



TRUTHFUL' CAREER THINKING

**"IN OUR NEED TO KNOW WHAT IS
CORRECT, WE LOSE WHAT IS TRUE "**

Rachael Coventry, *Poetic Truth in a Post-Truth World*

**What is the value of integrating
existentialism into career guidance?**

Robin Stevens
Careers Education Team Leader, King's College London
Doctoral Researcher, the University of Huddersfield's International
Centre for Career Development

SESSION OUTLINE

01. PhD research overview

What does the PhD research project look like and what phases are already complete?

02. What is existentialism?

How are we to try to understand existentialism?

03. Why integrate existentialism into career guidance?

What does existentialism have to do with career guidance?

04. 'Truthful' Career Thinking and The Magic Creed

What is the idea of 'truthful' career thinking, and the meta-tool the Magic Creed?

"IN TIMES OF CRISIS, TURMOIL, AND GREAT CHANGE, ... MANY PEOPLE AT EVERY LEVEL OF OUR ECONOMIC HIERARCHY SUFFER FROM UNCERTAINTY AND INSECURITY. THEY WILL ASK QUESTIONS THAT THEY THOUGHT THEY WOULD NEVER HAVE TO. ... THE MOST USEFUL ANSWERS WILL BE THOSE THAT EMERGE FROM WITHIN US."

(Sir John Whitmore, *Coaching for Performance: GROWing people, performance and purpose*)

05. Examples: Macro and Micro-level tools, and Early Findings

What are some of the examples of tools and early findings from the action research project?

06. Summary and questions

A brief summary and the opportunity to ask questions.

- The research approaches '**career guidance**' as the subset of career development work that focuses primarily on client exploration and self-understanding, and is distinct from career advice, information, and education. This is in line with the Career Development Institute's approach in the UK (CDI, 2026).
- '**Value**' will be explored from the perspective of the CGPs involved: if something is of 'value' then, broadly speaking, it may offer a benefit for a practitioner/client and could enhance or contribute positively to career guidance practice, either directly or indirectly.
- This aligns with a **social constructionist** approach, as the content and characteristics of my research are to be found in the "human conceptualization or perception of what reality or truth is" (Nyika, 2018), and knowledge is generated through relationships and reflective inquiry (Blustein et al., 2004).

TERMINOLOGY



- An **ideographic** (focuses on specifics and individuals rather than generalities) and **reflective** practice.
- Supports **individual understanding**, integration, and insight
- Supports **decision-making**
- Assists with finding **fulfilling work** and a sense of direction
- Contributes **holistically** to prosperity, **thriving**, and wellbeing
- Explores a client's **place in the world** and plans for their future
- Helps a person to **change** in a way they wish
- Offers **empathic** understanding, upholding **values**
- Supports exploration, **curiosity** and development of self-image
- Focuses on the **welfare** and **dignity** of the individual

COMMON FEATURES OF CAREER GUIDANCE?



Sources include:

Ali & Graham (1996); CDI (2026); Egan & Reese (2020); Fishbein & Ajzen (1975), Hambly (2021); Hillier (2002); Hooley, Frigerio, & Alexander (2024); Hooley, Sultana & Thompson (2017); Kauffeld et al. (2022); Kimsey-House et al. (2018); Nelson-Jones (2011); NICE (2012); Plesa et al. (2016); Rogers (1966); Whitmore (2009).

MACRO-TOOLS

- The **theory and knowledge-base** that we have as **practitioners** that helps us to think about, reflect upon, and explore the guidance practice we do.
- We may develop this toolkit through thinking about career theories or engaging with continuing professional development on the different disciplines that intersect with our work
- Developing one's level of understanding relating to the kaleidoscope of interdisciplinary fields that interweave with career guidance is a way to develop a toolkit on a macro-level - **this enhancement may impact your guidance in a practice-wide way, as well as potentially change who you are and your approach as a CGP.**

MICRO-TOOLS

- The **tools and interventions** that you might use **directly within an appointment**. These could be both tangible and intangible, such as decks of strengths cards, lego mini-figures, metaphors and analogies, open questions, fidget toys, challenging, contracting, active listening, scaling, psychometric tests, action plans, creative writing, generative AI, and so on.
- This level of your toolkit is applied in individual instances within a client interaction - it is inherently practical and communicative in its nature. It is focused on **the small-scale interactions that we have everyday with our clients, the ways in which we engage them.**

MACRO + MICRO TOOLS

In part inspired by Maglio, A.-S. T., Butterfield, L. D., & Borgen, W. A. (2005). Existential considerations for contemporary career counseling. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 42(2), 75–92. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1920.2005.tb00902.x>

PHD RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Phase 1 - Complete

- Data collection via questionnaire.
- 84 career guidance practitioners (CGPs) participated.
- Captured context, length of appointments offered, guidance models employed, and existential topics explored in one-to-one appointments.
- Demonstrated widespread experience of exploring existential topics with/observing them in clients in 1-2-1 guidance settings, relevance of them to practice, and desire to learn more about them in a careers education setting.
- Article detailing findings published in NICEC journal May 2026 - Stevens, R. (2026). Exploring one-to-one career guidance: Appointment lengths, guidance models, and existential topics. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, 56(1), 97-116. <https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5609>

Phase 2 - Ongoing

- Action Research Project taking place over 8 weeks.
- 26 CGPs participated - all active practitioners.
- Series of workshops and resources informed by Phase 1 delivered to, and shaped by, the community of practitioners.





Existential concerns as part of careers guidance

A notable feature of the findings is that **existential concerns are widely present in client interactions**, with 100% of respondents having encountered at least one topic, and **94% (n:79) identifying three or more**.

This exploration or observation spanned a **wide range of job titles and settings** indicating that it is not only Career Coaches who engage with existential topics, but also Advisers, Consultants, Officers, Leads, Counsellors, and more.

Only 4% of respondents said that they would not be interested in learning more about how to explore any of these topics in a careers related context.

Existential Topic	Overall (%)	HE (%)	Non-HE (%)
Career-related anxiety	94%	97%	87%
Developing a sense of purpose	83%	85%	78%
Personal identity and sense of self	76%	75%	78%
Taking responsibility for one's actions	73%	69%	83%
Freedom (or lack of) to act	60%	52%	78%
A search for meaning	58%	51%	78%
The struggle to be authentic	48%	51%	39%

EARLY FINDINGS: PHASE ONE RESEARCH RESULTS (2026)

Stevens, R. (2026). Exploring one-to-one career guidance: Appointment lengths, guidance models, and existential topics. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, 56(1), 95-114.

84 CGPs completed the questionnaire

38 different HE institutions represented

35 different job titles given

- **Four online workshops** delivered 2 weeks apart designed to introduce how different elements of existentialism can be integrated into career guidance (2 x 2hrs, 2 x 1.5hrs).
- Workshops involved elements of **acquisition, investigation, discussion, and collaboration** (Laurillard).
- Participants required to attend the approx. equivalent of **at least 3 out of 4 sessions live** online - recordings were made accessible.
- **Workshop slides, supplementary reading, digital micro-tools, and questions to aid reflection** were all made available and shared one week before each session, remaining available for the rest of the research window.
- Ideally within 48 hours of each workshop, participants completed a brief **online feedback questionnaire**. This data was used in real time to reflect upon and edit the pursuing workshops.
- Throughout the 8 weeks participants were asked to keep a **reflection diary** with prompts based on Jenny Moon's (2004) approach .
- At the end of the 8 week period, a sample of the participants were invited to take part in an **interview** to discuss their thoughts in more depth - these are happening during November.

AR PROJECT KEY FEATURES



- AR is a **plan-do-review** process, characterised by the importance of reflective and reflexive practitioners (Stenhouse, 1975), and aims to **generate research knowledge and improve social action ‘at the same time’** (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009).
- The **equitable** (Stringer, 1999), **democratic** approach of AR enables “working with participants” as a shared endeavour with the potential to help them “recognize their roles as agents of change” (Dusty, 2024).
- The workshops and resources provide **macro** and **micro** level tools for practice.
- Existentialism is not presented as correct, but as a **stimulus for career thinking and exploration**.
- The aim is to **build practitioners’ confidence** for when existential topics come up **organically** with clients.
- There are also resources to offer opportunities to engage with individuals/groups on these topics **proactively** in different settings if applicable.
- Micro-tools are not designed to be universally applicable, **situation sensitivity** is required.

ACTION RESEARCH SUMMARY



“a philosophy which refuses to define itself” (*Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 1945)

“this lack of academic rigour constitutes an obstacle to understanding. The undertakings may seem to us too vague, the standards of proof too low, the actual time and trouble taken on ensuring correctness or economy of argument too little.” (Warnock, 1970)

“Existentialism is notoriously difficult to sum up in a single definition—partly because many who might be identified with the movement reject the label, and partly because the movement is itself often a rejection of systematization and classification.” (APA, 2025)

‘with this broad and diverse range of incarnations, it is difficult to explain what the term “existentialism” refers to’ (SEP, 2025)

Existentialists have an “interrelatedness of their thinking: they lead into each other; they form a natural family; each throws light on the others, and together they develop the content of certain common themes”

“the effort of the whole enterprise is to light up personal existence, not to build an argument” (Blackham, 1952)

WHAT IS EXISTENTIALISM?

“existentialism is a theory about what it is to exist in the way that we exist, as creative and imaginative individuals with aims and values of our own, as self-aware beings with a sophisticated understanding of our place in the world, and as profoundly social animals who influence one another’s outlooks.” (Webber, 2025)

WHAT IS EXISTENTIALISM?

Existentialists are a dysfunctional family of philosophical creatives, misfits, rebels, and innovators. Their work and views vary in many ways, however they share two key things in common. They, broadly speaking, have:

- A similar **approach to *doing* philosophy** (their *method of enquiry*);
- A similar **focus on the types of questions and overarching themes** which they are concerned with in their work.

We will explore both of these elements and how they relate to career guidance.

INTRODUCING EXISTENTIALISM

KIERKEGAARD
NIETZSCHE
HEIDEGGER
JASPERS
MARCEL
MERLEAU-PONTY
SARTRE
DE BEAUVOIR
CAMUS*

DOSTOEVSKY
FANON
ELLISON
TILLICH
FRANKL
AND MORE...



PHILOS - A LOVE OF SOPHIA - WISDOM

Philosophy is as much something that you *do* as it is an area of study.

Doing philosophy is, simply put, pursuing this love of wisdom i.e. wondering about something in such a way that it may help us to become wise.

But... how do we go about doing this?

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

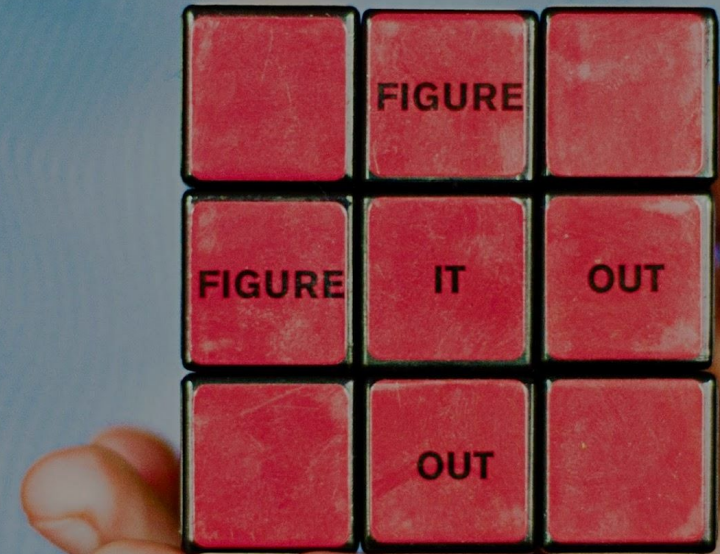
"IT IS SLIGHTLY PERVERSE TO THINK THAT WE SHOULD MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT WHAT TO DO WITH OUR LIVES—HOW TO LIVE, WHAT TO VALUE, WHAT TO PURSUE—WITHOUT ENGAGING, IN SOME WAY, WITH THE KINDS OF QUESTIONS PHILOSOPHY RAISES. WE ALL END UP DOING PHILOSOPHY ANYWAY, WHETHER WE RECOGNISE IT OR NOT. THE ONLY QUESTION IS WHETHER WE DO IT WELL OR BADLY, ATTENTIVELY OR CARELESSLY."
- WEBSTER (2026)

ULTIMATE QUESTIONS ARE QUESTIONS ABOUT PURPOSE AND EXISTENCE THAT 'GET AT THE HEART OF SOME OF LIFE'S BIG CONCERNS' (VALK, 2021).

How might you attempt to find an answer (what might be your method of enquiry) for the following questions:

1. How should I live my life?
2. Who am I?
3. What career should I pursue?
4. Where do I find meaning?
5. What matters?

ULTIMATE QUESTIONS



**"PHILOSOPHY
BEGINS IN WONDER"
- ARISTOTLE**

RATIONAL ENQUIRY

This way tries to find answers by demonstrating them through using logic and rational argument. This might be done by building deductive arguments whose conclusions we can 'see' the truth of. Using logic alone - abstract and separate from subjective experience and feelings etc. - the idea is that answers can provide certainty in their conclusions.

SCIENTIFIC ENQUIRY

This way tries to find answers by demonstrating them through the scientific method that can be observed in nature and agreed upon. This might be done by performing new experiments or appealing to scientific data, laws and theories already established. Using the scientific method, answers can be described as objective facts in the physical world.

EXISTENTIAL ENQUIRY

This way tries to find answers by appealing to our human experiences of the world. This might be done by analysing / exploring / categorising one's moods, behaviour, feelings, thinking, worries, background, sense of self, perceptions etc. All our answers come from ourselves and so have no independent source.

RELIGIOUS ENQUIRY

This way tries to find answers by appealing to religious beliefs in God. This might be done by referring to religious texts, talking to religious leaders or considering your own or other people's religious experiences. For believers, answers ultimately come from God and are true independent of us.

4 BROAD METHODS OF ENQUIRY

RATIONAL ENQUIRY

Example:

Trying to find out whether it is objectively right or wrong for someone to work for an oil company / oil companies to do the work they do by considering universal moral truths e.g. do they have rights/responsibilities?

SCIENTIFIC ENQUIRY

Example:

Exploring the work of oil companies and their impact/the impact of this job upon the world. This could be through environmental, social, economic, cultural, historic etc. data drawn from human observation and experience.

EXISTENTIAL ENQUIRY

Example:

Is this something that I want to be true to? How do I feel about working for an oil company? Will this work give me meaning/purpose? Does this work align with who I wish to be? Does this work affect my/others' humanity?

RELIGIOUS ENQUIRY

Example:

What does my religion's holy text say about this? What do the leaders of my faith say about this type of work? Are there any potential spiritual consequences for this type of work? What does my conscience say?

DIFFERENT METHODS OF ENQUIRY - SHOULD I WORK FOR AN OIL COMPANY?

EXISTENTIAL ENQUIRY

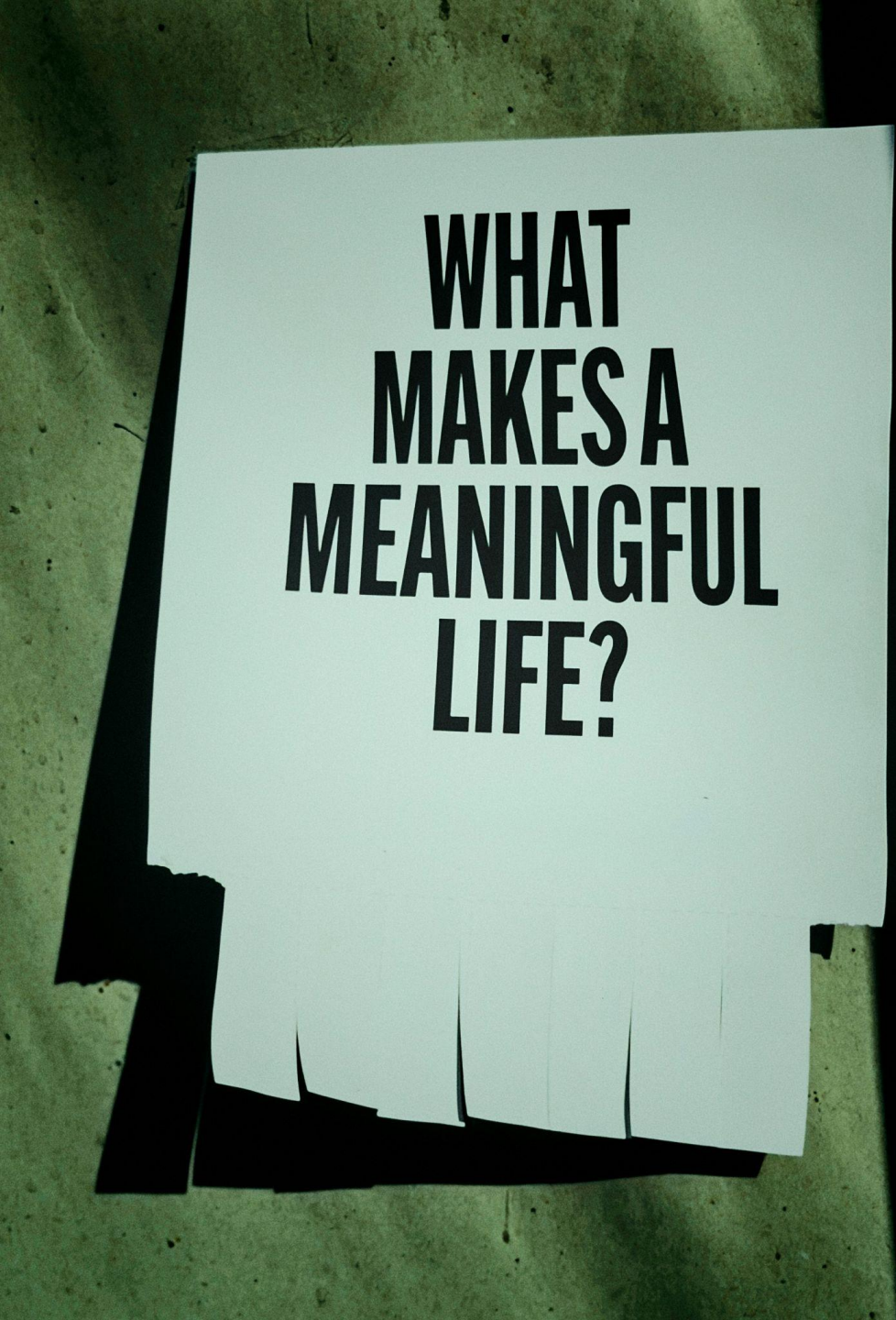
Beauvoir noted in 1944 that 'in France and all across Europe the individual is seeking with anguish to find his place in a world turned upside down' - it is in this '**seeking**' that we may begin to do philosophy as an existentialist.

To take an existentialist approach is to focus on the **personal, subjective, concrete** aspects of being human rather than our capacities for abstract rational or impersonal scientific thinking.

It is to place the individual at the centre of our wondering and to embrace the bitterness and sweetness - the 'colourful and living paste' (Beauvoir) - of human existence as **the only way to find any meaningful truth**.

Philosophy, Jaspers argued, **begins with what the philosopher is**, not with what they know. The world is a secret text that can never be translated into public language, it is decipherable only to each of us in our own way. **Philosophy is**, therefore, **deeply personal, reflective and creative**.

EXISTENTIAL APPROACH



WHAT
MAKES A
MEANINGFUL
LIFE?

EXISTENTIAL ENQUIRY

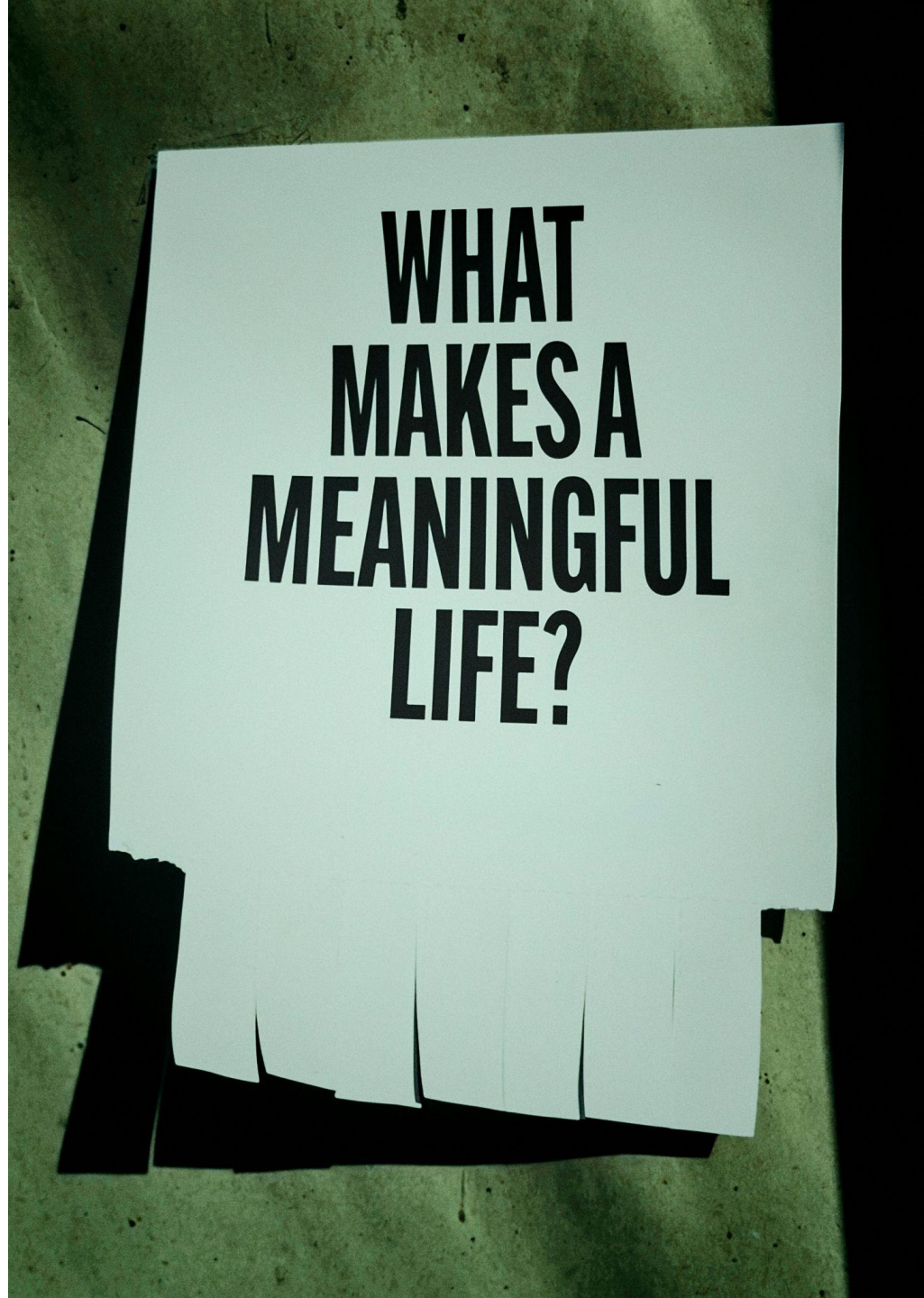
We only ever experience things through **a particular perspective, at a particular time, and in a particular situation** - “being human profoundly means being engaged and entangled in a situation” (Frankl, 1969).

Existentialism maintains that life is full of *mysteries* (Marcel) that can only be approached from the first person perspective: **there is no other way to do this** - there aren't objective solutions to subjective problems.

There is, therefore, more value in exploring **the *what-it-is-likeness of my experience***, than any attempt at being purely rational or objective. We must not become “martyrs on the battleground of truth” (Nietzsche).

As such, the existentialist mission is: ***To light up personal existence, encourage reflection, and begin an inward search of our personal experience in order to try to create a life worth living.***

EXISTENTIAL APPROACH



WHAT
MAKES A
MEANINGFUL
LIFE?

- Careers are ‘**deeply woven into the ongoing fabric of our lives**’ (McCash et al., 2021). In this way, **existential tools in guidance are not bolt-ons but core features of a practitioner's toolkit.**
- From struggling to take a first step, to being made redundant, to experiencing stress-related burnout, to a gradual atrophy of meaning in a role, **existentialism is relevant to career considerations.**
- The **existentialist mission and way of doing philosophy aligns in many ways with the practice of effective career guidance**, as well as the aims and qualities of its practitioners.
- The outcome of good career guidance related to existential themes is like that of good existential art or literature or music - it is **truth**.

EXISTENTIAL APPROACH + CAREER GUIDANCE - SUMMARY



From an existentialist approach, our starting point for career thinking is: ***what do I want to be true to?***

Through this lens, the outcome of good career guidance is *truth*.

A client's personal truth that **reveals something about what it is to be alive for that individual, illuminating part of their existence in a new way.**

Truth that, as Kierkegaard puts it, **belongs to a life**, in the sense of my 'being true to something' (e.g. a principle or project, myself, others) is the truth that *matters*.

It recognises Kierkegaard's claim that **objective truth will always be secondary in value to subjective truth.**

What do you want to be true to? opens up avenues for thinking, exploration, and discussion that will enable the client to develop a better sense of themselves and who they are in the world.

It also acknowledges the entangled nature of our lives, sociocultural context, and careers and how intertwined and connected they are.

'TRUTHFUL' CAREER THINKING

WHAT
DO I
WANT
TO BE
TRUE
TO?

How do we support our clients with unpacking and approaching this big question?

One way to approach it in a guidance setting is to use tools to explore relevant themes/ideas from existentialism - either in isolation as they arise, or as a series building upon each other.

Theme	Overarching questions explored
1. Concreteness	What's the truth about my situation, context, and place in/relationship to these and the world?
2. Illumination of Self	What's the truth about me and how to understand myself?
3. Growing and Becoming	What's the truth about change, growing, and the process of becoming?
4. Authenticity and Anxiety	What's the truth about what it means to be true to myself? How do I do this in the face of career anxiety?
5. Meaning	What do I want to be true to? Where/how do I find meaning, mattering, coherence, and purpose?

'TRUTHFUL' CAREER THINKING

WHAT
DO I
WANT
TO BE
TRUE
TO?

EXISTENTIAL THEMES IN CAREER GUIDANCE:

- 
- **MEANING**
 - **AUTHENTICITY AND ANXIETY**
 - **GROWING AND BECOMING**
 - **ILLUMINATION OF SELF**
 - **CONCRETENESS**

TOOLKIT: THE MAGIC CREED

© Robin Stevens 2026

THEMES: FOCUS ON...

M MEANING

- The will to meaning
- Connection of meaning to coherence, mattering, and purpose
- The 'existential vacuum' problem - meaninglessness, boredom, & apathy
- Projects, creativity, and absurdity

A AUTHENTICITY & ANXIETY

- Anxiety as "the dizziness of freedom"
- Responsibility and honesty
- Self-awareness and dignity
- Focus on decision-making
- Existential crises

G GROWING AND BECOMING

- Always a work in progress
- Self-invention and re-invention
- Perpetual change and transformation through action
- Individual riddles vs. objective puzzles

I ILLUMINATION OF SELF

- Self as a narrative construction
- The value of personal truth
- Exploration of self-identity and what it means to reflect
- "Existence precedes essence"
- Self as relational and incomplete

C CONCRETENESS

- Understanding circumstance
- Positionality and subjectivity
- Embodied, complex individuality
- The value of irrationality as well as rationality

&

PRACTICE: DO WITH...

CURIOSITY

- Wonder as a starting point
- Dialogue and criticality
- Questioning
- Challenge
- Digging deeper beneath the surface

REFLECTION

- Practitioner reflection and development of mindset
- Self-interrogation, understanding, and awareness
- Second-thoughts and reflexivity

EMPATHY

- Understanding of the 'other'
- Presence and honesty
- Active listening
- Respectful of dignity
- Recognition of shared human condition

EXPLORATION

- Creativity in thinking/practice
- Improvisation and innovation
- Discovery e.g. self, world, etc.
- Impartiality
- Engagement with ambiguity and uncertainty

DYNAMITE

- Exploding assumptions
- Rebellious thinking
- Opening up, uncovering new pathways
- Handle with care

EXISTENTIAL APPROACH TO CAREER GUIDANCE:

- **CURIOSITY**
- **REFLECTION + REFLEXIVITY**
- **EXPLORATION**
- **EMPATHY**
- **DYNAMITE**

TOOLKIT: THE MAGIC CREED

© Robin Stevens 2026

THEMES: FOCUS ON...

M MEANING

- The will to meaning
- Connection of meaning to coherence, mattering, and purpose
- The 'existential vacuum' problem - meaninglessness, boredom, & apathy
- Projects, creativity, and absurdity

A AUTHENTICITY & ANXIETY

- Anxiety as "the dizziness of freedom"
- Responsibility and honesty
- Self-awareness and dignity
- Focus on decision-making
- Existential crises

G GROWING AND BECOMING

- Always a work in progress
- Self-invention and re-invention
- Perpetual change and transformation through action
- Individual riddles vs. objective puzzles

I ILLUMINATION OF SELF

- Self as a narrative construction
- The value of personal truth
- Exploration of self-identity and what it means to reflect
- "Existence precedes essence"
- Self as relational and incomplete

C CONCRETENESS

- Understanding circumstance
- Positionality and subjectivity
- Embodied, complex individuality
- The value of irrationality as well as rationality

&

PRACTICE: DO WITH...

CURIOSITY

C

- Wonder as a starting point
- Dialogue and criticality
- Questioning
- Challenge
- Digging deeper beneath the surface

REFLECTION

R

- Practitioner reflection and development of mindset
- Self-interrogation, understanding, and awareness
- Second-thoughts and reflexivity

EMPATHY

E

- Understanding of the 'other'
- Presence and honesty
- Active listening
- Respectful of dignity
- Recognition of shared human condition

EXPLORATION

E

- Creativity in thinking/practice
- Improvisation and innovation
- Discovery e.g. self, world, etc.
- Impartiality
- Engagement with ambiguity and uncertainty

DYNAMITE

D

- Exploding assumptions
- Rebellious thinking
- Opening up, uncovering new pathways
- Handle with care

- Approaching career guidance with **dynamite** means (at the right times):
 - Exploding assumptions
 - Rebellious thinking
 - Opening up / uncovering new pathways
 - Handling with care
- Effective helping involves **challenge** (Egan, 2002), and coaches that can artfully bring a client into a space of anxiety and address it from an existentialist perspective can help address these complex emotions in a meaningful way (Langdridge, 2012)
- “**GROW, without the context of awareness and responsibility and the skill of questioning to generate them, has little value.**” (Whitmore, 2009)
- Existentialism and existential themes, if addressed with clients in appointments, have the potential to be incredibly powerful and, therefore, need to be done so with **care, empathy, respect, dignity, and due diligence**. “Ethics begins with responsibility: the obligation to act consciously and with care” (Younger & Veliz, 2026)

EXISTENTIAL APPROACH -
DYNAMITE!

**"WHAT I UNDERSTAND
BY 'PHILOSOPHER': A
TERRIBLE EXPLOSIVE
IN THE PRESENCE OF
WHICH EVERYTHING IS
IN DANGER "**

(Nietzsche, Ecce Homo)



Workshops involved:

Exploration of the topic

Context setting

Considerations of
relevant career theory

Existentialist philosophy

Reflection Questions

Group discussion and
feedback

- **Concreteness**
 - Merleau-Ponty
 - Nietzsche
 - Dostoevsky
- **Illumination of Self**
 - Kierkegaard
 - Sartre
 - Nietzsche
- **Growth and Becoming**
 - Marcel
 - Beauvoir
- **Anxiety and Authenticity**
 - Heidegger
 - Kierkegaard
- **Meaning**
 - Beauvoir
 - Frankl
 - Nietzsche
 - Camus

MACRO-TOOLS



PROBLEM OR MYSTERY? -
MARCEL

*Is a career question a problem or a mystery?
What's the difference? And how should we
approach these differently as career guidance
practitioners?*

Problems allow for solutions - which can be
incredibly useful - but leaving little room for
mysteries in modern society means people lose
their sense of self, meaning, and ownership.

Figuring out as a practitioner whether the client
has a 'problem' or a 'mystery' - or, as is often the
case, a combination of the two - impacts upon
how you will go about trying to address their
situation and how they may perceive it.

**GROWING +
BECOMING**

PROBLEMS	MYSTERIES
Problems involve obstacles which questioners try to overcome and solve in a detached, objective way such that they could be swapped out for someone else and the solution would still work.	Mysteries involve the individual in their solution. Mysteries require participation, engagement, and involvement - they cannot be solved in a detached, objective manner because the question itself involves the individual in it.
Solving problems involves finding the right 'technique' and employing it.	Techniques, solutions, replicable methods will not work for anyone other than the individual involved because once you change the individual, you change the problem.
A key factor here is that these techniques will usually be employable by others in the same situation to achieve the same results.	It could be whether I will be happier studying physics or chemistry, or if I will gain more from going to university than doing an apprenticeship, or whether I should stay in the job that I hate.
It could be how to change a flat tyre, or soothe a burn, or keep a pot plant alive, or make a Victoria sponge, or solve a maths equation, and so on.	

- 42 micro-tools created for the research.
- A different group of tools for each of the five existentialist topics covered (MAGIC).
- Designed to feature different types of tools that exist across the spectrum of career guidance.
- These included:
 - Group / 1-2-1 activities
 - Card sorts
 - Creative writing / expression tasks
 - Discussion prompts and activities
 - Metaphors and analogies
 - Ranking / comparisons / forced choices
 - Challenge tasks
 - Socratic Dialogue
 - Venn diagrams
 - Building blocks / mini figures
 - and more
- The participants gave their feedback on the value of each of these micro-tools.

MICRO-TOOLS OVERVIEW

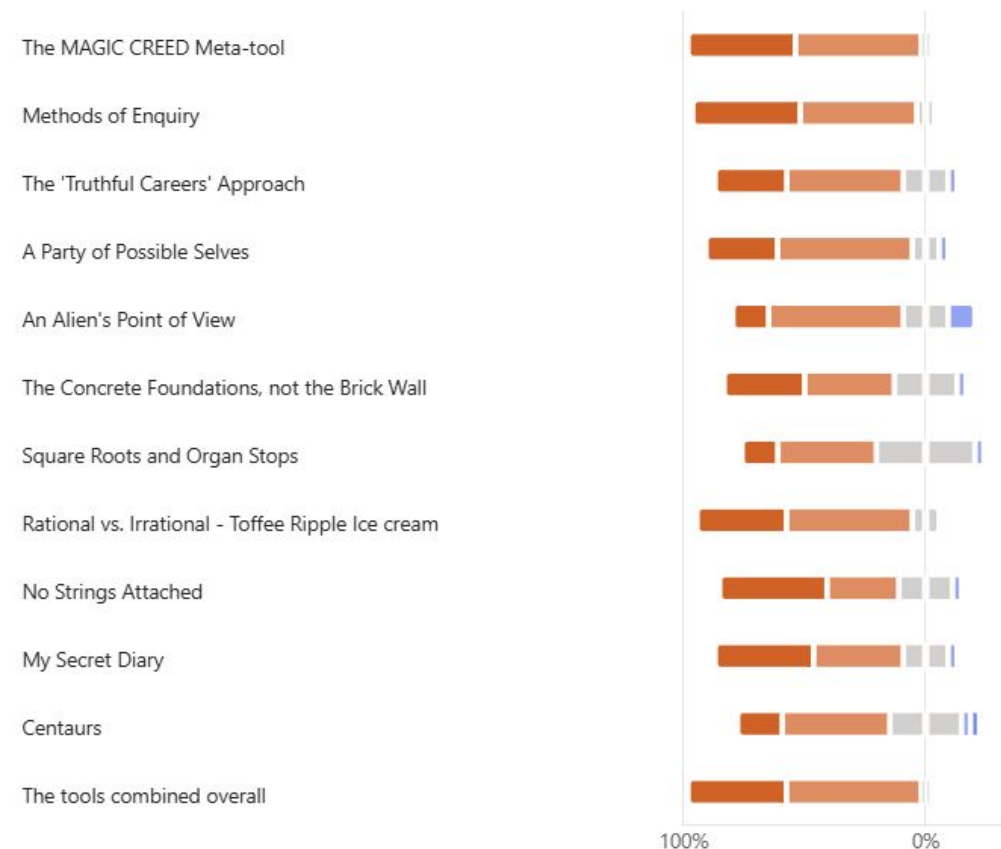


1. The Magic Creed Meta-tool
2. Types of Enquiry
3. Square Roots and Organ Stops: Metaphorical Thinking
4. Creative Writing: My Secret Diary
5. An Alien's Point of View
6. Rational vs Irrational: Toffee-ripple Ice cream
7. A Party of Possible Selves
8. No Strings Attached
9. Centaurs
10. Concrete Foundations, not Brick Walls
11. Cosmograms and Careers
12. Archaeology, Research, or Rocket Science?
13. Fame in the Brain!
14. The Ongoing Activity of 'You' - Career Circles
15. Who's in your orchestra?
16. Concrete Self, Ideal Self, and True Self
17. Relationships and Me
18. The Bad Faith Career Challenge

MICRO-TOOL PROTOTYPES

1. Problem or Mystery?
2. Flirting and Identity Play: First Dates
3. The Commitments
4. Devotion
5. Isn't It Ironic?
6. Sun Burnt, Burnt Stuck, or Burnt Out?
7. "The hardest thing to become is yourself"
8. + The Existential Vacuum First Aid Kit +
9. Splatter What Matters!
10. Meaning Cards and Connections - What does meaning mean to you?
11. What's the 'cash value' of your ideas?
12. Career Project Lifecycle
13. The Myth of Sisyphus: What if?
14. A Work of Art not a Worker
15. Venn Diagrams and Visuals - The Tri-partite Definition of Meaning
16. Just Be Yourself!
17. Shadow Boxing
18. Having an existential crisis?
19. Spin the Wheel
20. 'They'
21. My Secret Diary Pt. 2 - Owned
22. Finite of Infinite?
23. Living Deliberately
24. The Dizziness of Freedom

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree



RATIONAL VS IRRATIONAL: TOFFEE-RIPPLE ICE CREAM

*What does it mean to be rational or irrational?
Is one more or less valuable than the other in
career thinking?*

This tool can be used in both 1-2-1 and group settings. Look at the list of statements with a client or a group. Use a pen and paper / whiteboard / table or carpet space / digital whiteboard to create a linear scale with RATIONAL at one end and IRRATIONAL at the other. Open up a forum for reflection and curiosity around rationality/irrationality from a safe distance, before considering their particular circumstances and thinking.

CONCRETENESS

Taking a job for the sole reason that it offers a high salary.	Pursuing status and success in the eyes of others.
Taking a promotion that means relocating to another country because it affords the chance to work with someone you admire.	Deciding to quit your 9-5 job in order to pursue a dream of becoming a popstar even though you have no experience as a singer.
Choosing a degree subject because you like it.	A law student applying to a law firm for summer work experience.
Pursuing a career because it will make your parents proud.	Applying for an apprenticeship because you can earn while you learn.
Changing careers because you are bored and lack motivation to go to work in the morning.	Starting your own business because you can see a gap in the market and have the expertise to fill it.
Applying for a job because it sounds vaguely interesting and you don't know what else to do	Going to university to study a subject because your good at it, even though you don't like it much

Questions to consider with the client/group as they have a go at the exercise:

- Where would they place them on the scale?
- Are these examples of rational or irrational thinking?
- How rational or irrational were these decisions?
- Would they agree with them as a decision?
- Is there any further information that might make a difference to your judgement about whether a particular statement is rational or irrational?
- What does it *mean* to be rational or irrational?
- Is it *better* to be rational or irrational? Why?

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree ● Strongly Disagree



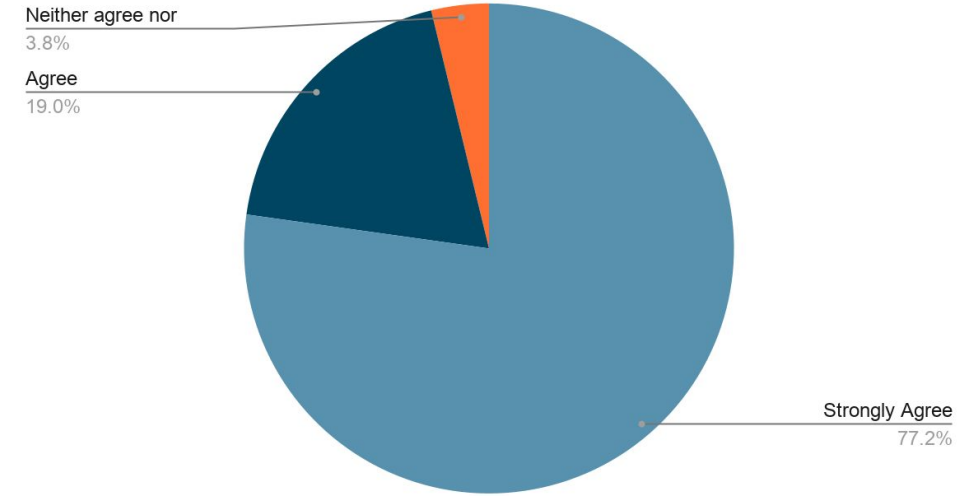
Questions asked after each session about workshop design and delivery:

1. The workshop's existentialist content was pitched at the right level for me
2. The existentialist content was engaging
3. The existentialist content was relevant to career guidance
4. The ideas presented were clear and well-explained
5. Overall, I can see value in the tools presented for my career guidance practice
- 6 The ideas presented were sufficiently different to existing career guidance resources that I am aware of
7. The workshop was appropriately connected to career guidance research
8. I have new ideas to take away and reflect upon
9. I would recommend this workshop to other career guidance practitioners
10. Overall, this session was valuable

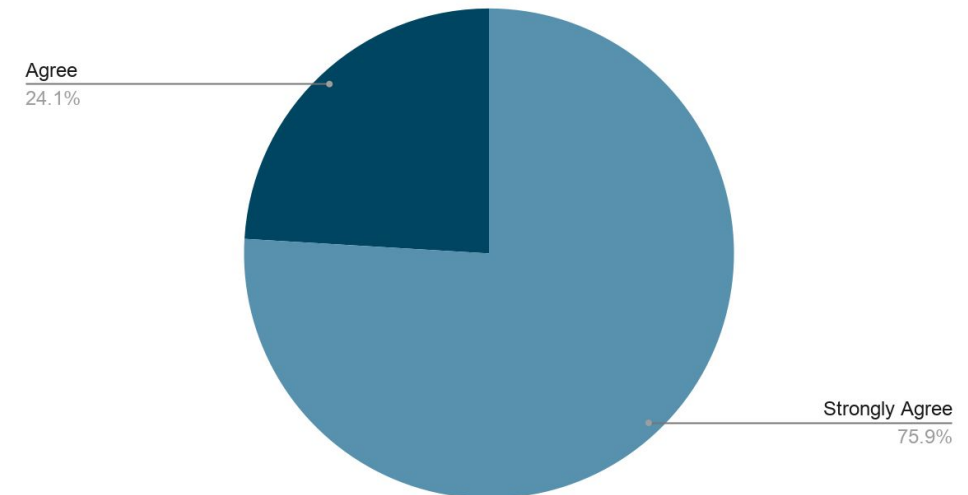
EARLY FINDINGS: PHASE TWO ACTION RESEARCH

Workshop 1 Sample Feedback:

Overall, the session was valuable



The existentialist content was relevant to career guidance



“Overall, I thought the four workshops were excellent. They were extremely well planned, organised and clearly very thoroughly researched. ... Overall, it was a really worthwhile and enjoyable CPD experience, and I would certainly recommend it to other careers practitioners.”

“All of the topics are directly relevant to career coaching in my view.”

“Existentialism seems of particular importance right now at a time when self-knowledge and questioning our values is what's most likely to keep us focused and help us to figure out how we can best contribute to a world that is looking pretty bleak.”

 **Value and Relevance / Raising awareness** 

“Sometimes I think that client and practitioner are dancing round the topic but not always connecting in a way that provides understanding and a path forward. I think the existentialist approach here really helps with that.”

“The sessions ... made me reflect on my own practice and how often these themes come up in appointments, even if we don't necessarily describe them in existential terms.”

EARLY FINDINGS: PHASE TWO ACTION RESEARCH

“The concepts anchor the spirit of the work in philosophy and give the entire profession a broader framework of meaning. Rather than “getting a job”, we are giving students and professional tools to explore their place in the world and how to contribute meaning to their lives through work.”

“I also think that for the right person, existentialism as an explicit framework can lend a credibility to career guidance/identity work, which many people dismiss as fluffy, intangible or ‘just about CVs’. Reframing these questions as philosophical questions which affect everybody is useful as an attempt to give some rigour to our profession.”

 Credibility to Practice / Support with bigger questions

“I think most of the Careers work I do is ultimately about supporting students and graduates to find ‘meaning’. It is so interesting to look at this through the philosophy lenses. The micro tools are really useful and ready to be used in practice.”

“The workshops reminded me that guidance isn't always about finding solutions or having a clear career plan, but sometimes about giving individuals the space to understand themselves, question assumptions and explore what matters to them.”

EARLY FINDINGS: PHASE TWO ACTION RESEARCH

“I think HE client groups would struggle with the questioning when they are often so desperate just to get into certain sectors.”

“In terms of the tools, I think these are interesting and very creative but I fear that I may be met with scorn if I try to ask a 19 year old ”

Challenges for application with certain groups / Challenges with concepts/understanding

“Whilst I found some elements hard to follow, overall the content was interesting and relevant to career guidance... I didn't take anything away consciously but I know my subconscious will be working over the information.”

“We need a bit more interactivity/time in breakout sessions”

“It's only week two and I think this should be a longer series. Or incorporated into career guidance training. CDP's often feel a pressure to have or give the right answer, to fix the student and their problem, this reframes the actual situation.”

**EARLY FINDINGS: PHASE TWO ACTION
RESEARCH**

TRUTHFUL' CAREER THINKING

“I find existentialism a particularly interesting and valuable perspective in career guidance because it encourages us to look beyond simply choosing a career or finding a suitable job. Instead, it helps individuals explore deeper questions about who they are, what matters to them, and what kind of life they want to create.” (Research Participant)

“It aligns with the depth of thought I hope to give career guidance as a profession” (Research Participant)

Robin Stevens
Careers Education Team Leader, King's College London
Doctoral Researcher, the University of Huddersfield's
International Centre for Career Development
robin.1.stevens@kcl.ac.uk
LinkedIn: Robin Stevens
Substack: ExistentialCareers

