Hi folks, I am pleased to be able to share some thoughts about a contextual action theory approach to career counselling.
Richard Young and his colleagues (including myself) have developed contextual action theory to provide a systematic understanding of human action in daily life, including action around career development.

CAT has 15 years of research and development behind it, and has been shown to be useful in gaining an understanding of career development processes, the transition into adulthood, and aspects of the counselling process.

Most recently, we have begun to formulate a model of counselling that is informed by CAT, and that’s what I would like to share with you today.
Key Tasks for CAT-based Career Counselling

• Establish/maintain therapeutic relationship
• Conceptualize the career concern though a CAT lens

We conceptualize 5 key tasks for a career counselling approach that is informed by CAT. These tasks do not happen in a particular order, but you will likely go through all of them by the time you are done with a client.

1. We see establishing and maintaining a therapeutic relationship as core to the counselling process... without this, career counselling can become something that is “done to” the client, rather than “done with”

2. Another central task of CAT-informed counselling is to conceptualize the client’s situation and concerns from the perspective of Contextual Action Theory, which I will describe in greater detail in a moment.

3. Although we have developed a couple of innovative interventions (which we have just begun to study), career counsellors working from a CAT perspective are free to draw on a wide range of specific interventions.
   The central issue is to that the intervention needs to match our understanding of the situation, through the CAT lens.

4. We also propose that the emotional dimension of career development must be attended to, because career development is not a purely cognitive or behavioural process; it is also an emotive one.
   Also, within our model, emotions are not problems that need to be overcome; instead, they can be utilized as a resource that provides direction and motivation for the client

5. And, as with most approaches to career counselling, it is important for the client to connect what they are doing in-session, to what they are doing in their daily life.
In the limited time that we have together, I want to focus on one of the most distinct aspects of our approach to career counselling:

The conceptualization of career concerns (and career development) through the lens of contextual action theory...

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**Key Tasks for CAT-based Career Counselling**

- Establish therapeutic relationship
- **Conceptualize the career concern though a CAT lens**
- Implement interventions tailored to how the career concern was conceptualized
- Attend to emotional dimension of the career concern
- Make connections to daily life
CAT theorists propose that any particular action can be viewed from three perspectives, each of which provides distinct information about a phenomenon (Young, et al., 2010):

1. Action can be understood from the perspective of **manifest behavior**— the readily observable sequence of behavior involved in carrying out an activity.

2. A second perspective is **internal steering processes**— the subjective cognitive and emotional processes that a person experiences during an activity. These internal cognitive and emotional processes are understood to steer, control, and regulate action by providing a person with a sense of how they should react in terms of manifest behavior in a situation, that is, in response to their internal experiences.

3. Finally, action can be understood from the perspective of **social meaning**, that is, the explanations that people construct about their situation both (a) for themselves and (b) when describing their situation to other people.
Actions that occur within the moment are typically embedded in larger systems of action that occur over longer temporal periods, reflecting larger goals and intentional frameworks.

CAT uses the language of “project” and “career” to frame these longer-term goals.

“Projects” are individual and joint actions around a specific purpose that occurs over a medial temporal period (typically measured in terms of a few months to a few years)

projects encompass more than what can be accomplished in the immediate term, and yet have some identifiable ending point, that is, when the project goals are accomplished.

They are also oriented towards accomplishing a particular goal.

In CAT, the concept of CAREER is not limited to occupations or work; instead, we define the concept as a framework by which an individual constructs understanding about how their are connected over long-term periods of time, and linked to goals and plans.

In comparison to projects, careers typically involve a greater range of actions and goals, and may not have a specific end point. Indeed, specific projects may be a part of a career.

To illustrate <click>
Because CAT had been researched and refined over the last couple of decades, it provides an understanding of action that is well supported by research.

And counselling based on CAT is grounded in that systematic action.

In other words, instead of being a collection of cobbled together techniques, CAT-informed counselling can perhaps best be thought of as an approach to understanding the client and the counselling process.

Because the focus is on action in daily life, the approach is flexible and has the potential to be used to address a wide range of life problems.

The flexibility of the approach is also evident in the way that it is possible to draw on a whole lot of different specific interventions, based on your understanding of the patterns of action in the client’s life.

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**Potential Strengths**

- Grounded in systematic understanding of human action in daily life
- Flexibility of the approach
- Capacity to integrate a wide range of specific interventions
On the other hand,

This flexibility is also a concern because it makes the approach difficult to manualize, which has implications for both learning the approach and conducting research on the approach...

On of my concerns is that, as we engage in the process of manualization, we will shift our focus away from CAT as a way of understanding the client and the counselling process to a set of specific interventions

On the other hand, without manualizing the approach, it becomes very difficult to conduct outcome research.

Which leads me to where we are at in the process of gathering research support for this approach to career counselling

Although we have experienced some anecdotal and clinical success, we are at the stage of developing the protocols and seeking funding to examine it’s application in various different counselling contexts.

A separate concern is that some of the interventions that are distinctly CAT in nature (such as the video-assisted self-confrontation procedure and the ongoing monitoring that was part of the CAT-based suicide treatment study that was recently completed) are very resource intensive.

This leads to the question of how practical it is to implement some of the interventions.

**Potential Concerns**

- Difficult to manualize
- Limited outcome research (so far)
- Some interventions are equipment / resource intensive