

Coaching and Counselling with Chaos: some practical tools

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It has been over a decade since we first published the Chaos Theory of Careers (CTC) (Pryor & Bright, 2003, Pryor & Bright, 2011). The theory places emphasis on the modern career realities of continual change, the complexity of influences on careers and the ubiquity of chance events in people's lives. Central ideas in the theory include: uncertainty, continual change, non-linear change, phase shifts, closed and open systems thinking, emergent order and chance events. We argued then, and continue to assert that careers are increasingly not experienced as stable and predictable rather we experience uncertainty, continual and unpredictable change in our careers.

In the last decade there has been an increasing awareness and acceptance of the idea that our career paths are not linear, that we confront complexity daily in our careers and that there are severe limitations on our ability to predict the future. Last year we were honoured with a special edition of the Australian Journal of Career Development devoted to our theory (e.g. Pryor & Bright 2014). Readers will find useful summaries of the theory in Bright & Pryor, 2005a; Bright & Pryor, 2011) and in our book, The Chaos Theory of Careers (Pryor & Bright, 2011).

If we accept that careers are more turbulent than traditional approaches tend to suggest, then we must consider how we can help our clients confront the realities of uncertainty, change, complexity and chance. Understanding how we respond to these career realities becomes an important goal of coaching. It can inform how we can best boost client skills in these areas, or alternatively we can be mindful of the sorts of roles that may be suitable given a client's approach to change and opportunity.

We have developed a range of tools and techniques that can be used practically with clients to address these new career realities. Chaos-informed coaches and counsellors in Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada, France, Netherlands, and the UK - to name just a few countries, are using these tools with clients in different ways including one-to-one settings, coaching, career education, rehabilitation, student engagement, leadership training, medico-legal assessment and career development conversations. Space does not permit me to describe all of these tools in detail, so I will focus on 2 tests that are available online (or in pencil and paper).

Luck Readiness Index

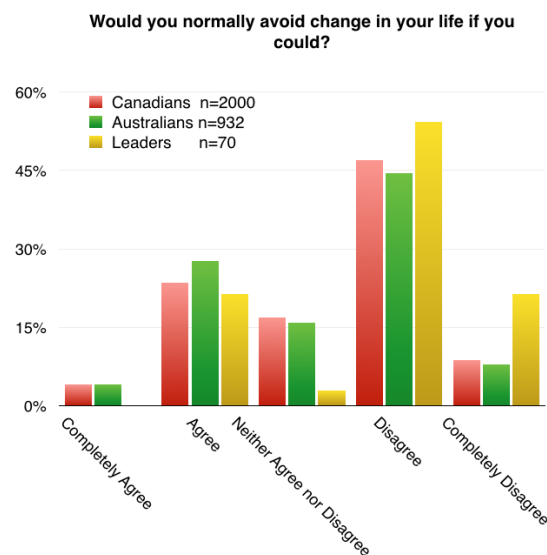
It is now well established that chance events are central to the career experiences of most people (Betsworth & Hanson, 1996; Borg, Bright & Pryor, 2006; 2014; Bright, Pryor, Chan & Rijanto, 2009; Bright, Pryor & Harpham 2005; Bright, Pryor, Wilkenfeld & Earl, 2005; Hirshi, 2010; Krumboltz & Levin, 2004; Neault, 2002; Patton & McMahon, 2006). Luck Readiness is defined as recognising, creating utilising, and adapting to opportunities and outcomes occasioned by chance. The Luck Readiness Index (Pryor & Bright, 2005b) assesses eight dimensions: Flexibility, Optimism, Risk, Curiosity, Persistence, Strategy, Efficacy, and Luckiness.

The Luck Readiness Index (LRI) has proved to be useful in measuring people's ability to use unplanned events to develop creative responses to career problems of people who may feel "stuck" or trapped in their circumstances. It has also proved to be valuable in helping those who feel threatened by chance events, especially those seen as beyond their control. The LRI has also

been used in career development research (e.g. Borg 2014, 2015; Lengelle, Meijers, Poell, Geijssel & Post, in press).

The LRI was developed originally as a pencil and paper test at the beginning of the millennium. The earlier versions of the test had 95 items, which were then reduced to 52 based on reliability analyses of the scales. The test is also available online at www.jimbright.com/tests. The online test version has also demonstrated acceptable levels of scale reliability. The online version has been adapted for use in Canada and is used under license by universities and consulting firms around the world.

A recent analysis of large samples of Australian and Canadian LRI responses highlights the scale of the problem many people have with change. Approximately one third of both samples said they'd avoid change if they could, and barely half disagreed with that sentiment. A sample of 70 professionals in leadership roles shows a greater appetite for change with 75% disagreeing they'd avoid change. However it is somewhat concerning that one fifth of leaders said they would avoid change if they could. One wonders how they see their leadership role if not in terms of change.



The LRI provides opportunities to initiate conversations with clients about change and can help to set an agenda for career development interventions. Reactions to change are the focus of the companion instrument to the LRI, the Change Perception Index.

Change Perception Index

The Complexity Perception Index (CPI) (Bright & Pryor, 2005b) is a psychometrically constructed inventory designed to measure an individual's typical reactions to the different implications of change as a consequence of complexity. It is designed to gauge people's responses to the following key chaos concepts: acceptance of Continual Change ; need for Control/Certainty; Non-linearity; Phase Shift; Emergence; Goal or Point attractor; Role or Pendulum attractor; Torus or Routine Attractor; Strange or Complexity Attractor; and Purpose/Spirituality. More complete descriptions of these dimensions can be found in Bright and Pryor (2005c).

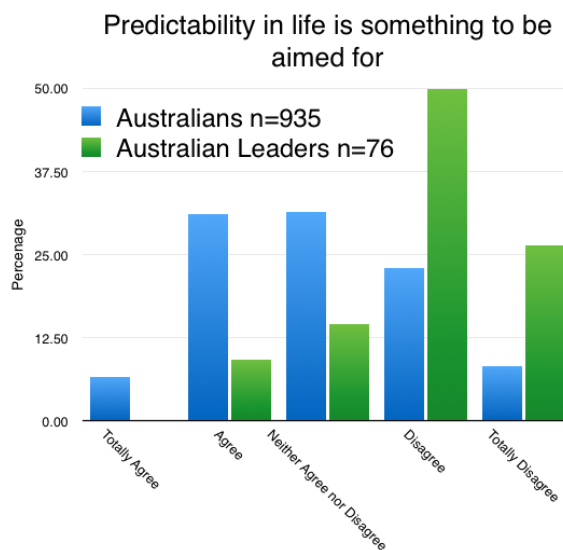
Failing to acknowledge that change is a continuous phenomenon can lead to unrealistic expectations of stability in work or career. This can lead to rigidity or resistance to change, or change fatigue when expectations of things settling do not come to pass. Appreciating that there is the potential for significant change to result from modest changes made right now (non linearity) is

likely to be accompanied by a client's willingness to take action even if that may seem to involve only small steps.

Phase shift measures people's appreciation that change can sometimes totally transform their situation (for good or bad); Emergence or Pattern seeking gauges the degree to which a person is prepared to act under uncertainty and let a pattern emerge as opposed to demanding a clear picture or plan in advance.

Four scales measure the 4 styles of thinking identified in the CTC called Attractors or Drivers that relate to how we deal with uncertainty - three of these relate to closed systems thinking styles called the Point (or Goal), Pendulum (Role) and Torus (Routine). The goal driver measures the tendency to reduce complexity to simple goal; the role driver captures the tendency to think in black or white (dichotomous) terms; and the Routine driver relates to the tendency to try to manage complexity with rules and routines. The Change driver measures the degree to which people think in more open terms that combine both change and stability. Finally the bigger picture (or spirituality) measures the degree to which people construe change as being part of a bigger pattern, scheme or system.

The following item, from the Routine Driver scale shows a stark contrast between Australians generally and Australians in leadership roles. Leaders are four times less likely to want to seek predictability compared to the populous. Less than a third of Australians generally disagreed with the sentiment. Encouraging people to embrace uncertainty can be challenging for career development professionals!



Conclusions

There are practical ways of using the Chaos Theory of Careers with clients that help to highlight the critical career issues confronting people in the C21st. Organisations including Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Latrobe University in Melbourne, Vocational Capacity Centre, and Careers Inside Track, as well as many individuals are using these tools in their service delivery and research. Helping people understand the importance of career adaptability, opportunity awareness (luck readiness) and how their reactions to change may be helping or hindering their career development has become an important component for many practitioners around the globe who are using the Chaos Theory of Careers to advance the careers of their clients.

How to access these tests

Contact Bright and Associates (jim@brightandassociates.com.au) to inquire about an annual license with a dedicated page for your organisation at yourorganisation.careerstesting.com or yourorganisation.careerstesting.com.au

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Dr Jim Bright works as a coach, medico-legal assessor, trainer, researcher and journalist. He trains career coaches and counsellors through his 3-day course and in the Graduate Certificate at ACU. He has published about 100 journal articles, books, chapters, and tests. Jim is the co-author of the Chaos Theory of Careers with Robert Pryor. As a weekly columnist for Fairfax for a decade he has published around 500 newspaper articles. He appears regularly on Sky Business, ABC702, Sunrise, Today and Studio 10. Jim is a Fellow of the Australian Psychological Society and the Career Development Association of Australia, an Honorary International Board Member of the British Columbia Career Development Association, an International Fellow of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling, and a member of the National Career Development Association.

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