the group. An intervention that countermands the adult or group role could be ineffective or even destructive of the wider cohesion already characterising that social fabric. At the same time, it may be that the adult view is out of date, out of keeping with the realities of the times or even counterproductive. The guidance target here would be to create an environment where the individual and the family have the opportunity to together create a new pathway. The objective, once again, is to facilitate the emergence of a new equilibrium while preserving and accommodating prevailing ways of living.

#### *Identify, valorise and integrate cultural symbols*

As discussed above, culturally anchored symbols are manifested in traditions, rituals, language and convention. An intervention that identifies these elements and integrates them into its methods and techniques would valorise them and thereby become more strongly

aligned to the cultural preparedness of the community for which the intervention is being prepared. A cultural artefact that is almost ubiquitous in its presence in almost all societies is the story. Legends, folktales, fables, parables, fairytales, and myths are receptacles and transmitters of culture and values. They create connections across generations, they are illuminative, they offer guidelines for everyday life. Every story has its culture specific dimension, whereby meaning emerges from the manner in which a story is interpreted and this could vary from one context to another. As Ramachandran and Arulmani (2014) point out, by using the story as a tool for career development, we are drawing upon one of the oldest forms of counselling, one that offers the possibility of interpreting universal themes into local contexts and at the same time of extending culture-specific themes to broader contexts.

#### *Integrate livelihood and career*

In common parlance, livelihood is associated with survival needs and believed to be practised by those who are in lower income brackets such as farmers, artisans, and skilled workers, mainly in rural areas. Career, by contrast, has stronger links to urban life and to middle and higher social classes, and portrayed as offering better opportunities and higher incomes. Formal (school and college) education is viewed as the entry pass to career, while traditional, non-formal practices of skills transmission are linked to livelihood. However, as seen in the case of Harish, in many cultures, livelihood is the reality. Yet, a common tendency amongst career development professionals is toward replacing livelihood practices with career orientations (Kumar, 2016). The cultural preparedness approach views career and livelihood within the same frame of reference. Accordingly, in one situation the objective may be to help the person explore specific occupational areas (e.g., law, journalism, or nursing) that he/she could consider in relation to his/her aptitudes and interests. In another perhaps more traditional environment, career guidance may need to help a community

identify and gain modern skills to manage their traditional occupations in a viable manner.

Arulmani (2014c) introduces the idea of livelihood planning and describes it to be an application of the principles of career guidance to facilitate individuals' traditional engagement with work such that it gains contemporary relevance. Here, the existing cultural preparedness equilibrium is recognised and strengthened by viewing traditional occupations from a contemporary view point (e.g., the value of receiving formal training related to a traditional occupation). At the same time, the intervention could also introduce contemporary occupations and careers that require formal education.

#### *Outcomes and evidence for culturally mediated interventions*

Examining the outcomes of a culturally sensitive intervention versus a career guidance-only intervention amongst high school students in the Maldives, Arulmani and Abdulla (2007) demonstrate that the extent of decrease in negative career beliefs following the interventions was greater in the group that received the culturally mediated programme developed specifically for the Maldivian context.

*Jiva*, is a culturally grounded method of career guidance based on the CPPM, developed for India (Arulmani, 2010) and was created over a period of three years drawing upon the principles listed above. The programme has subsequently been used successfully in various parts of the country. This success has been mainly attributed to the cultural resonance of the intervention. For example, Viray (2017) implemented *Jiva* with high school students in North East India. Her findings show that participants' readiness to make career decisions and academic achievement motivation improved and negativity in career beliefs decreased significantly amongst students who took up the *Jiva* workshop, while improvements were not significant amongst those who did not receive the culturally grounded intervention.

The principles of cultural preparedness have been used to develop interventions in other Asian countries and similar trends of positive outcomes have been found (e.g., Vietnam:

Arulmani, 2014d; Sri Lanka: Arulmani, 2016; Nepal: Shrestha, Regmi, Aravind, & Arulmani, 2018). Such converging qualitative and quantitative evidence give support to the argument that an intervention that is grounded in the cultural preparedness of a community could have better outcomes.

### ***Assessment and Career Guidance***

An important function of career guidance is to work with the client to deepen his or her self-knowledge particularly with reference to personal features such as interests, aptitudes, career beliefs, aspirations and motivations (Arulmani, 2019b). Often, the methods used to elicit and interpret information are shaped by the philosophic and theoretical orientations of the career counsellor. The rationale underlying methods of assessment and measurement have been the subject of extensive debate and the field has differentiated into the quantitative (psychometric) and the qualitative (non-psychometric) positions. However, an often ignored powerful, arbitrating force is culture. It is quite possible that an assessment method easily accepted in one culture maybe unfamiliar, considered strange, or perhaps even inappropriate in another culture. Qualitative approaches naturally fit into cultures that encourage dialogue, conversation and narration of personal experiences. In other cultures (urban India, for example), formal, quantitative testing is an integral and expected part of the educational system. Parents as well as the student expect, value, and count upon psychometric evaluation. They are uncertain about the reliability of the rest of the counselling process if a career report does not carry quantitative information about the *level* of their child's aptitude. Conversely, a similar response would be seen if psychometry is used in a culture that does not acknowledge its value. Career guidance training programmes also tend to operate from a particular epistemological stand point. Hence, counsellors in one course may be trained in psychometric tests of aptitude, interest, and personality, while another course may train them

in interviewing and observing, both sometimes carrying an underlying script of suspicion or even dismissal of the other.

The cultural preparedness view is that quantitative and qualitative approaches are both valuable and as with any single system, both have their limitations. Just as a psychometric test is only as good as the cultural relevance of its items and norms, a qualitative interview is almost entirely dependent on the skill and cultural experience of the interviewer. Difficulties arise when the counsellor places his or her commitment to a method or a theory at higher priority than addressing the client's needs from the view point of his or her cultural preparedness. A lack of sensitivity to the client's felt needs could shake a client's faith in career guidance itself. Viewed within the cultural preparedness frame, neither the qualitative nor the quantitative methods applied exclusively are sufficient to deepen a client's self-understanding in a holistic and reliable manner.

#### *The Strengths and Accomplishments Questionnaire (SAQ)*

Based on the cultural preparedness model, the SAQ is an approach to assessment that blends qualitative and quantitative methods (Arulmani, 2014b). The aim of the technique is to ensure that the testing method is contextually grounded and at the same time able to offer the assessor a structure within which an interview could be conducted. The method rests on the assumption that a person's *accomplishments* in daily life reflect his/her talents and potentials. Response categories are drawn from opportunities that actually exist in the person's life situation through which he/she can register various levels of accomplishment. The SAQ presents a list of accomplishments possible in the client's context and clients are required to select activities they have experienced and specify the level at which the selected accomplishment was achieved. This could range for example from: "Personal, private level" all the way through "Selected to represent my country". The aim of assessment is not to identify how high a person's score is in relation to a norm. Instead the objective is to identify

the pattern of scores across the domains assessed. Therefore, the SAQ lays greater emphasis on the shape rather than the height of the individual's potential profile. The accomplishment list as well as the response categories are generated through qualitative and quantitative methods such as systematic observations, focus group discussions, checklists and open ended questions.

In order to arrive at such a scale, the manner in which items are generated is crucial. As described in Arulmani (2014b), SAQ items are generated through qualitative and quantitative methods such as systematic observations, focus group discussions, checklists and open ended questions. Frequency analyses are used to compute a commonality index for the prevalence of an activity in the lives of the group for whom the toll is being constructed. Participants for item generation include representative samples of the target group, community elders, teachers, parents, related government officials, NGO and other welfare workers. Desk review of text books, reports and other relevant materials is also conducted. The information collected is then composed into items and iteratively presented to a relevant and informed local group that is qualified to comment on selection of items for the final scale. It is critical that the items and response categories finally selected lie within the potential test-taker's sphere of lived experience. The first SAQ was developed and trial tested as a part of the Jiva programme in India (Arulmani, 2010). Subsequently, guided by the cultural preparedness approach and the process described above, SAQs have been developed for a wide range of cultural contexts (e.g., Vietnam: Arulmani, 2014d; Sri Lanka: Arulmani, 2016; Nepal: Shrestha, Regmi, Aravind, & Arulmani, 2018, Sweden: Kalin, Axelsson, Petersson, & Arulmani, 2018; Bangladesh: Arulmani, 2018). Aravind has extended the SAQ framework to develop an assessment system for children with dyslexia (Aravind & Arulmani, 2019). Students report greater ease of test taking and initial trials have shown higher accuracy in identifying the test-taker's potentials.

In summary, the SAQ is qualitative in the manner in which it allows the assessor to construct an assessment protocol that is aligned with the opportunities offered to the test-taker by his/her socioeconomic, schooling, and cultural background. It emphasises the importance of tying in with the person's lived experience. It provides a structure for the counsellor to conduct a *guided* interview, unveiling, identifying and rating relevant aspects of the client's experiences and accomplishments. At the same time, resting as it does upon the psychometric logic of a rating scale, the method draws upon quantitative methodology. While the structure of the SAQ remains the same, a given SAQ is completely context specific. A version developed for one group may not be relevant to the cultural environment of another group.

### **Conclusion**

The environment that all humans are born into is replete with '...culturally anchored symbolic artefacts represented by traditions, rituals, tools, language, conventions and institutions such as family and religion' (Arulmani, 2019a, p. 197). Therefore, context is preeminent in the cultural preparation process model. Work and its manifestations are culturally coded constructs which career theorists and practitioners need to decode in order to ensure acceptance, appropriateness, and effectiveness. The model postulates that culture prepares individuals for all life roles including that of a worker. It views careers work as a consonant acculturative force that could facilitate individuals' and communities' career development within the framework of their cultural preparedness equilibrium. Rather than replacing ways of living, practicing the cultural preparedness approach entails recognising, acknowledging, and working with prevailing cultural practices.



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### Box 1: Cultural Preparedness Approach: Case Study

This illustration is set in Chamba, the northern most district of the Himalayan province of Himachal Pradesh in India. Chamba was an independent princely state till 1948 when it was merged with the Union of India. A number of performing and visual arts and craft flourished here under the liberal patronage of monarchy. Indications of the key constructs of the CPPM are provided as super scripts: CL = Cultural Learning, EN = Enculturation, EQ = Cultural Preparation Status Equilibrium, ACC = Acculturation-Consonant, ACD = Acculturation-Dissonant, NE = New Equilibrium.

#### **The Traditional Metal Worker**

Harish (name changed) is a 23 year old male from a family of Thathiyars, who for generations have been metal workers making traditional household utensils, statues and other decorative items using silver, bronze and brass<sup>EQ</sup>. Harish does not know how long his family members have been in this occupation. But legend says that they have been making goods from metal for many generations<sup>EQ</sup>. He learnt the basics of this complex art from his father and grandfather through observation and supervision<sup>CL</sup>. However, about four decades ago, many families in his clan had to abandon this occupation because the demand for handmade metal items was replaced by the introduction of cheaper, machine-made utensils<sup>ACD</sup>. People almost stopped buying handmade utensils which rendered many practitioners jobless forcing them abandon their traditional trade<sup>ACD</sup>. Harish's family could survive because of constant community support<sup>EN</sup>. Most importantly, they also kept on reinventing themselves<sup>NE</sup>. At the time of marriages, gifts are still exchanged in handmade thaals (large plates) embossed with images of Hindu deities<sup>EN</sup>. Demand for such plates continued. A demand for their taals from other communities (Muslims and Sikhs) gradually began to emerge<sup>ACC</sup>. They started making Thaals with Islamic and Sikh symbols which expanded their market base<sup>NE</sup>. Then, with Chamba's growing profile as a tourist destination, they began to focus more on decorative items. This became an instant hit among tourists<sup>NE</sup>. He proudly shares that his grandfather and two other artisans from the extended family received the national award for modern master craftsmen from the President of India<sup>ACC</sup>. And hence the family occupation became viable once more.