

# The HEROIC Mindset: Navigating a Lifetime of Career Transitions

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**Abstract:** Shifts in the global economy and advances in technology are driving change in the career landscape, affecting workers globally. Global trends indicate under-engagement in postsecondary education and under-commitment to investments in human capital; the practice of career development is ripe for change. By exploring the future of careers globally and present career development in the Asia Pacific region, this article highlights ways career professionals can co-create career possibilities with clients to drive self-supporting habits over a lifetime of transitions. Career professionals must assist their clients in identifying and maximizing their own potential to meet both existing needs and to anticipate skill gaps. The authors encourage the adoption of the HEROIC mindset model as defined by Rich Feller. By leveraging their own psychological capital, clients will be able to embrace curiosity, intentional exploration, hope, confidence, resilience, optimism, and clarity to effectively adapt to a lifetime of career transitions.

Advances in technology are driving change in the career landscape and have created an urgency to “learn continuously as the shelf life of skills shorten and career paths meander and lengthen” (Zao-Sanders, 2017, September 27). As workers attempt to redefine themselves to ensure their relevance in this new ultracompetitive economy, do-it-yourself career management has become a consumer product. Recent years have seen an uptick in degree programs, certificates, licenses, certifications, badges, and micro-credentials. New modes and models of delivery have also contributed to an explosion of choices in career development (Carnevale, Garcia, & Gulish, 2017). Clients of all ages and credentials ask: Am I learning as fast as the workplace is changing? How do I plan and manage a career with such an uncertain future? And although many learning opportunities exist, workers have less than 1% of a typical work week designated to learning (Bersin by Deloitte, n.d.).

Most workers report feeling restless, disengaged, and regretful about career investments. Fifty-one percent of adults in the United States say that they would study a different major in college, choose a different institution, or select a different degree program (Gallup-Strada Education Network, 2017). By some estimates, only 15% of workers worldwide feel engaged at work (Clifton, 2017, June 13), and 71% are searching for new jobs or watching for openings (Indeed, 2015). In Japan, the government has had to intervene to address historical issues of stress, clinical burnout, and related suicides aggravated by the reality that a staggering 94% of workers feel disengaged in their work; an equally alarming 70% in the U.S. feel disengaged (Clifton, 2017, June). Clients worldwide seek structure and insights to navigate these incongruences and to cope during change within the workforce, as well as to help them design what is next (Feller & Peila-Shuster, in press).

Culled from the first author's experience as USA Director to the Asia Pacific Career Development Association and consulting across six continents, as well as the second author's leadership of the National Career Development Association's Global Connections Committee and experience living and working on three continents, this article focuses on the knowledge, skills, and mindsets clients need to transition over a lifetime and thrive globally. While examining human capital issues and career development trends useful to those in the Asia Pacific region, we hold a cautious stance with great respect for the contextual nature of the reader's local experience. Our experience suggests that co-creating possibilities to drive self-supporting habits over a lifetime of transitions requires: (1) an understanding of the future of careers, (2) an evaluation of the present career development context and (3) an intentional commitment to the development of new skills and the HEROIC mindset as defined by Rich Feller (2017). These will help clients to embrace hope, confidence, resilience, optimism, intentional exploration, clarity, and curiosity to effectively adapt to a lifetime of career transitions.

### The Future of Careers

We live in an "age of acceleration" (Friedman, 2016) where advances in technology catalyze change at an unprecedented rate. It is expected that between 2018 and 2020, advanced robotics, autonomous transport, artificial intelligence, machine learning, advanced materials, biotechnology, and genomics will have the greatest impact on industries and business models. These trends will most likely result in global shifts in job families and functions, potentially eliminating more than 7.1 million jobs before 2020, a large concentration of which will be in white collar positions while adding 2 million jobs in fields such as information technology, math, engineering, and architecture (World Economic Forum,

2016). Ray Kurzweil, Director of Engineering at Google, foreshadowed a decade-and-a-half ago that "because of the explosive power of exponential growth, the 21st century will be equivalent to 20,000 years of progress" (Kurzweil & Meyer, 2003, p.1). Today's changing world is one that not only feels significantly different, but also one where the change is "no ordinary disruption" as Dobbs, Manyika, and Woetzel have termed it and their new book (2016). They categorized four colliding forces driving unprecedented change as:

1. "The shifting locus of economic activity and dynamism to emerging markets like China and to cities within those markets" (p.4);
2. "acceleration in the scope, scale, and economic impact of technology on market competition" (p.5);
3. demographic deficits resulting from an aging population and reduced fertility, globally; and
4. "the degree to which the world is much more connected through trade and through movements in capital, people, and information" (p.7).

In response to these changes, Kurzweil posited that "the models underlying society at every level, which are largely gauged on a linear model. . .are going to have to be redefined" (Kurzweil & Meyer, 2003, p.1). One of the many ways this change is evident is the projection that humans will soon live 100-year lives which will force us beyond the current three-stage life cycle (i.e., education, career, and retirement) to a multi-stage life pattern that has yet to be invented (Gratton & Scott, 2016).

New America and Bloomberg combined forces to attempt to predict the future of work. After carefully examining economic trends and conducting scenario planning, they identified four potential future work forecasts (The Commission on Work, Workers, and Technology; CWWT, 2017):

1. “A community-based, local, and sustainable economy that prioritizes work in person to-person interactions” (CWWT, 2017, p.12). In this predicted economy, comprehensive automation will result in fewer jobs. Individuals will revert to preferring handmade, local, and organic products, and workers will return to low-skilled, care-based tasks.
2. “A corporate-centered economy in which economic life is organized around large, profitable companies and those they employ” (CWWT, 2017, p.13). In this predicted economy, workers will be displaced from jobs in professional, retail, and service industries by robots. Workers with expertise in developing next generation technology and AI systems will be most in demand.
3. “A portfolio approach to work in which people build reputational rankings with each task they complete, combining multiple income streams to allow for a career that’s self-driven, entrepreneurial, and constantly changing” (CWWT, 2017, p.14). In this predicted economy, most aspects of work will be automated, and there will be a rise of contingent workers who specialize in specific tasks, like focusing on extending the capabilities of automation, or provide educational services to support the upskilling of new tasks.
4. “A technology-driven economy in which people embrace connectivity in every area of their lives and look for ways that machines can extend their capabilities through data-platforms, electronic devices, and virtual reality” (CWWT, 2017, p.14). In this predicted economy, artificial intelligence will facilitate problem-solving. Workers will predominately be coaches and psychologists who focus on advancing productivity in such areas as leadership, writing, social media, etc., using data integration.

The four work forecasts confirm that technological advances—like those propelled by artificial intelligence, the internet of things, and increased global connectivity—will replace human workers (Hess & Ludwig, 2017). In all four forecasts, “individuals have to be able to redefine themselves at a faster and faster pace” (Kurzweil & Meyer, 2003, p.1) and commit to becoming more technological savvy, innovative, human-centered, and specialized. Professional career practitioners have significant work ahead to prepare our clients for the work of the future. To fully understand and bridge this gap with appropriate career development, we must first explore the current context of career development.

### **The Current Context of Career Development**

We know that careers are much more than jobs. Work provides financial resources and also provides structure, relationships, and opportunities for finding purpose. However, careers are no longer based on stable, hierarchical organizational structures and lengthy employer-employee relationships as was the case for many privileged workers in many Western European and American markets in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Instead, careers are marked by uncertainty, instability, and unpredictability (Baron, 2012).

The number of occupations available to workers in the U.S. more than tripled from 1950 to 2010, and tripled again from 270 to 840 (Carnevale, Garcia, et al., 2017). Today, new occupational titles are established (seemingly) daily. It is estimated that 65% of children entering elementary school today will hold occupations that do not yet exist (World Economic Forum, 2016), making career development goals a moving target. The observations about the current context of career development that follow acknowledge the changing context of learning and work across the lifespan.

### **Low Wages and High Unemployment Prevalent for High School Graduates**

In a skills-biased economy that rewards “knowledge nomads” (i.e., those agile, self-directed learners with access to and competence in technology regardless of location) (Feller & Whichard, 2005), workers with only a high school education suffer from low wages and high unemployment to a greater extent than their counterparts did one and two generations ago (ACT, Inc., 2014). Postsecondary education has become required to enter the middle class, but unfortunately, many young adults are not engaging in postsecondary education adequately (Carnevale & Rose, 2015). The Population Reference Bureau (2017) measures the percentage of youth globally between the ages of 15-24 years old who are not pursuing education or work training and who are not engaged in gainful employment. Indonesia and the Philippines lead in the Asia Pacific Region with more than 15% of all youth and more than 30% of young women fitting this category. These workers may have no choice but to focus on manual, routine, and low-skilled labor employment devalued in today’s global business practices and curtailed by automation.

### **Value of the College Experience is Increasingly Questioned**

Worldwide, 34% of males and 38% of females who are of postsecondary school age are enrolled in tertiary education. This percentage is larger in Asia (65% of males; 59% of females) and in the United States (74% of males; 70% of females) (Population Reference Bureau, 2017). These high numbers do not mean that it is easy to attain. The financial resources required to attend college has increased exponentially in recent years. Trends in U.S. college pricing indicate that, at four-year public institutions, tuition and fees have increased 19 times faster than the median family income since 1980 (Carnevale, Garcia, et al., 2017). Over the past three decades, many states have divested in postsecondary

education, thereby shifting the financial burden associated with college attendance to students and their families (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, 2017). Prohibitive increases in college costs are not isolated to the United States. In China, for instance, it is estimated that the cost of one year’s college tuition at Chinese universities is equivalent to four years of income in urban areas while up to 14 years in rural, farming areas (Chamie, 2017, May 18).

Because of the high cost of college, recent college graduates are entering adulthood with record levels of student debt. Two decades ago, only a half of recent graduates had college debt, and on average, it was \$15,000 (Pew Research Center, 2014). The class of 2016 in the U.S. graduated with an average debt of \$37,172 (Student Loan Hero, 2017). Over the past decade, the rise in tuition, fees, and room and board at public four-year schools has been 3.3% annually even after adjusting for inflation (The College Board, 2014). And although there are 40 countries that offer free tuition at their public colleges, students still accrue debt to cover living expenses and fees. For example, 70% of students in tuition-free Sweden have student loans, and the typical student graduates with \$20,000 of debt (Chamie, 2017, May 18). It is not surprising that most governments seek more cost-efficient ways to educate their college-bound talent.

In addition to rising costs and increased debt, recent scholarship such as *College Unbound* (Selingo, 2013) and *Academically Adrift* (Arum & Roksa, 2010) has challenged assumptions about the measurable value of the college experience. Brandon Busted, Executive Director of Education and Workforce Development, at Gallup writes: “Americans have clearly made up their minds about the importance of colleges in preparing students to get good jobs, but measurements of this outcome are murky at best and nonexistent at worst,” (2014, February 25). In fact, when hiring, business leaders say a candidate’s

knowledge in the field and applied skills are more important factors than college attended or major (Calderon & Sidhu, 2014, February 25). Internships and work-based learning have become a form of documenting and supplementing the quality of the higher education experience as those experiences are looked upon favorably.

### **More Education Fails to Guarantee Work Performance or Higher Pay**

In the present (and thus, we expect in the future) workforce, more education does not guarantee more work readiness as required education does not necessarily equip individuals with the skills needed for successful job performance (ACT, 2014). Uncomfortable as it might be for those of us who work in higher education settings, four-year college degrees may not provide the security or mobility once professed. For example, technology changes shift the relative price of skills and the market then adjusts by paying more for skills than for educational pedigree. Even as liberal arts proponents argue for marketable skills (Burning Glass Technologies, 2013), STEM graduates are discovering that precise specializations have short shelf lives.

More education does not always equate to greater earning potential, so some assert that all learning pathways deserve equal priority and respect (Jarvis, 2013). It is estimated that 30% of individuals who hold 2-year associate's degrees earn more than their counterparts who hold bachelor's degrees (Carnevale, Garcia, et al., 2017). In addition, there are approximately 30 million jobs that pay an average of \$55,000 per year without requiring a bachelor's degree (Carnevale, Strohl, Cheah, & Ridley, 2017). While blue-collar jobs like transportation and construction are declining due to the influence of technology and offshoring of positions, skilled-service opportunities like information technology, finance, and healthcare are increasing (Carnevale, Strohl, et al., 2017). *Although fields like manufacturing and*

*production are expected to lose positions, these fields are “also anticipated to have relatively good potential for upskilling, redeployment, and productivity enhancement through technology rather than pure substitution” (World Economic Forum, 2016, p.1), favoring those with associate degrees.*

Relevant, academic, and challenging career and technical education (CTE) with strong employer partnerships and access to high technology produces strong middle skill workers. Growing numbers of college graduates understand that making the most of new technologies increases career prospects. Since non-technical college graduates do not replace technical workers, but rather replace service and retail workers with less education, CTE is increasingly valued by unemployed and underemployed college graduates. The market power of technical education therefore continues to garner attention.

### **A Lack of Commitment to Human Capital**

Skill set disruption impacts a wide range of industries and occupational titles. “Even jobs that will shrink in number are simultaneously undergoing change in the skill sets required to do them. . .shortening the shelf-life of employees’ existing skill sets” (World Economic Forum, 2016, p.3). The commitment to an investment in human capital—that is, the talents, technical and social skills, knowledge, and creativity possessed by workers—is therefore more critical than ever. Formal education and skills-based education develop over time and support both an individual's future and that of society as a whole (Smith, 1776). Human capital shapes how well political, social, and civic institutions function, and it is often a leading factor in a region's economic productivity. A commitment to human capital development helps ensure the knowledge and skills that workers need to create and add value to their lives. The World Economic Forum (2017) asserts that “all people deserve an equal opportunity to develop their talents” (p. v).

Even with similar levels of upfront educational investment, on-the-job learning is critical for generating returns on initial investments and making sure that skills grow and increase in value over time. Unfortunately, a worker's assets can also depreciate over time when clients are inhibited from contributing their full potential or unable to apply and exercise assets due to misaligned skill needs or inefficient labor exchange practices. Using the Global Human Capital Index, the World Economic Forum quantified the world's talent potential in hopes of sparking a revolution focused on using targeted education to meet the needs of the future workforce (2017). The Index ranks countries on their performance in developing human capital, thereby shedding light on the world's ability to gain, expand, and utilize skills throughout the human life cycle. Key findings from the Global Human Capital Report (2017, p. iii) include:

- On average, the world has developed only 62% of its human capital. Or, nations are neglecting or wasting, on average, 38% of their talent.
- Leaders of the Index are generally economies with a longstanding commitment to their people's educational attainment and that have deployed a broad share of their workforce in skill-intensive occupations across a broad range of sectors. Unsurprisingly, they are mainly today's high-income economies. Creating a virtuous cycle of this nature should be the aim of all countries.
- At a regional level, the human capital development gap is smallest in North America, followed by Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, and Middle East and North Africa. The gap is largest in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.
- In East Asia, the best-performing countries in the region, such as Singapore (11), Japan (17), and Korea, Rep. (27) are

global strongholds of human capital success, while countries such as Laos (84), Myanmar (89) and Cambodia (92) trail the region.

- From South Asia, Sri Lanka (70) is the top performer, while Nepal (98), India (103), Bangladesh (111) and Pakistan (125) lag behind. With the exception of Sri Lanka, the rest have yet to reach the 60% threshold with regard to developing their human capital.

As the Index quantifies, with skill underutilization, regional economies hinder a client's ability to be productive because there are fewer opportunities for clients to reach their potential or to benefit from innovation, wealth creation, and lifestyle improvements. Human capital formation, worker engagement strategies, client motivations to learn, and employer efforts to develop work-based learning are all interwoven. Career professionals who understand these connections see career development as a means to convert potential into human capital.

#### **A New Phase of Aging Demands Readiness**

Baby Boomers are currently benefiting from the longevity dividend shared around the world. Today, aging is understood less as chronological age and more by markers of failed health (e.g., loss of mobility), requiring many adults to reimagine their life through a series of choices, acts of courage, and a necessity to expand their curiosity. On one hand, many baby boomers are re-evaluating options about leaving paid work, creating the good life (O'Toole, 2005), and seeing aging as getting a second wind to remain highly engaged within the workforce (Thomas, 2014). On the other hand, many are forced to extend their work life for financial reasons. For example, while more than 10,000 Baby Boomers retire in the United States each day (Pew Research Center, 2010, December 29), most are not as well prepared financially as hoped. This global trend of aging is evident especially within countries with limited

innovation or high dependence on imported natural resources. Maintaining purpose, relevance, and connection is foundational to navigating a new life phase—a time that could be ripe with potential (Leider & Webber, 2013).

Returning to postsecondary or some form of lifelong learning is increasingly important to finding work and exploring unpaid—but still purposeful—work opportunities. Similar navigation issues and uncertainty exist, of course, for adults regardless of age, title, or income. Each life stage brings new questions about self-understanding and readiness for intentional exploration about “what is next?” (Feller & Peila-Shuster, in press). This question is normal for the underemployed, the unemployed, and for those who do not need to work for pay but wish to contribute to society in a meaningful way. However, the question is especially critical for those without paid work. Without a sense of purpose from work and without the pursuit of continuous learning, career transitions leave individuals with career pain that is often described as a hollowness or sense of being irrelevant, invisible, and isolated.

A review of the current context of career development confirms that to meet the needs of the future workplace, practice is ripe for change towards a focus on human capital development at any age. Given varied engagement in postsecondary education and limited opportunities for on-the-job training, we posit that career professionals must assist their clients in identifying and maximizing their own potential to meet both existing and anticipated skills gaps – while leveraging their psychological capital. To summarize, career development professionals are tasked with integrating the complexities of:

This changing context of career development requires strategies to maximize potential and opportunities to examine our perspectives about navigating change.

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practice is ripe for change towards a focus on human capital development at any age. Given varied engagement in postsecondary education and limited opportunities for on-the-job training, we posit that career professionals must assist their clients in identifying and maximizing their own potential in order to meet both existing and anticipated skills gaps – while leveraging their psychological capital. In the section that follows, we will share recommendations for workers of the future, along with ways that career professionals may co-create career possibilities with work-seekers to drive self-supporting habits over a lifetime of transitions.

### **Bridging the Gap: Maximizing Potential and Developing HEROIC Mindsets**

Our observations confirm the need for systemic changes globally as called for by organization such as the World Economic Forum to development pipelines to ensure the place of humans in the future world of work. This will require identifying potential earlier, effectively building systems to meet perennial skills gaps, and viewing career development programs as investments, not social programs. Globalization, technology, and demographic and longevity trends have turned careers upside down. “Without targeted action today to manage the near-term transition and build a workforce with futureproof skills, governments will have to cope with ever-growing unemployment and inequality, and businesses with a shrinking consumer base,” warns the World Economic Forum (2016, p. 7). The Forum emphasizes the need for profound change in the ways that both governments and businesses approach their education, skill-development, and employment practices, grounded in a deep understanding of each country and industry’s current skills base. Our observations have confirmed the need for global systemic changes to talent development pipelines in order to ensure the place of humans in the future world of work. This will require identifying potential earlier, effectively

building systems to meet perennial skills gaps, and viewing career development programs as investments, not social programs.

However, readiness for career change and development is complex globally. Untrained in career development, many secondary educators define readiness as preparedness for college and job placement. Our observations, however, have shown that successful job placement does not equate to job readiness or preparedness, nor is there assurances of employment longevity in these unpredictable times. Professional career practitioners are wise to encourage their clients to measure career success in terms of the client's ability to design a life of meaning that honors their cultural context while adapting to the changing career landscape. Career preparedness, in turn, should be viewed as purposeful skill development rooted in deep self-awareness and intentional career exploration to maximize both the client's potential and value.

### **Recommendations for Workers of the Future**

Leaders around the world across many types of organizations will soon be tasked with designing new systems breaking away from current models if they are not already (Kurzweil & Meyer, 2003). Navigating uncharted paths in an age of disruption will require novel and innovative thinking. Workers at all levels must commit to becoming technologically savvy to steer its future and leverage its utility to improve services, create new options, and fill new needs. Clients also must understand that although both knowledge and skill specialization will be critical to the future of human work (CWWT, 2017), they must guard against clinging to these specializations as they offer no guarantee of long term employability given the unprecedented rate of change experienced worldwide. Instead, clients must continually redefine themselves by expanding their areas of expertise to bridge existing and anticipated

skills gaps because advances in technology are leading to new models and delivery methods (Carnevale, Garcia, et al., 2017). Clients must leverage to pursue both depth and breadth of topical studies. The requisite of multiple and flexible future specializations will necessitate the individual's commitment to their own lifelong learning - regardless of their organization's commitment to human capital (which cannot be guaranteed). Engaging in continual learning will also allow clients to access others holding mutual interests and insights about continuing postsecondary skill development, leading to new and deeper desires for additional information.

Though work has traditionally provided structure and opportunities for finding purpose, this is no longer the case (Baron, 2012). As the workforce becomes increasingly uncertain, clients must hold true to their own belief systems, and commit to understanding and enacting their personal values. Career professionals must help their clients to find consistency and call upon a decision-making system to help them experience clarity and intentionality in search of deeper understanding, and application of mutual and sustainable goals of well-being. Furthermore, as technology continues to narrow the distance between nations, and workplaces become increasingly diverse, workers must commit to continuously developing their cross-cultural competence and communication skills. Commitment to these skills will allow clients to honor differences, develop empathy, and make connections to combat potential isolation and vulnerability.

### **A Focus on Potential**

Honoring natural aptitudes is the foundation to identifying and nurturing potential. This is not easy in any context and it is even more difficult with a global economy increasingly unable to create enough livable wage jobs to match aspirations where employees struggle to achieve their best fit (Feller, 2014). The lack of best fit is evidenced by relatively high under-



and unemployment rates, and the frequency of intentional self-exploration, the client’s blind

		Measured/Performance	
		APTITUDES	
		Low	High
Self-Reported INTERESTS	High	<p><b>Struggle Fit</b> Examine tension, challenges, and rewards of using low natural aptitudes within high interest work environments</p>	<p><b>Best Fit</b> Use natural aptitudes and be rewarded by spending time/focus within satisfying activities</p>
	Low	<p><b>Draining Fit</b> Explore and field test how you would be distracted and tired not using your natural aptitudes spending time on less satisfying activities</p>	<p><b>Extrinsic Reward Fit</b> Examine intrinsic rewards, boredom, and challenges of using natural aptitudes within low interest work environments</p>

(Feller, 2014)

ineffective adult career transitions. Low engagement and poor work performance due to mismatched abilities raises the importance of carefully matching abilities with job requirements (Swanson & Schneider, 2013). Connecting the client’s self-concept to a meaningful life purpose early is important to honor aptitudes and nurture potential, particularly as evidence shows that effective career interventions allow individuals to proactively manage career transitions (Whiston & Blustein, 2013).

Occupations vary greatly with respect to the skillsets required to succeed (Krane & Tirre, 2012). Performance-based integrative assessments like YouScience can enhance client outcomes and provide precise and valid indices that move beyond interests to explore vocational options free of experience-driven “exposure bias” (Rottinghaus & Jeong Park, 2018). As a client’s strongest performance-based aptitudes are identified for use within high interest environments, flexibility and openness to change is fostered, revealing opportunities for skill development. Through

spots may be challenged, and hidden assets may be discovered. These outcomes may, in turn, shape how the client adds value, and could lead to adaptive, multiple perspectives about the future. On one hand, clients may find the Best FIT Model (illustrated in figure 1) useful because it correlates strongly with focused learning and greater ease in college and career transitions (Feller, 2014). Strong aptitudes employed within low interest environments, on the other hand, displace internal motivation. Helping clients to find their best fits by connecting self-report interests with performance measured aptitudes leads to increased engagement, reduced distractions, and increased probability that they will find environments within which they will use more of their potential.

Figure 1. Best FIT Model (Feller, 2014) illustrates the relationship among self-awareness, interests, and aptitudes.

### The HEROIC Mindset

To best adapt to a lifetime of career transitions, Feller (2017, May) recommends the adoption of the HEROIC mindset, which embraces curiosity, intentional exploration, hope, confidence, resilience, optimism, and clarity. Though we face a complex present and uncertain future, clients may find comfort in viewing career as “the full expression of who you are and how you want to be in the world, which keeps on expanding as it naturally goes through cycles of stability and change,” (Franklin, 2014, p.451). This HEROIC mindset offers a concrete way for clients to move forward. Before describing the HEROIC mindset (Feller, 2017, May) in detail, an exploration into what is meant by *mindset* is warranted. In synthesizing the extant literature, Gupta and Govindarajam (2002, p.116) explain the concept as follows:

As human beings, we are limited in our ability to absorb and process information. Thus, we are constantly challenged by the complexity, ambiguity, and dynamism of the information environment around us. We address this challenge through the process of filtration. We are selective in what we absorb and biased in how we interpret it. The term *mindset* refers to these cognitive filters.

Within unpredictable times, learning and maintaining self-supporting habits increases the chance of remaining engaged during stress, disruption and change. Without strong cognitive filters “a person will be at the mercy of forces that he or she can’t understand, let alone control” (Gardner, 2007, p.2). The HEROIC mindset (Feller, 2017, May) enables clients to draw upon psychological capital to move forward regardless of what career changes confront them. It includes six elements: hope, self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, intentional exploration, and clarity and curiosity.

*Hope (H)* occurs not only in difficult moments but also as a thinking process to actively pursue goals. It brings together “will”

(a sense of investment and energy), and “way” (the resources used to generate viable avenues or pathways to finding purpose in work).

*Self-Efficacy (E)* is a person’s sense of “I can” where they trust their own ability to organize and execute a course of action to manage a job loss, transition, or a return to purposeful work commitments.

*Resilience (R)* is crucial to successful navigation of the stress and adversity brought about by change. It results from how a client defines, reframes, and constructs meaning of events. Rigid or habitual self-defeating thinking limits the ability to bounce back and move ahead. Flexibility, objective thinking, and rational explanation of setbacks increase resiliency and acceptance of change.

*Optimism (O)* is the ability to seek solutions, see the upside of things gone wrong, and reduce the gap between present and future. By not personalizing or catastrophizing failure when performance causes setbacks, the mind stays open (rather than adopting helplessness). Believing that (1) good events have a permanent cause, (2) causes of bad events are temporary and (3) denying universal explanations for failure expands opportunities.

*Intentional Exploration (I)* is looking for positive clues, welcoming planned (and unplanned) opportunities, and taking inspired action as a way to grow. These activities keep clients engaged and can help broaden, build, and test possibilities.

*Clarity and Curiosity (C)* are about possessing clear intentions and acting on purposeful commitments which creates focus, reduces distractions, and maximizes energy. Being clear about internal motivations makes it easier to act intentionally, and with integrity and curiosity (a readiness and openness to sparks of imagination).

Gupta and Govindarajan (2002) emphasize that mindsets evolve through a repetitious process, influenced by our histories. To change our current mindsets, we must become explicitly conscious of them. “The more hidden

and subconscious our cognitive filters, the greater the likelihood of rigidity” (p. 117).

### HEROIC Case Studies.

The case study examples that follow seek to be instructive for career professionals helping clients expand their current mindsets and consciously work to shift cognitive filters in the direction of HEROIC (Feller, 2017, May).

Jonas expresses little *Hope (H)* about completing an assignment. Lacking clarity about how to progress and stating few available resources, he seems defeated. To address this, the career professional may ask Jonas to think of someone who is hopeful about getting their assignment done. Next, Jonas may be prompted to consider what the person is thinking about the assignment, and what actions he or she is taking to complete the assignment. This series of probes can help Jonas experience a new way to feel, think and act regarding the assignment.

Tisha, looking discouraged, explains that they do not believe they can obtain an interview. Lacking *self-Efficacy (E)*, they distrust their ability to organize and execute their goal, which creates a significant barrier. For Tisha, turning an “I can’t” into an “I can” may build confidence and trust in their ability. To address this, the career professional may ask Tisha to tell about a time when they believed they could do something well. Next, the career professional may prompt Tisha to explore how they knew they could do something well and how it felt. Finally, they may explore what it would look and feel like if they were well-prepared for the interview. By experiencing these reflections, Tisha gets one step closer to trusting their ability to organize and execute steps to obtain an interview.

Ulan lost his mother to cancer and reports other life events that have created uncertainty and instability. He expresses, “I have no control over my future.” To address this, the career professional may ask Ulan to reflect upon a time when he bounced back from a conflict or challenge, when he voluntarily helped a person

he didn’t know, or when he went out of his comfort zone to do something new. Next, Ulan could reflect on how it feels to talk about these experiences. The career professional may also ask him to paint a picture of something that he can presently control. Being *Resilient (R)* means being able to reframe an experience to help reduce stress and construct a more helpful meaning. Practicing a positive adaptation can create insights about choice-making and bring Ulan beyond his normal reaction.

Linh remarks that her inability to meet friends is because she does nothing of interest, and that when she does meet someone, it’s because she’s “lucky.” Linh’s narrative illustrates how she views negative events as personal, permanent, and pervasive, and positive things as external, temporary and situation specific. *Optimism (O)* expects good things to happen in the future and derives from how the client explains why events occur in the past, present and future. Asking Linh why optimistic people differ from pessimistic people can help her to see the choices she can make in attributing cause to events. Asking her about a time when she was optimistic can help her to see her power in contributing to positive events. In addition, having her picture a future event where she is optimistic may help her experience the ability to shift her thinking to a more future-oriented perspective. By exposing elements of optimism, Linh may begin to see possible reasons, circumstances, and opportunities that lead to favorable events.

Ahmad seems to flounder at college and follows the whims of his friends in choosing courses and selecting a program emphasis. When the career professional asks Ahmad what clues he sees, or has experienced before, about choosing a fitting option, he is surprised to discover that stories about his summer job, feedback from his uncle, and a news item were related to his interest in mediating conflicts. Looking for clues during an *Intentional exploration (I)* of possibilities helps Ahmad to welcome new opportunities.

Ichika, tired of moving from job to job and finding little success, lacks motivation for his job search. Frequent job changes and little progression come with feelings of regret about his two degrees and considerable debt. When the career professional asks, “how do you want to spend your day?” and “what activities do you want more of?” ze was startled by the effect of the questions. Explaining what his ideal day would look like freed him to seek *Clarity (C)* about those things most important to him. By reflecting on what activities ze wanted to increase, ze also created a deep sense of *Curiosity*.

These brief case studies serve to emphasize that leveraging clients’ psychological capital to support their own self-adaptability enables them to maximize their potential to bridge existing and anticipated skills gaps. While a client creates self-defeating barriers, career professionals are positioned to help them identify new choices about their perceptions of an event, situation, or relationship. As clients explore how they might feel differently in another situation, identify how they would know if they made a positive choice in support of their adaptability, and visualize a desirable image of the future in their mind, clients are empowered to gain capacity to overcome present and future barriers.

### Summary

Career development—as in demand in the Asia Pacific region as it is worldwide—is key to developing potential. To continually position themselves as vital to the talent pipeline, clients must focus on continuous growth through lifelong learning, and commit to productive self-care and self-advocacy habits while leveraging their psychological capital. As work and learning undergo significant and continuous change, skills remain employment’s currency regardless of which future work scenario unfolds. Fortunately, a career professional’s perspective and productive cognitive filters can influence how

clients navigate a lifetime of transitions. By integrating key insights into the potential future of work, understanding the current context of career development, making an intentional commitment to developing new skills, and adopting the HEROIC mindset, a client’s lifetime of transitions will hold more potential.

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