

Entrepreneurial Career and Life Design (ECLD): Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Distinctions in a Transforming World

Dr. Lubna¹, Dr. Salma Begum²

¹Alliance Ascent, Alliance University, Bengaluru, India

²Faculty of Management Studies, CMS Business School

JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, India

Abstract

Entrepreneurial Career and Life Design (ECLD) is an interdisciplinary approach that combines the concepts of entrepreneurial thinking, Self-authored career and life design with the approach of Design Thinking. The ECLD enables individuals to chart the path of a dynamic and opportunistic career. This chapter defines ECLD by throwing light on the theories to form a conceptual framework, define its relevance in the transforming world and distinguishes it from the traditional approaches of career development. The chapter takes the cues from the changing professional landscapes with digital transformation and increased focus on sustainable and mindful lives. ECLD unifies the concepts of narrative career and the entrepreneurial venture creation, enabling to design the career trajectories by combining the self-directed career paths aligned with the entrepreneurial venturing. This chapter offers a comprehensive synthesis of theories and concepts to understand the ECLD as a research construct and as well as a curriculum concept for entrepreneurial and career building framework. By combining the educational psychology, career ladder, entrepreneurial mindset with design thinking approach, ECLD contributes as a strong foundation for the new generation curriculum designing and career innovation. ECLD is encouraging the educationists, researchers and the professionals to think and act beyond the traditional architecture of life and work, encouraging a mindset where career development is accepted as an iterative life project.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Career and Life Design, Career Construction Theory, Effectuation Theory, Design Thinking, Career Adaptability, Life Design, Self-Authorship

1 Introduction

Navigating modern careers requires a blend of adaptability, creativity, and self-direction. Entrepreneurial Career and Life Design (ECLD) offers an interdisciplinary approach, integrating entrepreneurial thinking, self-authored career paths, and design thinking principles. This chapter explores the ECLD concept and its relevance in the constantly evolving environment. The concept of ECLD has emerged thanks to the growing attention to integrate the self-anchored career paths and entrepreneurial thinking within the rapidly changing professional careers. The literature review for the study synthesizes the research on the concepts, conceptual frameworks of ECLD and on the theories forming the foundation for ECLD. The base theories considered for the study to explore ECLD in this chapter are Effectuation theory, Career Construction Theory and Design Thinking concepts.

The recent research is focused on ECLD as an innovative bridge between the personal growth and life design with entrepreneurship. Wolf and Landberg (2022) and Poech and Wolf (2024) are of an opinion that the entrepreneurial mindset and traditional life design is integrated by ECLD, facilitating individuals to embrace the career transitions and uncertainty challenges. self-efficacy, life satisfaction and resilience are the key components of ECLD framework, encouraging dynamic, and adaptive processes over the linear and static career curves. The shift is appreciated as a sustainable transformation in the society contributing to the economic progress, with ECLD crafting careers as iterative process as explained by Wolf and Landberg (2022) and Poech and Wolf (2024) rather than a fixed career path (Neck et al., 2020; Wolf & Landberg, 2022).

2 Chapter Overview

The dynamism of the present complex professional life the age-old career frameworks is inadequate to meet the challenges of work and life. ECLD framework has a futuristic approach, integrating self-crafted career, design

thinking and entrepreneurial thinking principles. This section of the chapter addresses the concept, significance and scope of ECLD, offering an array of empathetic exploration for the learners and professionals. ECLD is an interdisciplinary framework that offers a perfect blend of entrepreneurial mindset, self-curated career and design thinking to shape the professional career and life choices of individuals. Contrary to the traditional career planning, ECLD is an innovative, iterative and increasingly personal approach, focusing on flexibility and proactive career design.

- Entrepreneurial Mindset: creative, proactive problem solving, innovative and recognizing the opportunity and foster innovation.
- Self- Authorship: individuals craft their own career identifying success in one's own terms, encouraged by the personal goals and values.
- Design Thinking: An empathetic, iterative framework to address the self-authored career growth.
- Objective: Defining ECLD and Its Conceptual Framework
- ECLD focuses to address how individuals sync the career and life aims by integrating the entrepreneurial mindset, self-authored career and design thinking. The main objective is to enable individuals to:
 - Take ownership of their career paths through proactive, self-directed strategies.
 - Recognize and seize new opportunities in uncertain, dynamic environments.
 - Apply creative problem-solving to both career and life challenges.

Core Components

- Entrepreneurial Mindset: Inspires opportunity recognition, innovation, and resilience
- Self-Authored Career: Motivates individuals to define success in their own terms, focusing on self-aspirations.
- Design Thinking: Stimulates empathetic human-centered and iterative framework to pilot personal and professional life.

2.1 Scope and Significance

The Foundational Theories, like Effectuation Theory, emphasizes on navigating the uncertainties, managing the risk, and embracing the challenges. Whereas, the Design Thinking focuses on a human-centered approach, with ideation, prototyping and testing the self-authored career and designing the life. The Career Construction Theory, on the other hand, encourages career growth by aligning it with the individual's personal values and life themes and stories.

The practical implications for Individuals are that it inspires adaptability and constant learning throughout life, enhances opportunity recognition in the increasing digital era and the world of gig economies and career choices are aligned with the personal life themes and goals. For Educators and Institutions, it provides a framework to integrate the entrepreneurial mindset and design thinking approach into the academic curriculum. Directs career curation from linear assessments toward complex and narrative processes, and for Organizations, encourages talented individuals to contribute to the organization through a well-designed, flexible, and self-authored career. Stimulates organizational flexibility by encouraging career development as a continuous work-in-progress process.

Significance: ECLD's Role in Modern Contexts

Entrepreneurial Career and Life Design (ECLD) have a significant role to play in addressing the dynamic and modern professional career choices with flexible and adaptive nature. In the current volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world, ECLD acts as a tool supporting individuals to navigate through the uncertainty and explore the opportunities. With the characteristics of providing room for experimentation for transformation with desired flexibility, ECLD supports an ecosystem where individuals can make career choices in an ambiguous environment with complete confidence. Such adaptability is highly significant in the VUCA environment, where the traditional approaches fail.

The ECLD essence is in identifying an opportunity, especially in the advanced digital era by shaping the entrepreneurial mindset. An individual's thought process is designed to identify the trends, predict the shifts and capture

the new avenues, which is vital to be pertinent in the dynamically evolving environment. Moreover, ECLD promotes adaptability by nurturing a progressive mindset, reframing falling short in any situation as a learning experience and encouraging a perfect balance between work and personal life.

In response to the advanced technological transformation in the digital era, ECLD significantly emphasizes on skill enhancement. An individual behaving like a lifelong learner is the paramount aspect for the career development, like an entrepreneur who is persistent and risk taker, making sure the individual is agile and embraces the digital transformation. ECLD also emphasized on self-upgradation to be on par with the technological advancement and take advantage of the opportunities for self-innovation.

The increasing opportunities with the gig economy specifies the significance of ECLD. The ECLD model navigates the individuals to be agile and accept the flexible, project-based careers. The career choices need not be confined to the traditional, long working hour employment. It nurtures self-development skills, including self-branding and navigating between the different income streams with utmost ease. ECLD also creates a platform for taking calculated risks and to manage the finances and concentrates on continuous upskilling, encouraging individuals to succeed in the gig working opportunity as well.

ECLD not only concentrates on the professional flexibility and adaptability, but also it wins over to live a meaningful life. It supplements to build a holistic ecosystem consisting of both career advancement and personal well-being and also supports for appreciated social impact, making sure that the professional growth is not achieved at the cost of the individual's personal values and responsibilities. ECLD acts as a tool to give a clarity to the individuals on the choices of journey in the pursuit of desired careers and personal endeavors.

3 Concepts and Theoretical Foundation

3.1 Concepts

Entrepreneurial Thinking: Mindset is focused on opportunity recognition, innovation, and proactive problem-solving.

Self-Authored Career path shaped by individual choices, values, and personal goals.

Life Design: Intentional structuring of one's life and career, integrating personal and professional achievements.

Design Thinking: Human-centered, iterative approach to problem-solving and innovation.

Effectuation Theory: Entrepreneurial theory emphasizing flexibility, creativity, and action in uncertainty.

Career Construction Theory Framework for building adaptable, meaningful careers in a changing world.

3.2 Theoretical Foundations

3.2.1 Effectuation Theory

Sarasvathy (2001) introduced effectuation theory, challenging the causation logic and emphasizing on leveraging the available means by the entrepreneurs and focusing on identifying opportunities in an uncertain condition prevalent in the ecosystem.

The review of literature has considered the effectuation theory's key dimensions: experimentation, flexibility, affordable loss and pre-commitments. The effectuation principles support learning from experience and give room for errors, encourage dynamism, stress on calculated risk, and deliberate the formation of partnerships to leverage on the opportunities. Of late, effectuation is identified as a base theory for the research in entrepreneurship, the literature is classified into the determinants, drivers and outcomes, adding to the existing knowledge. The scholarly work on effectuation is emphasized on the logical experimenting, leveraging uncertainties and embracing innovation in the business ecosystem (Sarasvathy, 2001; Grégoire, D. A., & Cherchem, N., 2020)

3.2.2 Design Thinking

Design thinking is an iterative, non-linear and human-centered technique to solve the most complex and wicked problems, as well to solve simplest problems in the most innovative way. It involves the following steps: empathy, defining, ideation, prototype and testing. The review of literature has a greater emphasis on empathizing with the user and multiple iterations to solve the complex problems with the most innovative solutions in the design thinking process. Design thinking is a process to design the thought process to align with the holistic approach to solve

the problems by designing the most appropriate approach. Design thinking has a wider approach than the problem solving or designing the product/service. It has an application developing a holistic model for life and career planning, embracing ambiguity and adapting flexibility. Application of Design Thinking in the framework of ECLD, it focused on the encouraging self-authored careers by motivating individuals to self-empathize with career preferences aligned to life goals, develop a career path, prototype the career choices, iterate and re-align with the personal and professional goals and aspirations (Liedtka, 2015; Cautela et al., 2019; Interaction Design Foundation, 2025).

3.2.3 Career Construction Theory

Savickas (2005) proposed a comprehensive Career Construction Theory, a life narrative construct for career choices and development. The theory reflects on the facts of personal and social constructivism, emphasizing on individual life themes pilot the career choices. They craft their career based on their life themes by aligning the career choices to a meaningful life with personal and professional accomplishments. In today's dynamic and ever changing world of uncertainties, a well-designed career path is essential. The elements of the career construction Theory are: vocational personality- the individual career related interests and self-abilities, career adaptability- the individual's values and needs encouraging the adaptation, and the life theme- charting the life stories. The Career Construction Theory is apparently more efficient than the age-old career matching to the available jobs in the market, a meta-analysis has suggested (Savickas, 2005; Guan & Li, 2015; Langher et al., 2018).

3.2.4 Integration and Contemporary Relevance

The Effectuation Theory addressing to embrace uncertainty, Design Thinking to empathize and iterate and Career Construction Theory aiming to map the life theme to the career path integrates very within the ECLD model focusing on the limitations of the traditional career choices and career development methods. ECLD envisions and accommodates the changing societal expectations, addressing growing gig economy and the transformation to digital world by encouraging entrepreneurial mindset. The scholars are troubling light on the ECLD's potential in fostering entrepreneurship as a part of the curriculum in the educational institutions, crafting career paths and career-life balance, and setting a foundation for the future generations for career development with entrepreneurship and a life theme-based career paths (Wolf & Landberg, 2022; Poech & Wolf, 2024).

The existing literature shows that the ECLD is an impactful curve in the career curation evolution, contributing to the approach narrating entrepreneurial design meeting the needs of the ever-changing dynamic world. The ECLD fosters career development by aligning the personal life themes to the career advancement and inculcating the practice in the traditional education systems and the personal and professional growth.

4 Distinguishing ECLD from Related Career Development Models

The Entrepreneur-Career Life Design (ECLD) differs from several existing career development models. We have discussed a few below.

4.1 Difference from Life Design Counselling

Life Design Counselling is grounded in narrative approaches that help individuals make meaning of their career paths through personal stories, identity exploration, and life themes (Savickas, 2012; Savickas, 2013). Though this approach is considered powerful for promoting self-awareness and psychological adaptation, it largely focuses on reflection and narrative reconstruction. In contrast, Entrepreneurial Career-Life Design (ECLD) expands this scope by integrating entrepreneurial venturing directly into the career-life design process. Rather than limiting individuals to guided introspection, ECLD encourages opportunity testing, small-scale prototyping, and value-creating action. In doing so, it shifts from a counselling-based model to an initiative-driven framework that blends personal meaning-making with entrepreneurial experimentation.

4.2 Difference from the 3Cs Model

The 3Cs model, based on curiosity, connections, and creating value, emphasizes exploratory behaviours and network building as essential foundations for modern career development (Burnett & Evans, 2016). While ECLD incorporates these elements, it diverges by positioning them within an entrepreneurial, self-directed venturing mindset. Instead of using curiosity and connections mainly for career exploration or incremental refinement,

ECLD uses them to identify unmet needs, design value propositions, gather feedback, and test emerging opportunities. Thus, whereas the 3Cs model focuses on adaptive career exploration, ECLD advances toward active venture creation and iterative opportunity development as part of one's evolving career-life pathway.

4.3 Difference from Traditional Career Frameworks

Traditional career development frameworks typically conceptualize careers as linear, predictable, and structured sequences of stages or person-environment fits (Super, 1990; Holland, 1997). These models assume that individuals progress through stable pathways guided by long-term planning and occupational matching. ECLD fundamentally departs from this logic by adopting a dynamic, opportunity-driven, and iterative approach. Instead of emphasizing predefined paths, ECLD aligns with contemporary labour market uncertainty by encouraging individuals to continuously experiment, pivot, and redesign their trajectories in response to emerging opportunities. This makes ECLD particularly suited for volatile, innovation-oriented, and rapidly evolving contexts where static career models fall short.

5 The ECLD Framework

The Entrepreneurial Career–Life Design (ECLD) framework integrates principles of life design, career development, and entrepreneurial venturing to support individuals in navigating contemporary, uncertain, and opportunity-rich career environments. Unlike traditional career frameworks that assume linear and predictable career trajectories (Super, 1990; Holland, 1997), ECLD emphasizes a dynamic, iterative, and opportunity-driven approach that blends self-reflection, entrepreneurial experimentation, and value creation (Savickas, 2012; Burnett & Evans, 2016).

Core principles of ECLD

- Purpose-Driven Education: Aligns learning with personal values and societal needs, encouraging individuals to pursue endeavors both meaningful and impactful.
- Self-Authored Career: Individuals design their own career trajectories, proactively embracing change and actively designing their path rather than following predefined routes.
- Integration of Life and Work: Encourages holistic life design, blending personal fulfillment with professional achievement.
- Culmination of work and life: Inspires a holistic approach to life with a perfect blend of personal and professional goals achievement, leading to a harmonious balance.

Framework Structure- Design Thinking applied to ECLD

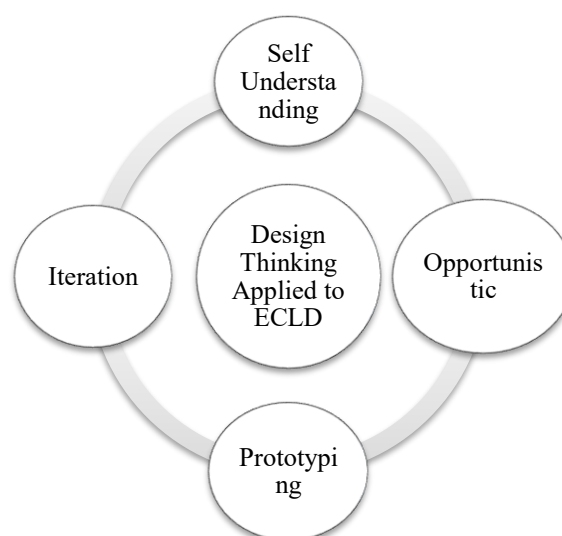


Figure 1.1: ECLD Framework

Figure 1.1 shows the ECLD framework reflecting on the cyclical process of repeated experimentation and adaptation, enabling individuals to continuously co-create their career paths in alignment with personal and professional growth.

Self-understanding: Empathizing with self and encouraging self-awareness.

Opportunistic: Identifying the avenues available matching with the individual's core strength.

Prototyping: Embracing the opportunity and testing the career prototype designed by the individuals considering their life preferences.

Iteration: The individuals can introspect on their career choices and make changes to meet the life themes they pursue to achieve.

6 Thematic Analysis

Responding to Digital Transformation: Digital transformation is the need of the hour, with almost all the sectors becoming digital. The very job nature is flexible and adaptable. ECLD prepares the individuals to win over the changes with utmost clarity and confidence.

Embracing the Gig Economy: There is a shift in the traditional work flow from the long-term commitment and long working hours to a flexible task-based orientation to the jobs. This transformation is complemented by the ECLD model to encourage an entrepreneurial mindset

Shifting Employment Paradigms: The individuals are prepared to explore the short task -based career choices like individual projects, freelancing encouraging multiple income avenues. The individual need not *restrict* to a single long-term job. The individual can design their own career portfolio to build an effective skill-based careers and pursue their varied interests at the same time.

Entrepreneurial Approaches to Career Building: ECLD prepares the individuals to recognize the career opportunities and maximize the returns on the skill-based jobs choices in the gig economy. The gig economy gives the opportunity for remote working saving a lot of time and effort in being physically present. Promotes task-based entrepreneurship avenues. The career can be self-authored and managed on one's own terms and value system. The personal goals can be prioritized with career goals. ECLD framework fosters risk management by embracing uncertainties.

Focus on Sustainable and Mindful Living: The economic success is just one part of the ECLD wherein it concentrates highly on the quality of life, by giving wings to a mindful living by aligning the professional choices to the personal fulfillments.

Integration of Well-Being and Societal Impact: ECLD promotes a holistic life design by fostering individual growth with professional work choices aligned to the life expectations, including the self- expectation as well meeting the success in the vision of the societal development. ECLD framework encourages sustainable practices by supporting an entrepreneurial mindset in their career choices and responsible stewardship in career and life decision making.

Purpose-Driven, Meaningful Work: The personal values are parked under the carpet most of times while running to catch up with the career success. ECLD framework gives the opportunity to the individuals to achieve the desired success by integrating the life themes and professional choices, achieving a fulfilling desired life.

Informed Decision making: is one of the approaches of ECLD which promotes mindful career choices, navigating the individuals to select and choose the most promising and contributing career aspirations to achieve the self-fulfillment as well the societal acceptance. By selecting purposeful personal and professional endeavors, it motivates individuals to attain financial rewards.

7 Practical Implications

Entrepreneurial Career and Life Design is a multifunctional concept with a workable model sequencing from the education, career choices strategy leading to the professional and personal success. ECLD domains offers distinctive perks from integrating the flexibility, adaptability and innovative thought process fostering career and entrepreneurial mindset to meet the evolving demands of life expectations.

7.1 Curriculum Design

The introduction of ECLD principles to the curriculum of the educational programs fosters the revolutionary change in the learner's preparedness to the future challenges. Instead of concentrating exclusively on knowledge acquisition and following a traditional career choice, the curriculum based on the ECLD principles will inculcate an entrepreneurial driven thought process. This in turn will encourage the learners to focus on creative thinking and identify the opportunities and cultivate grit to overcome the uncertainties in the career as well as in the personal life. With ECLD the educational learning is designed to be experiential in nature to welcome the adversities. ECLD based learning framework involves immersive project learning, simulation and real-world problem solving. This results in the learners shaping their life to own the personal and professional success beating all the odds.

7.2 Career Coaching

ECLD provides a comprehensive model for the career coaching, to navigate the individuals through the journey of self-designed career pathways. The coaches using ECLD in their training applies the principles to support their learner clients to identify their core values, beliefs and strengths in alignment with the career choices to lead a meaningful life in the ever-evolving job and career market. The ECLD framework helps the learners to shift from the static traditional mindset to an experiential mindset, focusing on life-long learning. Individuals are trained to view careers as projects, where glitches are handled with grace and setbacks are treated as opportunities to explore new opportunities through prototype and iteration.

7.3 Organizational Development

ECLD encourages organizational strategies focused on fostering employees to adapt design thinking in their roles at the workplace. Organizations that facilitate the application of ECLD as the culture of the organization learn continuously and evolve into an innovative, self-directed organization. Employees self-initiate new tasks by identifying the opportunities within the organization and accept new challenges to align organizational growth with their own career advancement. This leads to the creation of a talented, agile workforce contributing to the success of the organization. Furthermore, the transition can reap the fruits of engaged employees with reduced turnover and a ready force for the leadership roles within the organization.

7.4 Personal Development

The basic agenda of the ECLD is to empower individuals to focus on the life themes while building a career. The ECLD model fosters self-awareness, helping individuals to identify their life themes and align them to their career choices with an entrepreneurial mindset to design and iterate to lead a satisfying life. With an entrepreneurial mindset the individuals can make better decisions to identify the opportunities and construct a better career and own a purposeful life.

8 Challenges and Solutions

In contemporary labour markets, individuals face not only uncertainty and non-linearity in career paths, but also volatile employability conditions and shifting personal-life priorities, which together complicate long-term career planning. Traditional career models often assume stable progression, but such stability is increasingly rare; employees must therefore develop adaptability to manage career transitions, job insecurity, and changing work demands. To respond to this, proactive practices such as career crafting, individuals design their career path to be associated with enhanced perceived employability and career success (Diaa, Abidin & Roller, 2024). At the same time, the pressure to integrate work with personal life, especially in an age of pervasive digital connectivity and blurred boundaries that can lead to work-life conflict, stress, and decreased well-being. Research demonstrates that job crafting and life-domain balance crafting (i.e., proactively shaping boundaries and roles across work and non-work life) significantly improve overall life satisfaction by increasing work-nonwork facilitation and reducing work-nonwork conflict (Shi et al., 2022). The challenge of maintaining career meaning, motivation, and well-being across life transitions and changing contexts can be addressed through continuous learning, self-regulated adaptation, and iterative career-life redesign. Empirical studies of career crafting report positive effects on employee well-being over time (Kaltiainen et al., 2025).

In sum, modern challenges such as uncertain employment landscapes, work–life integration pressures, and evolving life priorities require flexible, proactive, and value-oriented responses. Solution strategies rooted in career crafting, lifelong learning, and iterative self-authored design as directed by ECLD.

9 Conclusion

Entrepreneurial Career and Life Design (ECLD) is a progressive framework that reiterates and imagines a world of innovation and flexibility to achieve the professional and personal goals without a compromise on the life themes and values. ECLD is a perfect combination of entrepreneurship, career construction, Psychology and design thinking offering a holistic development for a successful life.

ECLD is highly favored and has found its place across all the domains of life, its presence is found and appreciated in all the segments of life from education, career to society. The beauty of ECLD is its involvement in education right at the start offers new opportunities for the research-based inquiry, and ensures the far accessible societal benefits. ECLD is positioned to reframe the curriculum frameworks of education to include the flexibility, creativity and innovation as its core in the individual learning curve. The traditional educational system is highly focused on the linear learning leading to long-term static career progression, whereas ECLD favors a dynamic experiential learning to beat the complex challenges of modern life and career. With this focus ECLD provides a foundation to build individuals culminating to society that is a better place to live in which meets the demands of career development with an entrepreneurial mindset.

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