Article

Context Matters: Examining Discourses of Career Success in Tanzania

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Abstract

Although geopolitical, temporal, and sociocultural factors shape normative stories of meaningful and attainable work and careers, most scholarship addresses Western, white-collar contexts. Analysis of two Tanzanian youth magazines revealed different normative stories of career success for educational achievers (*Fema*) and youth outside the educational system (*Si Mchezo!*). Both appeal to themes of self-reliance, collective good, entrepreneurship, and healthy relationships; however, the normative story for educational achievers appeals to *discourses of achievement* whereas the normative story for educational underachievers appeals to *discourses of survival* offered via Horatio Alger–like plots. We argue that nuanced differences between discourses necessitate evaluating contextual factors in career research and management, and provide a beginning framework accounting for cultural levels, material constraints, and temporal shifts.

Keywords

meanings of work, career success, career narratives, discourse, context, class, Tanzania

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Scholars have been able to gain understanding of the complex meanings and practices of careers by examining individual stories and collective career narratives (LaPointe, 2010). Storytelling and restorying also offer practical interventions that can extend agency and drive positive career behaviors (Savickas, 2012). Yet, scholars regularly critique "grand narratives" of careers and individual stories derived thereof, because they often fail to consider, and may even reinforce, material and social structures serving a select few (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015; Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, & Lair, 2008). The false promises and myths (Hochschild, 1996) in such narratives illustrate how extant career research often overemphasizes agency and neglects context (Dries, 2011).

By focusing on Western, usually Anglo-U.S, white-collar contexts, career scholarship rarely acknowledges how sociocultural, historical, and material factors influence career discourses. Yet career discourses help define what counts as meaningful, acceptable, and/or attainable work (Cheney et al., 2008) within *particular contexts*, concordantly informing recommended career actions and outcomes (Dries, 2011). Because context shapes discourse (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2014), empirical research in different contexts can extend and refine understandings of the ways discourse shapes the meanings of work and consequent career actions and outcomes. Career outcomes affect quality of life (Cheney et al., 2008), social mobility (Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991), social justice (Dougherty, 2011) and employee engagement, and are often linked to turnover and organizational productivity (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). This study addresses calls to consider the context of careers (Dries, 2011)—and by extension, effective management—by examining career discourses in the primarily agrarian economy of the United Republic of Tanzania (hereafter, Tanzania).

This study aims for two primary contributions. First, it answers calls to consider how context shapes careers by examining neglected career contexts, namely, an African, rather than Western or Asian, country (Dries, 2011), and a primarily agrarian, rather than industrial or information economy (Dougherty, 2011). In examining an unconventional setting, we extend understandings of careers by considering how temporal, material, and discursive contexts affect career understandings, actions, and outcomes.

Second, this study calls into question common criticisms of dominant career discourses and narratives. People often attach strong ideological judgments to individualized career myths and idealized linear pathways even though such judgments may not hold across contexts or groups (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015; Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991). Yet, such judgments are theoretically and practically consequential. How individuals define career success shapes what career actions they consider appropriate and necessary,

and what actions they are likely to take. How workers are evaluated vis-à-vis an organization's definition(s) of success affects personnel selection (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014) and policies (Kirby & Buzzanell, 2014), reinforcing particular actions and outcomes that may (not) be individually or collectively desirable (Kerr, 1995). As context affects discourse, which affects behavior, scholars and practitioners must be mindful in light of the multilayered contexts within which particular discourses arise and are used. We propose an initial framework to help scholars and practitioners to consider context more explicitly when evaluating careers and associated management practices.

The Discursive Context of Career Development and Success

With a discursive approach, we assume language influences behavior by shaping what people consider "normal, natural, and true" (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011, p. 1131). Following Ashcraft (2007), we view discourse as "a (semi-)coherent system of representation that crafts a context for language use" including "a (loosely) affiliated set of metaphors, images, stories, statements, meanings, and so forth that generate a particular and socially recognizable version of people, things, events" (Ashcraft, 2007; p. 11). As used here, discourse aligns with Alvesson and Kärreman's (2000) capital-D Discourse, rather than the "little-d" discourses that are restricted to particular texts or settings. When shared assumptions coalesce (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011), discourses emerge as agreed-on ways to organize everyday behavior (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015) such that "the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves" regulate individual and collective actions and identities (Rose, 1998, p. 10).

This is not to say that discourse determines action or that material realities are inconsequential. Rather, operating from a paradigm-type discourse approach, we emphasize how language creates and stabilizes (perceived) realities, informed by material conditions and human agency (Dries, 2011). Although discourse and action are distinct, they remain coupled to each other and material conditions (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015). Indeed material conditions affect discourses and outcomes as much or more than individual agency (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2014).

Furthermore, when structured as narratives, discourses offer a "coherent *system* of interrelated stories" that help address a shared challenge (Halverson, Goodall, & Corman, 2011; emphasis added). As they appeal to and interact with other discourses (e.g., meritocracy, capitalism, equality), narratives

inform career actions. Narratively structured discourses do so by establishing expectations through patterned plot trajectories (Halverson et al., 2011). Here, we use *narrative* to refer to discourses structured as stories with plots and characters that show often idealized expectations of how things should and do work and use *discourse* for shared systems of meaning that are not necessarily narratively structured.

Discourse and Narrative in Career Scholarship

Discursive approaches to careers emphasize how language constrains or enables individuals' career choices and actions (Dries, 2011). Scholarship (implicitly) invoking a discursive perspective often addresses how people construct meaning and satisfaction at work (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015), what constitutes legitimate paths to career success (Lucas, 2011), and what counts as career success (Dries, 2011). Ciulla (2000), for example, noted how differing values and conceptions of work shape individual career behaviors and social norms. Similarly, Buzzanell and Goldzwig's (1991) classic work on the relation of language and spatial orientations to career success reports that although most career paths are described as linear journeys "up" corporate ladders, nonlinear routes better present most people's experiences. Yet, because such alternative trajectories do not align with the dominant career narrative, they are usually devalued and discouraged (Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991). Other scholars report that the narratives people construct and the metaphors they invoke define what counts as meaningful work in certain contexts (e.g., nonprofits; Dempsey & Saunders, 2010) and for certain groups (e.g., blue collar; Lucas, 2011).

Even as existing career scholarship has enhanced understandings of career meanings and practice, it still privileges careers of middle-class, white-collar, and Western populations in industrial economies (Dries, 2011; see Dougherty, 2011; Lucas, 2011, for exceptions)—often emphasizing how these groups achieve career success. By focusing on a narrow set of relatively uniform contexts, scholars fail to fully consider the implications of cultural, material, and temporal factors on career discourses, and concordantly on career practices.

Contextual Factors That Shape Career Discourses

Emerging scholarship is beginning to address this gap, offering clues into the ways contextual factors such as social position, economic context, and national context affect career discourses. In terms of social position, the middle-class, white-collar, and/or Western career contexts informing most career

scholarship presume possibilities of choice, mobility, and paid work that are not always available in lower class circumstances (Dries, 2011) or manifest differently (Lucas, 2011). Growing emphasis on callings and self-actualization as *the* definition of meaningful, successful careers draw on similar classed assumptions (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015), overlooking material realities of lower income groups who must consider work "just a job" to meet material needs (Cheney, Lair, Ritz, & Kendall, 2009).

Similar discursive patterns are seen in low-income countries or agrarian societies where people are more likely to define career success as survival—namely, material and physical security (Inglehart, 2008). Yet, despite assertions that "workers of all types have careers" (Dries, 2011, p. 264), scholarship rarely considers agrarian or unemployed workers (Dougherty, 2011). For lower socioeconomic groups, rural workers, and chronically unemployed people, moving *around* might be more typical than white-collar emphases on moving *up* (Inkson, 2007). In Western industrial economies, career success has typically been framed in terms of higher income and position advancement, and shifts toward knowledge economies have reframed career success as self-actualization—at least for white-collar, high-status workers (Inglehart, 2008). Yet, even as economic structures shape discourses, they do not determine either discourses or consequent actions. People can respond to economic conditions and contradictory and inadequate dominant discourses (Lucas, 2011), by "talking new normalcies into being" (Buzzanell, 2010, p.1).

Finally, emerging work also highlights the influence of national culture on career discourses. Even in China and the United States, typically considered ideological opposites given master narratives of communism and capitalism, respectively, Lucas, Liu, and Buzzanell (2006) found that career discourses served similar purposes in both countries—promoting the dominant sociopolitical system. Research on career discourses in young children (Berkelaar, Buzzanell, Kisselburgh, Tan, & Shen, 2012) and different countries (Buzzanell, 2010) reinforces how nationality interacts with age, geopolitical location, and class to inform meanings of work and related actions. Scholars have started to examine careers outside Western contexts; yet the focus has been primarily on Asian countries, particularly China. African and South American countries, with different geopolitical, sociocultural, and historical influences, remain all but neglected.

In sum, emerging research attends to social position, (shifting) economies, and geopolitics influences on the career discourses to which people are exposed and which they consider most relevant for informing action. Building on this, we respond to calls (Dougherty, 2011; Dries, 2011) to consider career context(s) explicitly; extending beyond more commonly researched settings

to consider how temporal, material, and discursive contexts shape career discourse(s) in the primarily rural economy of Tanzania.

Tanzanian Context(s)

Tanzania is a country on Africa's east coast composed of the Tanganyika mainland and two Zanzibar islands. A very poor country, 75% of the population works in agriculture, many as subsistence farmers (The United Republic of Tanzania, n.d.). Unlike other African countries, Tanzania lacks popular gems or minerals (BBC Monitoring, 2013), which undermines large-scale industrial development but has helped Tanzania avoid becoming a conflict zone.

Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's first president, inspired principles and values that are still reflected in Tanzanian society today. In *The Arusha Declaration*—Tanzania's policy on socialism and self-reliance—Nyerere attempted to reconcile tradition and modernization (Guahar & Nyerere, 1984). In this and other policies, the focus was on the necessity of communitarian values and self-reliance, agriculture as the nation's economic foundation, and education as the means to escape a colonial mind-set and bring about equality (Mulenga, 2001). Although the *valence* of Nyerere's legacy remains hotly contested (Saul, 2012), the *impact* of his legacy does not (Fouéré, 2014). Viewing socialism and self-reliance as a dialectic relation essential to Tanzanian society, Nyerere (1967) affirmed "hard work" as a *collective* endeavor that leads to *self-reliance*.

Nyerere (1967) thought that agriculture offered the economic foundation necessary to manage this individual–collective tension. He believed that Tanzania could not follow the "conventional" Western path of industrialized capitalism and rapid development (Mulenga, 2001). In policy moves designed to shift the economic system from focusing on *money* to *people*, and thus away from *urban* to *rural* centers, Nyerere hoped to prevent the widening class divisions typical of rapid economic expansion and urbanization. He believed that agriculture could help regulate socioeconomic change, maintain traditional communitarian values, and ideally keep the population relatively equal financially (Mulenga, 2001). Nyerere did not achieve this goal as divides between urban elite and rural poor continue to grow (Policy Forum, 2010).

Nyerere also emphasized education as a means for collective and individual success—a way to achieve freedom from colonial thought and the hope for the nation's future (Tanzania Online, 2008). To address individual–collective tensions and desires for economic equality, Nyerere attempted to implement an education system geared toward a rural economy and the

population writ large, emphasizing primary education as an end that served local communities (Sahle, 2002). Nyerere's rural, local focus contradicted common Tanzanian hopes that higher education promised youth opportunities to leave villages and raise their standard of living through stable employment (Sahle, 2002). Few rural Tanzanians realize this hope.

Students who wish to continue on to post-secondary education must pass the Form IV National Exam, which determines if they will continue and what they will study. In 2012, 65% of test-takers failed (Mwakyusa, 2013). The result was so devastating that people reportedly "collapsed" on hearing the news ("Grading System Affects Results," 2013); others committed suicide (Mulisa, 2013). Although the failure was generally attributed to changes in the exam ("Grading System Affects Results," 2013), when the test was re-graded under the old system, more than half of the students still failed ("No "Big Deal" in 2012 Form IV Results," 2013). The current education system as an (imagined) path to success works for very few Tanzanians.

These unique aspects of Tanzania's current context—grounded in Nyerere's agricultural and educational policies that encourage self-reliance and collective good, contradicting parental hopes, and problematic educational outcomes—inspire our research. Looking beyond typically Anglo-Western urban and professional contexts, we ask, "How is career success discursively defined and described in contemporary Tanzania?"

Method

Sample

As popular media often reflects, reinforces, and distributes discourses (Kuhn et al., 2008), we analyzed cover stories from the two most widely read magazines in Tanzania: *Fema* and *Si Mchezo!* (Tufte, 2014). Targeting two different groups of Tanzanian youth (aged 13-30), the magazines reach over 11 million of Tanzania's 44.9 million people (Tufte, 2014). Both magazines are published by Femina HIP, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) founded by a Swedish aid worker, to address health issues in Tanzania. Largely funded by international donors, Femina HIP initially provided information on gender equality, sex, and HIV/AIDS. As readers increasingly requested articles on financial literacy and careers (Tufte, 2014), both *Fema* and *Si Mchezo!* now offer career, financial, and health information targeted to their respective audiences.

Both magazines are written primarily by Tanzanian, often Western-trained, authors employed by Femina HIP (Tufte, 2014); however, they address different audiences. *Fema* is a 64-page quarterly magazine written in English and Swahili aimed at Tanzanian youth who are currently in school. Its

original title, *Femina*—Latin for women—was shortened to *Fema* to include men in the target audience (Gossé, 2006). *Fema*'s cover articles are third-person interviews with celebrities and high achievers who are usually urban Tanzanians. *Fema* also includes editorials, articles, and photographs of students throughout the nation—drawing on readers' letters, texts, and emails to inform content.

In contrast, *Si Mchezo!* is a 32-page bi-monthly magazine aimed at rural, out-of-school Tanzanian youth, who are often not in school because they could not afford school fees or did not pass national exams. Thus *Si Mchezo!* uses a version of Swahili considered appropriate for semi-literate audiences. *Si Mchezo!* can be translated as "It's no game/joke!," indicating the seriousness of its content. *Si Mchezo!* cover stories are interviews of ordinary, primarily rural, Tanzanians written as first-person accounts. Each issue addresses a different Tanzanian region. *Si Mchezo!* also includes editorials and cartoon edutainment.

We examined discourses of career success in the cover stories of all available issues since 2011, the year career content began in both magazines. Our data corpus includes cover stories from 14 recent issues of *Si Mchezo!* and 14 recent issues of *Fema*. Some issues are missing because we could not obtain them in any way. We focused on the cover stories because they are each issue's focal point (Tufte, 2014). We analyzed the English version of *Fema*'s cover stories after the first author—a native English speaker fluent in Swahili—confirmed the equivalency of the English and Swahili versions of the cover stories. Because *Si Mchezo!* is only published in Swahili, the first author translated *Si Mchezo!* cover stories from Swahili to English. To ensure accuracy, a native Swahili speaker backtranslated a random set of cover stories. The translators met to clarify a few discrepancies and to confirm that translated meanings accurately reflected intent, content, and culture (Douglas & Craig, 2007).

Analysis

Discourse analysis focuses on identifying and examining "patterned redundancies" or systems of meaning in texts. By explicating salient discursive patterns, we gain insights into what language is "doing" in particular contexts: how language "organizes groups towards particular ends" (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2014, p. 275). Sensitized to existing research on career myths and discourses, we engaged in systematic abductive analyses to identify and explicate discourses within and across both magazines. Moving back and forth between texts and extant research (Putnam, 2014), we looked for evidence of taken-for-granted discourses that defined how and what careers should be (Ashcraft, 2007), including how careers should be enacted in everyday practice (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011).

We categorized and grouped emerging discourses based on what language was doing within and across the magazines. Initial analyses focused around how each cover story was structured, toward what ends, and with what underlying assumptions, noting demographic and occupational characteristics of the individuals featured. During early stages of analysis, both authors noted similarities between the narrative structures of *Si Mchezo!* cover stories and Horatio Alger tales. In subsequent rounds, we began to investigate how discourses in *Si Mchezo!* resembled and departed from Alger's, as well as *Fema*'s, storytelling. We examined discourses in light of Tanzanian history and Nyerere's policies to ascertain connections and disconnections between the two sets of cover stories and broader systems of meanings about success implicated in historical documents.

We also outlined and diagrammed each cover story to identify structural organization. Diagramming each story's plot progression offered a visual means of examining points of structural overlap and difference within and across the magazines (see Figures 1 and 2). For example, diagramming revealed that *Si Mchezo!* used a common template for its cover stories, offering readers a roadmap to overcome adversity and find economic stability. In contrast, *Fema* offered more varied cover story structures focused on personal and political achievement. We described the discourses in memos, individually and in conversation with each other, after which we returned to the data to test our assumptions. In particular, we paid attention to negative examples, refining our conclusions accordingly (Tracy, 2013).

Normative Discourses of Career Success: Achievement Versus Survival

Analyses revealed four discourses across both magazines: encouraging self-reliance, working for the collective good, developing entrepreneurship, and reinforcing healthy relationships. Yet, the magazines articulated these discourses differently. *Fema* (for youth in school) framed career success as *achievement*—encouraging self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and healthy relationships to achieve individual self-actualization. In contrast, *Si Mchezo!* (for youth outside school) framed career success as *survival*—encouraging self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and healthy relationships for the collective good to achieve stable employment. Furthermore, the structures of *Fema* cover stories offered various pathways to success grounded in formal education, natural leadership, and a middle-class urban background (see Figure 1), whereas the narrative structure of *Si Mchezo!* offered a linear, patterned pathway to survival via economic stability (see Figure 2). In the following sections, we explicate

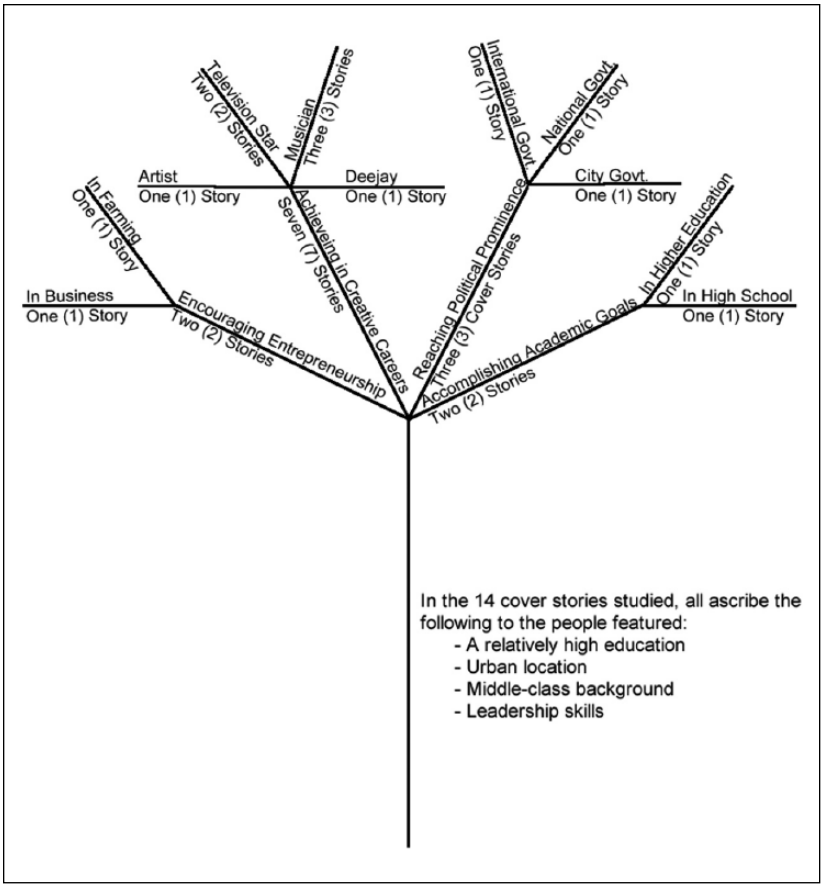

Figure 1. Diagram of *Fema* cover stories.

Fema's and *Si Mchezo!*'s articulations of career success addressing each discourse in turn (see Table 1), with each cover story identified with code.

Encouraging Self-Reliance

Although both magazines draw on Nyerere's language of self-reliance as necessary for success, the underlying logics differ. *Fema* stories present diverse occupational choices as people with exceptional careers or fame inspire readers to reach their full potential. In contrast, *Si Mchezo!* stories offer a formulaic narrative of finding a job for survival as everyday people display how to find a stable livelihood.

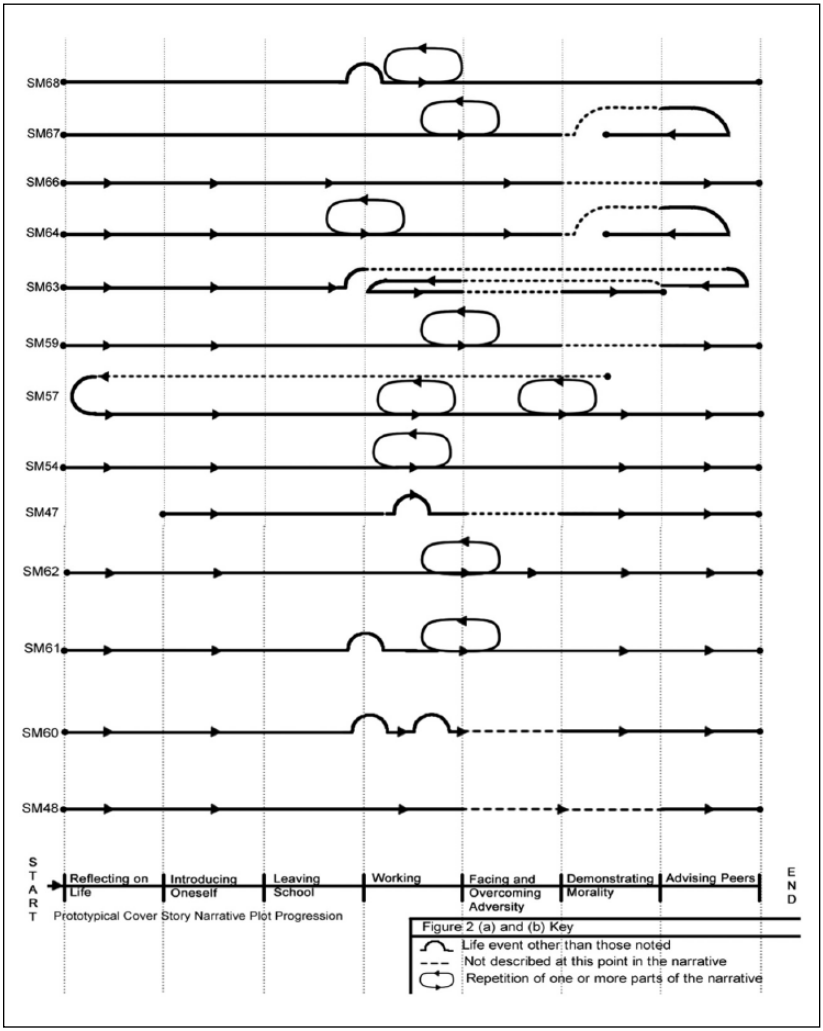

Figure 2. Diagram of *Si Mchezo!* cover stories.

Fema: Self-reliance for self-actualization. *Fema* focuses on self-actualization—achieving one's fullest potential by attaining a highly respected position. Individuals featured in cover stories primarily have careers in entertainment, politics, or other white-collar positions. Living in urban areas like the capital, Dar es Salaam, they use their positions to advocate for national change. In *Fema*, self-reliance is discursively constituted through extraordinary

Table 1. Discourses in Two Magazines.

	Fema	*Si Mchezo!*
Encouraging self-reliance		
Focus	Self-actualization	Survival
	Makes *extraordinary achievements* seem possible for the average reader	Makes *ordinary challenges* seem surmountable for the average reader
Addresses	Special accomplishments	Steady employment
	National and international leadership	*Local* and *community* leadership
	Overcoming *social* obstacles	Overcoming *economic* obstacles
Working for the collective good		
Focus	The good of the *nation*	The good of the *community*
Addresses	*National* economic issues such as corruption	*Local* economic issues through microloans
	Educational initiatives for *national* gender equality	Educational initiatives for *local* leadership
	National change through reform of social services	*Small-scale change* through reform of the reader's own life
Developing entrepreneurs		
Focus	*Choice* to be an entrepreneur	*Necessity* of being an entrepreneur
	Frames entrepreneurship as a *trend*	Frames entrepreneurship as a *route to survival*
Addresses	Entrepreneurship as an *innovative* career choice	Entrepreneurship as necessary for economic *stability*
	Farming as a *smart* opportunity	Farming as a source of *security*
Emphasizing healthy relationships		
Addresses	Physical health	
	Equitable partnerships	
	Family planning	
	Escape from abuse	

achievement, national and international leadership, and overcoming social obstacles.

Fema authors frame interviewees as simultaneously extraordinary and imitable. For example, the story of Lucylight Mallya—the highest scoring student on the 2010 Form IV national exam—offers one exemplar illustrating

imitable exceptionalism. The author shows Lucylight overcoming exceptional circumstances—her parents' death and an inability to afford school, while also suggesting that her accomplishment is a normative possibility. As Lucylight is quoted, "I will say this, I don't know what I did differently from other students, but I do know that I would concentrate in class" (F23), implying that success came via hard work rather than unique talent or circumstances. Although Lucylight achieved academic success few can match, the story describes an everyday girl behind the academic superstar: She enjoys watching movies and chatting with friends, just like anyone else. In *Fema* readers are encouraged to believe that they, ordinary people, can lead extraordinary lives.

Such extraordinary accomplishments are not limited to education. *Fema* cover stories imply that readers can become national and international leaders. Mostly women, real leaders are described as "bold [and] determined" (F17), "confident" (F28), "reliable" (F25), and "busy" (F22). *Fema* stories emphasize that Tanzanian youth have a voice and can make a difference because of natural leadership and drive. One young woman, Fancy Nkuhi, was the youngest person to run for an elected seat in the East African Legislative Assembly. Although she did not win, Fancy's determination is palpable. When asked "What inspired you to get into leadership?" she replies,

> I was actually not inspired by anyone. I am a very curious and confident individual and I felt that I could fit the role. What really pushes me forward is the belief that I can do better than others in representing people. I have always had leadership ambitions and started off with CCM [Chama cha Mapinduzi, Tanzania's leading political party] events when I was a young girl. I worked hard and I was always moving up the youth leadership ladder. (F28)

As consistently portrayed in *Fema*, self-reliance and leadership are natural extensions of the self, fueled through hard work and self-reliance. The characters do not need others, for each individual "has always had" the necessary qualities.

Fema stories recognize obstacles in the path to self-actualization; many interviewees describe overcoming common personal challenges as well as cultural norms to achieve success. Although the celebrities interviewed have had many difficult experiences—alcoholism (F21), teenage pregnancy (F26), abusive relationships (F30), and the universal trial-by-fire of puberty (F29)—none managed to stop their success. In one article, Jerry, the youngest mayor in Tanzanian history, describes being chided for his more liberal stance on family planning: "'We are Africans!' is what others say. They do not understand the concept of family planning" (F24). Jerry takes a stand against the cultural view

that family planning is incompatible with being truly "African." Other examples illustrate how interviewees moved toward gender-equitable relationships, often indicated by advocating for open communication about sex and sexual health despite cultural norms to the contrary. One article describes the real-life relationships of an actor and an actress who play a married couple on television. Indicating valuable lessons learned from the program, the actor's wife relates: "We tell each other the truth, we don't hide things" (F18). Such comments advocate for implicitly more advanced cultural values:

> Some say it's not Tanzanian to be as open as Bwana Ishi and Tuli [the show's characters]. But in these times where the need to talk about issues such as HIV, sexual health and trust is clear, what is holding a couple back from good communication? (F18)

By focusing on the need to "overcome" cultural values, *Fema* stories move away from Nyerere's agrarian model and its associated cultural values and toward individual career and personal value systems typified in the Western career literature. Even as these stories appropriate Nyerere's principle of self-reliance, the underlying logics shift away from the individual–collective tension he affirmed and toward individualism. In sum, *Fema* readers are encouraged to be self-reliant by challenging "regressive" values to accomplish individual life goals via their chosen career paths (see Figure 1).

Si Mchezo!: Self-reliance for survival. In contrast, self-reliance in *Si Mchezo!* manifests as survival. *Si Mchezo!* targets Tanzania's educational (and career) nomads (Inkson, 2007)—people who invariably left, failed, or could not continue in school. Cover stories offer formulaic first-person narratives of self-reliance aimed at survival (see Figure 2). Consistently these stories highlight when and why each person left the educational system: "My mother—who put me through school—died in a car accident and it caused me to stop my studies in Form III" (SM49); "I graduated from Standard 7 in 1998, but unluckily, I failed" (SM48); "I wasn't able to continue with my studies, because my parents didn't have tuition money" (SM68). Half "left" during or just after primary school, and the rest during or just after secondary school. *Si Mchezo!* cover stories are routinized—everyone weathers difficult circumstances. Those who survive do so by pursuing steady employment, leading locally, and overcoming harsh obstacles, contributing to their community on the way.

By focusing on similar day-to-day actions and career plotlines of featured rural Tanzanians, *Si Mchezo!* offers a roadmap for finding employment. Hamad's story is typical, describing multiple jobs and the need for social connections in the pursuit of steady work:

> Mom was not able to put me through school. When I reached the age of 12, I began to hunt for money so that I could help mom to care for the family. I got a job selling fried dough and I was paid 2,000 [US$1.24] per month. . . . After two years, my cousin who lives in Tabora city called and asked me to come work there selling bales of second-hand clothes. . . . I worked there for 3 years, but I saw that it did not pay me enough to live in the city. During this time, I heard that Dar es Salaam was a place that paid. I didn't have the fare, but I traveled to Dar by train by avoiding the guards in the train compartments, so I made it without being caught. (SM27)

In the end, through perseverance, determination, and hard work, Hamad finds steady employment as a minibus conductor. Although the work is hard, he can make ends meet. The routinization of stories like Hamad's encourages readers to believe that they too can find stable employment despite difficult circumstances if they follow the path of hard work and perseverance.

Cover stories also imply that the youth reader may find himself or herself foisted into local leadership by external circumstances. For example, one woman who became an electrician after being told it was "men's work" explains that she has "become the advisor of many" (SM62) and helps other women achieve similar goals. However, to get to this point, the narrator first had to overcome perceptions that she would never be accepted as an electrician. Every leader in *Si Mchezo!* became successful by overcoming obstacles. In a way, obstacles are what allowed the narrators to become leaders. Readers are encouraged to believe that they too are able to persevere and attain positions of respect in the community.

Many *Si Mchezo!* narrators describe how they overcame economic obstacles to achieve individual security. For most, these obstacles are related to low education levels and economic instability. Yet women featured there also emphasized the need for self-reliance to avoid dependence on men for basic needs. For example, returning to school allowed one woman to "leave the torture" (SM61) of an abusive relationship. She advises women "to get an education, so that they aren't dependent on men" (SM61). Another links financial independence to physical survival:

> To be [financially] dependent—especially on men—indeed is the origin of getting infected with HIV. You lose the power to make decisions because you depend on another person. Let's keep ourselves occupied [with work] so that we can depend on ourselves. (SM60)

Readers are encouraged to be self-reliant by facing economic hardship with education and a work ethic to better reach financial stability. Thus, although both magazines address self-reliance, *Fema* encourages self-actualization at the national level, whereas *Si Mchezo!* aids individual survival within the local community.

Working for Collective Good

Both *Fema* and *Si Mchezo!* emphasize the connection between individual needs and collective good, although they frame this tension differently and address it to varying degrees. *Fema* only intermittently addresses economic, educational, and social issues and does so at the national level, whereas *Si Mchezo!* consistently emphasizes the importance of addressing economic, educational, and social issues at the local level.

Fema: For the good of the nation. When discussing the collective good, *Fema* stories focus on people who work for good of the nation. Interviewees are high achievers; however, only half describe working for positive social change in the nation on their path to self-actualization. Such interviewees talk about ending corruption in the Tanzanian economy, educating others about gender equality, and addressing problems with national social services as a way to enact their purpose.

Featured individuals in *Fema* focus on national economic issues. For example, one political activist focuses on grassroots movements, encouraging Tanzanian youth to "stop being 'hypocrites' about corruption" (F25). Another targets Tanzania's policies and founding documents, arguing that "[t]he current Constitution protects people in power [because] in cases of corruption, for example, somebody can't really use the Constitution to report offences" (F22). In describing political activists' work, *Fema* emphasized the need for readers to use their natural leadership abilities to change "very real and tough situations" by sacrificing personal benefits (i.e., "pay[ing] a bribe to get preferential treatment") to address a "corrupt political system."

People featured in *Fema* also emphasized the need to educate the nation about gender equality. They lobby to change laws and shift national viewpoints by writing songs about strong women (F17), encouraging open communication through television shows (F18), and promoting the idea that women are academically equal to men (F23). These individuals assume that their voices will be heard. Gender advocacy is often implicit. Recognizing their own clout, interviewees rarely defend their stance on gender equality; they simply speak matter-of-factly about their own experiences as, for example, the highest scoring student on the national examination who presumably exemplifies gender equality via her accomplishments.

Two articles argue for comprehensive national reform of social services such as roads and medical care. Notably, both question the resolve of other Tanzanian youth. One journalist describes how the interviewee "fails to understand why social and public services fail to function efficiently and why fellow citizens resign themselves to accepting things the way they are" (F17).

Another interviewee asserts that his peers think too narrowly: "Sitting around the whole day doing nothing and complaining at the 'kijiwe' [small problem] is not going to push us forward" (F25). Both stories express a desire for change and frustration in Tanzanian youth who do not emulate national level ambition and work ethic *Fema*'s subjects report.

Si Mchezo!: For the good of the local community. *Si Mchezo!* stories focus on people who work for the good of the *local* community. Many stories involve survival under harsh conditions; all but one stress how "ordinary" people must contribute to local economies, youth, and social issues for the good of (the local) all. By emphasizing cooperative enterprises, youth mentoring, and individual behavior change for the collective good, *Si Mchezo!* places a much higher emphasis on collectivity than *Fema.*

Stories often illustrate how narrators' work contributes to local economies by actively participating in microloan or handicraft cooperatives:

> After finishing Standard 7 grade a group of five of us came together to ask for a business loan, and we got it. Each person was supposed to do business that allowed him/her to return this loan in the time we agreed on. I started a business of selling used clothes, carefully and faithfully. (SM66)

The story continues, sharing how "faithfully" repaying his loan helped him build his business by showing commitment to the community. Even when sharing negative experiences (e.g., a microloan organizer ran off with one individual's money), narrators assert that participating in local cooperatives helped to expand businesses, procure necessary supplies, and improve the economy for the local community.

Stories also describe how people give back to their local communities by educating others. After overcoming their own obstacles, narrators share the path to success. For example, one individual who was heavily involved in theft and drug abuse now runs prevention programs to keep others from repeating his mistakes: "I have joined a group of educators here in Makambako who teach youth about the dangers of alcoholism" (SM54). Stories emphasizing shared responsibilities to educate others offer the final scene of *Si Mchezo!*'s formulaic narrative for career success. By educating other youth within the story itself, the stories emphasize the importance of passing on this success formula to other educationally limited youth, using discourse to construct a recognizable path to survival.

In addition, *Si Mchezo!* stories often address social issues by speaking directly to readers, advocating small-scale social change in readers' own lives and families. Unlike *Fema*'s interviewees, *Si Mchezo!*'s narrators do not

assume that this advice will be heeded. Instead, they labor to convince their audience that their stance on equality is reasonable:

> This life makes me so happy, and you dear reader, I advise you to love and partner with your wife in all things, help her with work and don't treat her like a slave. I believe that after a short time you will see a great change in the atmosphere and life of your family. Given the peace and love I have in my family, I wish to see all men be like me. (SM48)

Instead of claiming that men should treat women equally, this narrator attempts to persuade, describing how his life is more fulfilling because of his equitable relationship. Without assuming that readers will take his word for it, he encourages readers to experiment with equality themselves. Thus, even as *Si Mchezo!* addresses the same social issues as *Fema*, the level and style of the advocacy are often quite different, revealing a more important communal focus in *Si Mchezo!*.

Developing Entrepreneurs

Alongside encouragement toward self-reliance and working for the collective good, both magazines call for increased entrepreneurship. Here too, logics of success as self-actualization (*Fema*) versus survival (*Si Mchezo!*) constitute the concept in different ways. *Fema* frames entrepreneurship as an up-and-coming trend one should choose to follow to find a life calling. *Si Mchezo!* frames entrepreneurship as the only option for economic stability.

Fema: Entrepreneurship as choice. In *Fema*, entrepreneurship is presented as a new, innovative career choice, even a chance for celebrity, and described as an opportunity to pursue a personally meaningful career. Even farming is framed as a bold, new career choice.

Fema stories frame entrepreneurship as a means of choosing a personally meaningful rather than an instrumental career. One featured celebrity "crossed years and borders in search of his dream career. He is living the dream, running his own design company" (F25). Similarly, an entrepreneurial reality show *Ruka Juu* ("Jump Up") gives contestants the chance to "be exposed to different challenges . . . [to see] if they have the vision, aspirations and operational skills to make their small businesses grow" (F19). In *Fema*, even farming is presented as a smart, hip entrepreneurial *choice*. A description of one competition states:

> Farming is HOT! We have visited smart young entrepreneurs from across the country who are using farming to build their lives . . . While jobs in other

> industries may be limited, agriculture has an abundance of opportunities . . . "the earth smells of money, but people just don't see it . . . ." Don't miss out, farming can turn your life around! (F27)

Thus, in *Fema*, farming is put forth as the smart opportunity for the fashionable youth, hip to emerging market trends, and a pathway to abundant success.

Si Mchezo!: Entrepreneurship as necessity. In contrast, *Si Mchezo!* cover stories present entrepreneurship as the best means of survival, a way to find steady work given no other options. The narratives describe entrepreneurship as the only way to survive, often framing farming as a smart return to historic financial stability.

Si Mchezo! narratives frame entrepreneurship as necessary for economic survival because options for work are few to none. A typical story describes how:

> In 1999 I traveled to the city of Dar es Salaam and arrived to stay with my sister who had gotten married there. I stayed there for a short time, and then I entered the life of the street to try to find something to do. . . . I started to sell peanuts at the bus station. . . . I sold peanuts for a year. . . . At this point, I decided to switch businesses and start to sell plastic dishes. . . . I changed businesses again and started to sell radios. I saved little by little until my savings reached 250,000 [US$154.89], and I built a hut from which to sell suitcases . . . I worked hard, and God helped me to reach a savings of 2,000,000 [US$1239.16]. (SM53)

Like other *Si Mchezo!* stories, the narrator moves from job to job, creating new opportunities not out of creativity or a drive to be fulfilled, but out of sheer economic necessity. Each subsequent venture is not chosen for its meaningfulness, but because of the financial security it offers.

Rather than encouraging moves to urban centers to find industrial work, stories advocate for farming as a source of financial security. For example, a protagonist describes how he moved to the city, but quickly ran out of money and could not afford to live there. He narrates how, upon his return:

> I decided to farm tomatoes. . . . When I reaped, I was lucky to have a good season and I sold each plastic bag of tomatoes for the price of 4000 [US$2.48] to get 280,000 [US$173.48]. I started to be self-dependent in 2007. I bought a three-hectare farm. . . . By now I have discovered the secret that farming pays! It has given me hope. (SM64)

Yet, even as farming is framed as more financially secure than urban work—consistent with Nyerere's philosophy—narrators view farming as a career of

necessity, not of choice as *Fema* authors advocated. *Si Mchezo!*'s protagonists often try other alternatives first. Only when urban work proves untenable does farming become the career path. Thus, although both *Fema* and *Si Mchezo!* endorse entrepreneurial careers, one does so out of choice and the other out of necessity.

Emphasizing Healthy Relationships

These magazines paint divergent portraits of career success as achievement or survival, yet uphold similar relational values. As evident in a smaller set of cover stories, both emphasize healthy relationships as foundational to success. Specifically, readers learn how to be free from disease, develop equitable partnerships, use family planning, and escape abuse.

Both *Fema* and *Si Mchezo!* emphasize physical health. Many cover stories describe the importance of getting tested for HIV/AIDS with partners and being "faithful" to maintain health in relationships. Eight cover stories describe equitable partnerships between spouses and the good that that brings to marriages. Healthy relationships also involve family planning, although both *Fema* and *Si Mchezo!* describe the pushback couples can receive from other Tanzanians resistant to family planning. Finally, both magazines dedicate one cover story to describing how to leave abusive relationships. In terms of page area and content, both magazines cover each well-being topic nearly equally, implying that although the logics underlying discourses of career success diverge, foundational relational values do not.

In sum, in these magazines we find career discourses that define dominant and alternative paths to success, which the magazines seem to differentiate for their respective audiences—the educationally elite or the educationally adrift. The discourses situate career success at various cultural levels (local, national, international), reflect the shifting nature of historical discourses over time, and encourage career behaviors that correspond with material constraints or opportunities.

Discussion and Conclusion

Fema and *Si Mchezo!* cover stories construct normative career narratives for Tanzanian youth based on self-reliance, collective good, entrepreneurship, and healthy relationships. These discourses operate differently depending on target readers' education level and socioeconomic status: *Fema* refracts the first three discourses through a lens of *achievement*, whereas *Si Mchezo!* refracts these discourses through a lens of *survival*. Here, we discuss the need to read these—and by implication other—discourses contextually. This study

thus provides two key contributions: extending the career literature by considering how cultural, material, and temporal factors affect career understandings and practices, within particular *intranational* contexts, and providing an initial framework to help scholars and practitioners integrate context more thoroughly in their work.

Understanding how cultural, material, and temporal factors shape these four discourses helps inform analyses of discursive differences and similarities. When decontextualized, *Si Mchezo!* stories may appear to align with oft-criticized Horatio Alger tales of the American Dream. Consequently, *Si Mchezo!*'s routinized stories could be hastily judged as problematic just as Alger's stories are now often dismissed off-hand (Nackenoff, 1994). However, although such discourses may be considered problematically classed, patterned stories might also offer workable, if incomplete, solutions to career dilemmas many rural Tanzanians face. Similarly, *Fema*'s stories are designed to fit the context at hand, able to focus on individual exemplars rather than patterned stories because of career opportunities afforded by educational achievement and socioeconomic stability. To fully consider the influence of context, we illustrate how the differential nuances between discourses of career success can be revealed by considering how three interrelated contextual dimensions—culture, materiality, and temporality—influence discursive appropriations, construction, and/or interpretation.

Cultural context exists on a continuum within which multiple levels should be considered over time. At times, national or international (more macro) culture will be salient, and at other times community, regional, or otherwise local (more micro) culture may be relevant. Researchers need to clearly define the specific culture(s) and level(s) to which they are attending and how those contexts interplay with other dimensions. For example, comparing *Si Mchezo!*'s patterned stories with Horatio Alger tales might make contemporary Tanzania appear synonymous with a past United States. Such an argument, although tempting, would disregard important differences. Rather, uses of patterned career stories in the United States and *Si Mchezo!* might be more usefully compared by emphasizing historically situated national culture—namely, the more abstract sense of economic uncertainty, the difficulty met by readers of both texts in securing stability, and attempts by authors who are contemporaries of those facing the uncertainty to provide patterned stories as a "guidebook" to weather changing circumstances (see e.g., Nackenoff, 1994).

As evident in this analysis, *Si Mchezo!* stories follow a predictable pattern (Figure 2), from a point of economic uncertainty to economic stability. Despite specific differences, the Horatio Alger myth could generally be mapped onto these stories: Starting from a lowly position, our hero

overcomes educational and economic odds to find himself financially secure and morally redeemed. Initially, this seems problematic, but attending simultaneously and closely to contemporary national cultural context with the discourse, one can see how popular contemporary criticisms of Horatio Alger do not apply. First, no blame is applied to narrators of *Si Mchezo!* for their economic circumstances, whereas contemporary invocations of the American Dream and re-workings of Alger stories often blame individuals for lacking ambition (Hochschild, 1996). Instead, the stories imply that circumstances are to blame. As contemporaries of the narrators, readers know the Tanzanian educational and economic situation: leaving school for financial reasons or failing the Form IV exam is more typical than not. Because Tanzania lacks consistent national social safety nets, people depend on family structures and communities as a form of self-reliance for collective good (Nyerere, 1967). The implication that one should have to arise from poor circumstances individually, without community help, is supported neither in Tanzanian culture, nor in *Si Mchezo!* stories. Thus, we argue that discourses or myths considered ideologically problematic in one historic national context may serve important goals in another.

Although distinguishing between (historic) national contexts is important, such distinctions are insufficiently nuanced to appreciate overlapping and contradictory influences of discourses within geopolitical spaces. Following Hofstede (1980), much international management work has tended to equate nation with culture. Yet, like Kwek (2003) and Fougére and Moulettes (2012), we encourage moving beyond the nation-as-culture formulation to think across *and within* national boundaries, considering how individual, local, and other regional contexts interplay with the material and temporal resources of everyday life to shape career discourses and corresponding actions. Although increasingly recognized in studies engaging Western settings, this is often forgotten where international settings are concerned. For studies in Sub-Saharan Africa, the slippage between nation and culture or between continent and culture is particularly problematic because of the arbitrary ways most national borders were constructed (Mamdani, 1996).

Thus, even as *Fema* and *Si Mchezo!* are shaped by the same national policies—evident in their appropriation of similar discourses from historical documents—readers' immediate contexts and needs help shape and alter how historical discourses and their underlying logics are appropriated and (re) constructed, and the practical implications thereof. *Fema* does not offer patterned survival stories. Rather, *Fema* provides individual opportunities for career achievement by its readers when they graduate—a taken-for-granted assumption given readers' typical educational and economic status. Although discourses of career success orient around key Nyererean tenets of

self-reliance and collective good, *Fema* focuses on (inter)national action and assumes individualistic motivations and drive, and *Si Mchezo!* discursively functions on the local level, where rural Tanzanians live and work.

Material constraints also influence how discourses are organized and interpreted. *Si Mchezo!* must be read against a backdrop of very real concerns for readers' survival. We argue that *Si Mchezo!* cover stories offer an attempt to help rural, lower class youth weather economic hardship. Failed by a promised education system, many youth are left directionless with few career opportunities (Sahle, 2002). Just as Alger can be read as providing Gilded Age youth with a means to middle-class security in a harsh, uncaring, and rapidly changing economic system (Nackenoff, 1994), *Si Mchezo!*—through routinized descriptions of a linear trajectory of self-dependence—provides readers with a possible path to survival. In both cases, the impetus to self-dependence is not the neoliberal individualism so often anachronistically interpreted in Alger's stories, but rather the failure of the system to work on the individual's behalf.

Fema discursively operates within a different scope of material concern. Although not all readers may be financially secure, or live in an urban space, the discourse is aimed at those who are still in school. Presumably, these readers have not lost the dream of passing Form IV examinations, moving to the city, and achieving steady employment in white-collar and/or celebrity professions. Thus, economic and material needs that constitute and shape interpretations of discourses are less pressing in *Fema. Fema* readers exist in material circumstances that allow for extraordinary achievements as distinct possibilities, encouraging readers to dream of individual achievement without threatening immediate survival.

As suggested earlier, understanding the differences and similarities between discourses requires considering temporality as time shapes people's construction and interpretation of organizing processes (Ballard & Seibold, 2003), including discourse. The discourses at play in *Fema* and *Si Mchezo!* can be traced back to Tanzania's foundational national identities and policies. Self-reliance and collective good were initially instantiated by Nyerere (1967), but have shifted in scope and meaning over time. Indeed, the discourses of entrepreneurship and healthy relationships can be seen as effects of such shifts.

Entrepreneurship can be situated within the historical development of the relationship between self-reliance and collective good as well as contemporary cultural and material circumstances. Entrepreneurship has become more salient in many contexts due to changing contemporary economic circumstances (Gill, 2014). In the cultural and material contexts of *Fema*, the discourse of entrepreneurship primarily attends to self-reliance to create career

opportunities, which culminate in national and international advocacy for social change. In *Si Mchezo!* conversely, entrepreneurship is often a collective endeavor that culminates in individual survival. Here, changes in appropriations of particular discourses over time affect the relationships between discourses, and the way such discourses are taken up in contemporary life.

By weaving together three interrelated dimensions—culture, materiality, and time—we propose an initial framework through which scholars and managers can begin to consider interrelated contextual factors that otherwise might be obscured when examining discourse. Discourses must be considered as informed by and situated in the intersection of differing cultural levels, varying material constraints, and changes over time. This framework recognizes not only that culture, materiality, and temporality need to be taken into account but also that they are dimensions, not binaries, and they can also act in varied ways within a single discourse: *Culture* ranges from micro to macro levels and may entail international conglomerations, national cultures, local cultures, and anything salient in between and beyond; *materiality* considers availability and diversity of resources including but not limited to the economy at large, educational issues, community resources, and family circumstances; and *temporality* focuses on persistence or changes over time (e.g., of a nation, family, lifetime) and their relative proximity. Examining discourses in this manner encourages consideration of the multiple factors constraining and enabling discursive constructions, and shows how discourses might offer conflicting interpretation within and across contexts.

This framework has important implications. For scholars, a more thorough attention to multiple dimensions and levels of context allows for more rigorous research and detailed claims. It also creates possibilities for comparative work without essentializing differences or similarities. It offers researchers a point of departure from which to extend or challenge extant research by drawing in aspects of contexts and their interrelationships that often have been ignored or obscured. It also challenges researchers—in partnership with practitioners—to attend to the structural and material circumstances that necessitate such patterned discourses, and to work to avoid problematic discursive perpetuation should material circumstances change. Practically, detailed attention to context can lead to more thorough understandings of international and intranational employees or partner organizations that do not universalize dominant Western, particularly U.S., notions of career success. It encourages managers to evaluate current communication strategies by considering what important aspects of context are currently being undervalued or conversely overvalued or misplaced—adding to intranational as well as national differences and similarities. Even as this framework provides value for nuanced contextually relevant communication overall, we caution managers and

scholars against using this framework to fix particular contexts as "the way things are," but instead to appreciate the situatedness of discourse and meaning as cultural, material, and temporal conditions change.

This study offers insights into lower class, agrarian populations and challenges scholars and practitioners to consider the problems and possibilities of career discourses and context; however, more work is needed. Although we analyzed the two most popular magazines in Tanzania, they offer but one perspective. Future work should compare discourses within and across different media and also directly interview, survey, and observe participants over time to see how and what discourses of career success are revealed in conversation, speech acts, and career actions. Future work should also consider how multilevel, multidimensional aspects of context affect discourse and practice.

In conclusion, this study looks into normative discourses of career success, highlighting the ways contextual factors inform and influence discursive appropriation, construction, and interpretation. Although discourses revealed here are classed, such differences, although potentially problematic, may point rural youth to a pathway to survival in difficult circumstances. With a multidimensional, multi-level cultural analysis within the Tanzanian context, this study adds nuance to understandings of popular career myths—urging consideration of the ways similar discourses may be used to support differential ideological and individual goals, and how discourses may be shaped and interpreted differently because of cultural, material, and temporal contexts.

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