

The World of Work and Career Interventions

Work in the 21st century leaves people feeling anxious and insecure. Societal changes affecting employment continue to set an increasing number of workers adrift as they endeavor to chart their futures, shape their identities, and maintain relationships. During the first decade of the 21st century, Western societies experienced a break with previous forms of jobs and occupations. Rapid advances in information technology and opening of world markets produced a globalization that is reshaping forms of employment and transforming ways of living. Furthermore, emerging technologies and robotics place 47% of total United States employees at high risk of having their jobs automated within 20 years (Frey & Osborne, 2017). Previously, the stable employment and secure organizations of the 20th century offered a solid foundation on which to build a life. Such stability and security have now given way to a liquid life

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Career Counseling, Second Edition, by M. L. Savickas

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(Bauman, 2013) of new beginnings in which people cannot solidify their positions or chart a course into the future. The new social arrangement of flexible work and fluid organizations in liquid societies continues to distress many people.

THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

The digital revolution requires that organizations become smaller, smarter, and swifter in responding to market conditions. This has been accomplished by reducing layers of decision making and removing barriers between functional units to produce what Jack Welch (1992), then president of General Electric, called a “boundaryless” organization. Changing the shape of organizations changes the shape of careers. The employee in a postmodern, 21st-century organization becomes unbounded and ungrounded. Now organizations mix standard jobs with nonstandard assignments. Using temporary assignments rather than permanent jobs creates “jobless” work. This “dejobbing” shapes work to begin as a project and end with a product. A prime example of work as a project is producing a motion picture. For that project, the producers assemble a large team of specialists with diverse skills to work for a set period of time to make a movie. When the movie wraps, the team disassembles, with each member seeking employment on a new project.

Although full-time employment remains a dominant form of work and long-term careers still exist, temporary and part-time employment are increasingly commonplace following the flattening of organizational hierarchies. In addition, of the standard jobs started by workers between the ages of 18 and 24, 69% ended in less than a year and 93% ended in fewer than 5 years. This was true not only for emerging adults but also for those adults who in previous times had stabilized in jobs and families. Of jobs started by 40- to 48-year-olds, 32% ended in less than a year and 69% ended in fewer than 5 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Do note that careers bounded by bureaucratic organizations still exist for many people. Nevertheless, we have entered the age of insecure workers who are no longer bounded by a single organization nor grounded in the same

job for 3 decades. The new employment market includes a “gig economy” that calls for viewing career not as a lifetime commitment to one employer but as selling services and skills to a series of employers who need projects completed.

INSECURE WORKERS

Jobless work and automation have produced “insecure workers,” especially those peripheral and external employees who perform temporary assignments (Wilkinson & Johnstone, 2016). Full-time company employees with permanent contracts are designated core employees. In contrast to core employees who compose about half of the workforce, peripheral and external workers perform short-term projects rather than long-term jobs. Part-time company employees with flexible work arrangements are termed *peripheral employees* and compose about 40% of the workforce. And employees who do not work directly for a company but rather for an outside contractor or consultant are termed *external workers*. Peripheral and external workers have also been called *temporary*, *contingent*, *casual*, *contract*, *freelance*, *part-time*, *atypical*, *adjunct*, *consultant*, and *self-employed*. Peripheral and external employment do not provide the benefits of a traditional, standard job enjoyed by core workers. For all three types of insecure workers, matters once taken for granted such as job security, health insurance, and pensions have become problematic. Furthermore, multiple career transitions and periodic geographic dislocation pose new questions about work lives—most especially, how may individuals negotiate a lifetime of job changes without losing their social identity and sense of self? The 20th century metanarrative of an organizational career no longer answers this question.

CAREERS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Twentieth-century organizations provided a metanarrative for the life course, a career story with coherence and continuity. The metanarrative clearly outlined trajectories with stable commitments around which

individuals planned their lives. The 21st-century organizational narrative about career is ambiguous and discontinuous, so individuals cannot make life plans around institutional commitments (Kalleberg, 2013). Their compass for action must point to possibilities in a liquid society with fluid boundaries rather than predictions in a stable society with solid boundaries. Because boundaryless organizations provide individuals with so little career structure, individuals now must take more responsibility for managing their own work lives. Rather than living a narrative conferred by a corporation, people must author their own career stories.

This loss of stable structures and predictable trajectories has led to the “individualization of the life course” (Beck, 2002). The individualism of postmodern life emerged because the work role no longer serves as the axis around which other roles revolve. Nonstandard work produces nonstandard lives. Individuals cannot securely identify their place in the world with the work they perform. Individualization of the life course calls for individuals to navigate transitions by using what has been referred to as *biographicity* (Illeris, 2017), which is the self-referential process by which individuals integrate new and sometimes puzzling experiences into their biographies. This *identity work* involves narrative construction and revision to cope with the uncertainties provoked by life tasks, transitions, and traumas. Identity work includes the interpretative activities of “forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening and revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165).

Protean and *boundaryless* are two metaphors that symbolize the new career, one now authored by the person rather than the organization. Realizing that the individual rather than the institution shapes a 21st-century career, Douglas Hall in 1996 formulated the concept of a protean career as flexible, versatile, and adaptive. Hall defined a protean career as self-directed and shaped by intrinsic rather than extrinsic values. In the pursuit of self-directed values, the individual uses the two metacompetencies of identity and adaptability to chart a course through the work terrain; together, the metacompetencies give individuals a sense of when it is time to change and the capacity to change (Hall, Yip, & Doiron, 2018). Hall’s conceptualization of the protean career, which concentrates

on inner psychological variables, finds a complement in Arthur's (2014) conceptualization in 1994 of a boundaryless career. Rather than stability tied to one firm, an unbounded career consists of a sequence of positions characterized by physical and psychological mobility across organizations. Individuals with greater career competencies, including identity and adaptability, may find more opportunities for mobility.

It is increasingly difficult to comprehend careers with theories based on stability rather than mobility. While the form of career changes from commitment to flexibility, so too must the conceptual models of careers and work lives. Existing career theories do not adequately account for the individualization of the life course in the rapidly changing occupational structure, nor do they address the needs of peripheral and external workers. Even for core workers, there are fewer identifiable and predictable career trajectories because many organizations have dissolved established paths and traditional scripts. Rather than developing a stable life based on secure employment, most workers today must maintain flexible employability through lifelong learning or, as some say, "learn for a living." Rather than developing a career by making plans that plant them in a solid context, they must manage a career by noticing possibilities in a liquid environment. New conceptual models of vocational behavior across the lifespan must be accompanied by career counseling methods that help individuals construct and use their life stories to order their careers and give meaning to their choices. Theories of career and techniques of career counseling must evolve, as they always have, to better assist workers throughout the world adapt to liquid societies, gig economies, and flexible organizations. The present book describes methods of career construction counseling based on the conceptual model of life designing. Before beginning to examine career construction counseling in detail, the following section defines counseling and how career counseling has evolved over the last century.

CAREER THEORY AND COUNSELING DISCOURSE

Career theory as a conceptual model differs from career counseling discourse as practice methods (Savickas & Savickas, 2017). The *APA Dictionary of Psychology, Second Edition*, defines *theory* as "a principle or body

of interrelated principles that purports to explain or predict a number of interrelated phenomena” (VandenBos, 2015, p. 1081). In vocational psychology, a career theory is a set of principles used to explain vocational behavior and its development. For the present book, the three most pertinent theories are Holland’s (1997) person–environment theory, Super’s (1957) career development theory, and Savickas’s (2013) career construction theory.

Practitioners have applied these career theories to specify the goals of career counseling along with models, methods, and materials to accomplish these goals. While some would refer to these conceptual models and techniques as career counseling theories, others prefer to refer to them as discourses. Career counseling models are better called discourses rather than theories because the models focus on practice-based knowledge and observable outcomes not measurement, prediction, and experimentation. Thus, career counseling models are disciplinary discourses that provide language and definitions for writing and speaking about career practices, paradigms for thinking about client concerns, and methods for helping clients resolve their concerns. Different discourses understand careers from distinct perspectives or philosophies; such as logical positivism for person–environment fit, humanism for career development, and social constructionism for career construction. What the conceptual models share in common is that each one prescribes particular counseling methods.

The American Counseling Association defined *counseling* as “a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals” (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014, p. 368). The Association encouraged particular specialties to elaborate this basic framework by adding a statement about their area of focus. From my perspective, this elaboration would simply adopt Super’s (1951) definition of *career counseling* as

the process of helping a person to develop and accept an integrated and adequate picture of himself [or herself] and of his [or her] role in world of work, to test this concept against reality, and to convert it into reality, with satisfaction to himself [or herself] and benefit to society. (p. 92)

Today, career practitioners may use the three different philosophical perspectives of positivism, humanism, and constructionism to substantiate counseling discourses and structure patterns of practice as well as to continue to develop these discourses through a process of evolution.

EVOLUTION OF CAREER COUNSELING

During the last 100 years, the counseling profession has evolved three distinct conceptual models to direct how they conduct career counseling: guiding, developing, and constructing (Savickas, 2015). These three paradigms both define career counseling as a scientific discipline and structure patterns of practice that address predominant career problems during a particular time period (Kuhn, 1996). Early in the 20th century, the first scientific model for career intervention emerged to address a question asked by Western societies as they coped with industrialization, urbanization, and immigration: How may workers be efficiently matched to fitting work? The answer to this question came in Parsons's use of the *individual-differences paradigm* (Hollingsworth, 1916) to match a person's abilities and interests to an occupation's requirements and rewards. In first stating the matching method, Parsons (1909) outlined three steps (a) study and understand the self, (b) get information about occupations and opportunities, and (c) reason correctly about the relations of these two groups of facts. During the next 5 decades, the individual differences model and Parsons's matching method defined the field of counseling. After World War II, practitioners elaborated Parsons's method for matching people to positions into the trait-and-factor method (Guilford, 1948) and eventually the person–environment fit method (Holland, 1997). Practitioners apply the individual difference model when they use the methods of vocational guidance to help clients (a) enhance self-knowledge, (b) increase occupational information, and (c) match themselves to fitting occupations. A more recent application of the matching model has emerged in higher education as student personnel workers expanded the scope of traditional academic advising to guide students through the educational and vocational decision-making process. Gordon (2006) defined *career advising* as a process that “helps students understand how their personal

interests, abilities, and values might predict success in the academic and career fields they are considering and how to form their academic and career goals accordingly” (p. 12).

Following World War II, the United States experienced the rise of suburban, middle-class individuals employed by hierarchical bureaucracies located in vertical skyscrapers. Consequently, in the middle of the 20th century a theory of vocational development emerged to address the question of how to climb career ladders in hierarchical professions and bureaucratic organizations. To complement the matching model’s focus on the *content* of career choices Super (1957) applied the *life-cycle paradigm* (Bühler, 1933) to psychosocial education about the *process* of coping with a progressive sequence of career stages and developmental tasks. Super’s counseling method concentrates on helping clients to choose and adjust to occupations, not on which occupational choices to make. Practitioners apply the life-cycle model when they use the methods of career development education to help students and career coaching to help adults (a) envision the future to plan ahead; (b) learn about imminent developmental tasks; and (c) rehearse the attitudes, beliefs, and competencies needed to master those tasks. The counseling methods of vocational guidance and career education remain useful today when considering how to match workers to occupations and how to develop careers within bureaucratic organizations.

As corporations changed shape at the dawn of the 21st century, the nexus of career moved from the organization to the individual. Rather than *develop* a career within a stable organization, the digital revolution requires that individuals *manage* their own careers. This shift in responsibility from the organization to the individual posed the new question of how individuals may negotiate a lifetime of job changes. The *life-design paradigm* (Savickas et al., 2009) emerged as one answer to this question about individualization of the life-course. It moved career counseling to a new vantage point from which to view how insecure workers with precarious employment design their lives. The conceptual model of life designing concentrates on how individuals bridge transitions through autobiographical reasoning to further self-making, identity shaping, and career constructing (Savickas, 2012). Practitioners apply the life-design

conceptual model when they use the method of career construction dialogues to prompt clients to (a) construct careers through small stories, (b) deconstruct and reconstruct these stories into an identity narrative or life portrait, and (c) coconstruct intentions that extend that portrait to the next action episode in the real world.

The paradigms of individual differences, life cycle, and life design each structure a distinct pattern of practice: Vocational guidance matches to an occupation, psychosocial education with students and coaching with adults develops a career, and constructing designs a life. To succinctly explain the three counseling methods of guiding, developing, and constructing, Figure 1.1 outlines each fundamental pattern. Vocational guidance, from the objective perspective of individual differences, views

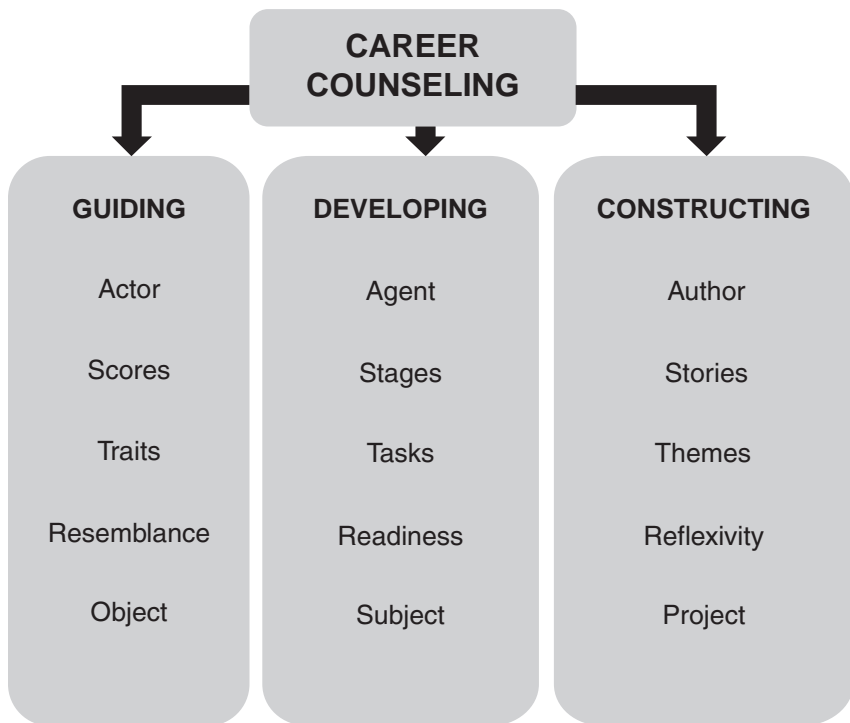


Figure 1.1

Comparison of counseling methods for guiding, developing, and constructing.

clients as actors who may be characterized by scores on traits and who may be helped to match themselves to occupations that employ people whom they resemble. Career education and coaching, from the subjective perspective of individual development, views clients as agents who may be characterized by their life stage and readiness to engage appropriate developmental tasks and who may be helped to learn new attitudes, beliefs, and competencies that advance their careers. Career constructing, from the project perspective of life design, views clients as authors who may be characterized by autobiographical stories and who may be helped to reflect on life themes with which to script their career transitions. The three distinctions in Figure 1.1 are explained more fully in book chapters: McAdams and Olson (2010) differentiated actor, agent, and author; Savickas (2015) differentiated traits, tasks, and themes; and Savickas (2011) differentiated object, subject, and project.

Depending upon a client's needs, practitioners may provide different career services: vocational guidance to identify occupational fit, career education and coaching to foster vocational development, or career construction to design a work life. Each career intervention—whether it be guiding, developing, or constructing—is valuable and effective for its intended purpose. As practitioners select an intervention for a particular situation, they answer anew the essential question first posed by Williamson and Bordin (1941, p. 8): What method will produce what types of results with what types of clients? The current book is about career construction. The remainder of this chapter explains why career construction counseling discourse meets the needs of individuals preparing for and participating in the new world of work forged by the digital revolution and the global economy.

A NEW PARADIGM

New theory cannot be just an addition to or extension of the old ideas. New theories and counseling discourses must emerge from a new philosophy or world view. The philosophy of positivism, replacing 19th-century romanticism, provided a new perspective from which the individual-differences paradigm emerged. Following World War II, the philosophy of humanism

led to the life-cycle paradigm, which supplemented rather than replaced the differences paradigm. The societal reorganization beginning late in the 20th century was accompanied by a philosophy of social constructionism that provided a different perspective from which to envision careers and elaborate new premises. For example, the humanistic idea of actualizing an essential self that already exists within a person served career counseling well during the second half of the 20th century. However, for careers in the 21st century, that idea may be replaced with the postmodern idea that an essential self does not exist *a priori*; instead, constructing a self is an unfolding life project. This view considers self to be a story, not a substance defined by a list of traits. Needless to say, self-actualization and self-construction offer fundamentally different perspectives on and prospects for counseling methods.

Accordingly, career construction theory (Savickas, 2013), as a theory or conceptual model, concentrates on the self as a social actor, motivated agent, and autobiographical author. The theory concentrates on self-construction through work and relationships. Well-being in knowledge societies requires that individuals take possession of their lives by connecting who they are to what they do. The conceptual model is accompanied by a counseling discourse that concentrates on identity and adaptability relative to vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas. Career construction counseling discourse responds to the needs of today's mobile workers who may feel anxious and angry as they encounter a restructuring of occupations, transformation of the labor force, and multicultural imperatives. In an uncertain world, accumulating skills and developing talents remains important, yet there is no substitute for a grounded sense of self. To provide counseling to individuals that moves from fitting life into one's work to fitting work into one's life requires constructionist interventions that deal with designing a life and deciding how the work role serves that life. The new question is not what do you want to be but rather how do you want to be?

To be clear, the ideas in this book emerge from a constructionist narrative psychology, not from Holland's (1997) positivist differential psychology nor from Super's (1990) humanistic developmental psychology.

The foundational theories of vocational behavior articulated by Holland and Super are neither true nor false; they substantiate a set of practices crafted to organize the work of vocational guidance and career development education. Because of their proven effectiveness, these theories and their counseling methods remain essential in certain contexts and for particular goals. However, these established theories of vocational behavior cannot be readily stretched to provide new counseling methods that meet the needs of mobile workers in the flexible organizations of fluid societies.

OVERVIEW

Before presenting the constructionist career counseling discourse, Chapter 2 examines the core concepts of self, identity, meaning, mastery, and mattering. Chapter 3 explains how practitioners use narrative psychology to help clients revise their career stories to increase comprehension, coherence, and continuity. Chapter 4 describes the framework and elements of the Career Construction Interview during which practitioners ask story-crafting questions, which scaffold career construction. The next three chapters discuss systematic assessment of the data elicited during a Career Construction Interview. Chapter 5 presents the assessment goals that concentrate on extracting client preoccupations and problems from the early recollections that sustain them. Chapter 6 describes how to identify client solutions to the problems they pose in their early recollections. Chapter 7 discusses how to use career themes or central tensions to extend clients' occupational plots by identifying fitting settings, possible scripts, and future scenarios. Having completed discussion of the career construction assessment protocol, the final two chapters concentrate on using the assessment results in career construction counseling. The penultimate chapter describes how practitioners compose an identity narrative that reconstructs clients' small stories into a large story that encourages reflexivity to clarify choices. The final chapter explains the importance of turning intention to action in the real world, first through exploration and trial, then through deciding and doing. The chapter concludes with the case of Raymond to illustrate career construction counseling. A glossary defines specialized words used in the text.