

## Exploring Career and Life Design: Innovation, Resilience, and Personal Growth

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In the scientific spirit of CERN, this Special Issue focuses on humanity's biggest experiment: Life Design. It is about transformations and innovations related to the most profound questions of what it means to design your life in your personal and professional context for sustainable flourishing, meaning, happiness, and well-being on individual and societal levels. We sought inspiring articles that spark new ideas, go against what is commonly understood, and inspire us to ask more questions and create new experiments to advance practice-oriented and experimentation-driven innovation in the Career and Life Design field. Future dynamics, characterised by rapid technological advancements, globalisation, and evolving societal norms, are shaping our lives and demanding adaptability, self-leadership, and lifelong learning (Landberg & Wolf, 2022). Traditional career paths and life trajectories have become less predictable; consequently, a flexible framework for people to continuously reassess and redefine their goals and strategies, ensuring resilience and relevance in a rapidly changing world, is essential to long-term happiness and well-being (Wolf & Maisch, 2023a).

Life Design has been hailed as a new paradigm in career construction that empowers individuals to actively shape their lives through thoughtful, creative, and meaningful career development (Savickas, 2009; 2012). With its roots in career construction theory (CCT) (Savickas, 1997), life design signifies a shift toward more person-centric and self-directed career planning, emphasising intrinsic motivation and contextual adaptability (Savickas et al., 2012). The field of career and life design has grown to incorporate elements of design thinking, entrepreneurship, and positive psychology as well (Burnett & Evans, 2016; Cagarman, 2022; Gedeon, 2021; Gedeon & Kernbach, 2024; Maisch & Wolf, 2022; Wolf & Maisch, 2023b). Life design counselling (LDC) integrates career counselling and psychotherapy using Systematic Treatment Selection (STS) and employs assessment tools, concepts, and interventions from both career planning and positive psychology theoretical

orientations and world views (Cardoso, 2016; Savickas, 2015). Positive psychology elements of life design use cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), mindfulness, self-talk, self-reflection, and introspection to challenge and change one's internal resources, beliefs, attitudes, automatic thoughts, intentions, and behaviours to increase positive emotions, decrease negative emotions, and enhance psychological well-being, satisfaction with life, meaning and self-actualisation (Boniwell, 2012).

While LDC is practised in a dyadic setting with an expert and non-expert (e.g., therapist and patient), new life design approaches and innovations rooted in design thinking and entrepreneurship are characterised by a less hierarchical, peer-to-peer collaborative team setting in which the participants contribute to each other's design challenges. This educational approach to career and life design typically involves workshops that use team-based design thinking, blending project-based learning, identity narrative, self-determination, and positive psychology interventions for individuals to introspect, develop visions, ideate life scenarios and test life prototypes (Maisch et al., 2024). Emerging evidence demonstrates life design's effectiveness in enhancing a wide variety of positive life outcomes, including self-esteem, career decision-making, adaptability, resilience, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (Camussi et al., 2023; Wolf & Landberg, 2022; Pordelan et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2022). Entrepreneurial education, experiential learning, and student-centric pedagogies have been shown to positively empower students with essential competencies and attitudinal learning outcomes related to happiness and well-being, including alertness, curiosity, empathy, proactivity, resilience, adaptability, optimism, internal locus of control, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and core self-evaluation (Gedeon, 2022). Theoretical frameworks underpinning these empirical results include Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), and theories of motivation (Acquah et al., 2021). Additional related frameworks and theories include effectuation



theory (Sarasvathy, 2009), business model canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2012), business model you (Clark et al., 2009), speculative design (Dunne & Raby, 2013) and design science research (Hevner, 2007).

Much work remains regarding theory-building, model development, experimentation, and discovery of career and life design innovations. How can we understand and improve the impact of career and life design programs on participants' life outcomes such as happiness, satisfaction with life, subjective well-being, engagement (flow), relationships, meaning, autonomy, mastery, purpose, self-esteem, self-efficacy, internal locus of control, optimism, hope, resiliency, growth mindset and empathy in addition to potential career and life outcomes including work-life balance, family, health, job satisfaction, stress, financial security, entrepreneurial mindset and positive impact in society (Wolf & Landberg, 2023).

This Special Issue aligns with the CERN IdeaSquare's commitment to experimentation, exploring career and life design as an integrative approach that equips individuals to confront modern challenges. Life Design has become particularly relevant in today's VUCA world—marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity—where personal and career adaptability are crucial to achieving long-term well-being and fulfilment (Kraaijenbrink, 2019). The contributions in this issue extend life design's applications across educational contexts, entrepreneurial pathways, and innovative digital mentorship solutions.

This Special Issue brings together papers illuminating diverse perspectives and innovative approaches to the Career and Life Design research area. The selected works offer valuable insights and deepen our understanding of key topics within this field by bridging theoretical, empirical, and practical viewpoints.

We commence with two **foundational papers** that lay the theoretical groundwork for this issue, offering key concepts underpinning the discussions and discoveries in the following sections. Gedeon and Kernbach (2024) explore *Concepts, Theories, and Future Directions in Career and Life Design*, providing a comprehensive overview of the field's theoretical underpinnings and emerging directions. This foundational paper establishes essential theoretical bases supporting Life Design's scientific advancement as a new and interdisciplinary research field. Following this, Wolf, Maisch and Sales' (2024) paper on *Entrepreneurial Life Design: Bridging Innovation and Personal Growth in Entrepreneurship Education* highlights the relevance of Life Design in entrepreneurship and underscores its importance for everyone navigating today's complex world. By integrating life design principles with personal growth, this framework promotes an entrepreneurial mindset and skillset as essential future skills for thriving in both entrepreneurial and everyday journeys.

Following, five **conceptual papers** navigate through innovative frameworks and ideas, pushing the boundaries of current thought and proposing new lenses through which to view our field's most pressing challenges. Adlmaier-

Herbst and Maisch's (2024) *Beyond Ideation: Potentials and Challenges of Creativity in the Entrepreneurial Organisation of Life* delves into creativity's integration into life design, focusing on self-regulation and emotional control as a means to sustain creativity. The authors outline PSI theory's practical applications in ELD, with proposed exercises for each phase of creativity. This theoretical framework invites empirical exploration and is positioned to influence life design education, promoting creative thinking as a lifelong skill for personal and entrepreneurial development. Further emphasising the importance of resilience, Todt, Wolf and Maisch (2024) present the 4D LOOPING framework in *Navigating Peaks and Valleys – Fostering Resilience through Entrepreneurial Life Design*. This model not only equips individuals to handle the inherent highs and lows of career and entrepreneurial paths but also makes a valuable contribution to innovations in Career and Life Design by demonstrating how specific phases within a Life Design approach can reinforce resilience factors. Broady's *Personal Branding: An Innovative Approach to Life Design Education* (2024) adds a self-branding dimension to life design, showcasing personal branding as a tool to enhance self-awareness and professional identity, aligning career choices with personal values and aspirations. Tan's *Designing an AI Career Mentor for Early Career Researchers* (2024) brings life design into the digital realm, exploring AI-powered mentorship as a solution to the mentorship gap faced by early-career researchers. This innovative approach illustrates how AI can offer scalable, personalised support for career and life planning. Hernandez's *U and I: Synthesizing Life Design and Self-Narrative* (2024) combines Life Design with Theory U. With that, it adds a narrative approach, synthesising self-narrative construction with life design and inviting individuals to integrate personal storytelling into their career planning and personal growth processes.

Anchoring theory in practice, the three **empirical papers** present rigorous studies that explore and validate key hypotheses, providing concrete evidence to inform and enrich our academic and practical understanding. The methodological study by Hall, Millar, and O'Regan (2024) at the University of Galway's *Designing Futures* program. Hall and his colleagues provide insights into the evaluation techniques, including digital storytelling, that can measure life design's impact on students' development. Their findings set a foundation for understanding how structured life design modules can be evaluated and improved over time. Pridchenko and Cagarman (2024) contribute a qualitative study on the *Individually Perceived Impact of a Life Design Intervention on Students*, focusing on the perceived benefits of life design interventions on students' outlooks on life and careers. This work demonstrates the psychological benefits of life design, including enhanced self-efficacy and proactive goal-setting. Lelis (2024) provides a unique perspective on group-based projects in *Anticipation of the Impact of Academic Group-Based Projects in University Students'*

*Desired Futures*, exploring how collaborative learning prepares students for future career planning, aligning with life design's focus on adaptive, future-oriented thinking.

Our collection continues with two insightful **case studies**, offering nuanced, real-world perspectives illuminating the practical applications and implications of our field's evolving principles. *Activating Agency through Life Design* by Vierrether, Stone, and Nelson (2024) emphasises the role of life design in fostering creativity and a proactive mindset in higher education. Using the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as a framework, this study demonstrates how life design can help students approach complex global challenges and contribute to positive change. Gorni, Di Stasi, and Vignoli (2024), in *Including Career Guidance in University Courses: The Instructor Perspective*, address the integration of career guidance within academic curricula. This paper closes the discussion on institutional support, highlighting the essential role that educational institutions play in embedding life design principles within university education.

Concluding this issue, we present a reflective piece by Pablo Garcia Tello from CERN (2024) as a coffee paper. His essay, *CERN IdeaSquare 10th Anniversary: An Aftermath Personal Reflection*, weaves philosophical insights, quantum mechanics, and biological metaphors to explore the essence of human existence and collective creativity. Drawing from Sartre's existentialism, Goodhart's Law, and the concept of autopoiesis, the author reflects on how IdeaSquare thrives as a collaborative ecosystem, continuously evolving through individual and collective contributions. This thought-provoking work invites readers to ponder their roles in shaping the meaning of shared endeavours and the unpredictability of the future.

These articles provide an overview of career and life design and open up a new interdisciplinary research field, offering fresh perspectives on Life Design. They underscore its relevance in fostering resilience, adaptability, and personal growth, responding to a growing societal demand for knowledge, tools, and guidance in these areas. This Special Issue invites readers to view Life Design not just as a career framework but as a holistic, empowering approach that holds potential for individuals and as a foundational lever for societal and sustainable development. It extends Life Design's significance beyond individual career contexts, highlighting its applicability across scientific disciplines and its value for everyone navigating the complexities and uncertainties of modern life.

We sincerely thank the authors for their dedication and thought-provoking contributions to this special issue on Career and Life Design. Their rigorous research, innovative ideas, and commitment to advancing this evolving field have been instrumental in shaping this issue. Each article reflects a remarkable level of scholarship, creativity, and engagement with both theoretical and practical aspects of life design, offering valuable insights

that will inspire readers and contribute to ongoing discourse.

We are equally grateful to the reviewers, whose expertise, insightful feedback, and meticulous attention to detail have been invaluable throughout the editorial process. Their dedication to maintaining the highest standards of academic quality and their constructive guidance have greatly enhanced the rigour and depth of each paper. Through their efforts, this issue achieves its scholarly excellence, and we thank them for their generous support and commitment to fostering innovation in career and life design research.

We hope to meet you all sometime in person in one of our upcoming Life Design Track Sessions at the European Academy of Management Conference - EURAM!

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