

NICEC

**CAREERS EDUCATION
AND GUIDANCE**

Bulletin

NUMBER 42

SUMMER 1994

FRACTURE LINES IN CAREER COUNSELLING

Career counselling aims to foster the vocational development of clients. Richards (1881) and Parsons (1909) originally conceived of vocational guidance as matching people to positions. Following the rise to prominence of large organisations during the twentieth century, the vocational ethic, held by many workers, changed into a career ethic. This hierarchical view of life permeated the middle-class conception of career as climbing the corporate ladder, and led to the pathology of careerism. To correspond to the career ethic, which is so vital to bureaucratic form of modern organisations, vocational guidance revised itself into career counselling.

As we approach the new millennium, the companies that people build careers around are downsizing or disappearing. The global economy and the development of information technologies have transformed us from an industrial to a post-industrial society. People can no longer count on stable companies to provide life-long employment and a clear career path of advancing positions from initial employment through to retirement.

There is even the question of whether the concept of career has a future.

The "fracture lines" that seem to be changing and transforming the concept of career include:

- workers ill-prepared to fill high-skill, team-oriented jobs
- low wage, service economy
- multicultural movement and affirmation of diversity
- feminist scholarship
- postmodern culture
- post-industrial workers
- crises facing the family as a social institution
- the apprenticeship movement.

As the modern career ethic fractures, it may be replaced by a post-modern work ethic rooted in a new perspective on the work role. The work role may emphasise connectedness and social contribution, contrasting with vocational, career, and work ethics.

Occupational Ethics Across Three Eras

	TRADITIONAL VOCATIONAL	MODERN CAREER	POSTMODERN WORK
EMPLOYMENT	self-employed farmers and crafts people	employees in organisation	team workers
PHILOSOPHY	romantic conceptualism	logical positivism	post-modern interpretivism
KNOWLEDGE	meaning in the person	meaning in the world	meaning in the word
VALUE	value feelings	value facts	value perspectives

GOAL	be creative	be rational	be in community
PATH	success through self-expression and individual effort	success through climbing someone's else's ladder	success through cooperation and contribution

Correspondingly, career psychology is being challenged to reform itself into an interpretive discipline. Currently, career psychology looks for ideas on adapting itself to the 21st century in four central tenets of post-modern philosophy of science:

- **Perspectivity** in seeking strong objectivity by stating for whom and by whom knowledge is produced
- **Particularity** in emphasising useful practices for particular circumstances
- **Context** in privileging the individual's embeddedness in, and affordances from, context
- **Constructs** in problematising central concepts and definitions.

Career - A Transition or The End?

Adherence to these tenets would drastically change career theory. Consequently, career theory is at a crossroads. On the one hand, career theory has lately been observed to have converged in several key ways and could proceed to become a unified science, as the rest of psychology seeks to do (Staats, 1991). Osipow (1990) has identified specific ways in which career theories have converged, and his view - resonated in the work of theorists such as Super (1992) and Krumboltz and Nichols (1990) - has been well received by commentators such as Borgen (1991). A recent conference on convergence in theory produced many useful ideas for continuing to advance the modernist project of studying career development (Savickas and Lent, in press).

On the other hand, some individuals question whether the concept of career has a future. As large organisations that support careers disappear, a career path in a single organisation will be rarer. Placed in context, career is a life structure that emerged in tandem with the bureaucratic form of large organisations. Concepts in the mainstream of career originated with and still best fit middle-class men. The last two decades have seen theorists stretch the concept of career to comprehend work in the lives of middle-class women. And, to some degree, the concept of career accommodates their experiences. Yet the concept falters when applied to dual-career couples, balancing work and family roles, and embracing a cooperative ethic. When trying to stretch the concept beyond the Eurocentric middle-class, it becomes even less useful. The very notion of a subjective career among underprivileged groups seems trivial, if not meaningless. It is not that they do not work; they just do not have the moving perspective - on vocational past, present, and future - that uses occupation to articulate an integrative theme and enact a life project.

What Now?

If the concept of career is so tightly linked to twentieth-century modern society, what could replace it in a vocational theory for the post-modern era? Two tentative answers have emerged. The first comes from the modernist position,

broadening the definition and contextualising it. The second answer comes from the post-modern standpoint, attempting to constrict the definition and mapping a new context for it.

A "Modern" Broadening of Career

Super, who led vocational psychology to concentrate on career (Super, 1953), now provides the broadening answer:

"Societies, like careers, develop" ...so ... "what else can one do but accept, adapt, and contribute to change in the hope of making the future better?" (Super, 1992)

He adapts the concept of career for post-modern vocational psychology by broadening the definition of career to encompass nine life-career roles, not just occupational activities. This allowed him to ask: how salient is the work role in the rainbow of life roles? If the work role is not salient for an individual or group, then the concept of career and its operational measures of career maturity do not pertain in the same way. In addition to prominence given to the new construct of the role salience, this contextualisation of the work role allowed him to revise his notion of maturity. Before his retirement, Super spent much time elaborating the new construct of career adaptability. Super's writings provide a clear vision of how to give the concept of career a future in post-modern times, namely by redefining and placing it among other major life roles.

A Post-Modern Construction

An alternative answer refuses to shore up the concept. Instead, Richardson (1993) demotes the concept of career to a peripheral position in theorising about work in people's lives. Focusing on work activities, rather than occupational roles, emphasising "the multiple contexts of any one individual's life". Richardson argued that vocational psychology has to take this new direction. This is because expanding the "conceptual umbrella of career", as Super does, still equates work with an occupational role. She warns that ignoring work performed outside the occupational structure (e.g. work in the home and volunteer work in the community) perpetuates a bias that privileges the occupational structure and devalues other work domains or environments.

Ways Forward?

Regardless of the reader's preference for the two positions (Savickas, 1994; Tinsley, 1994), clearly the concept of career is a problem in a discourse that has demythologised, delegitimated, and deconstructed it. If we are to inscribe a new meaning for a construct of career, then career theorising will need to be informed by the wisdom provided in both Super's modernist re-vision and Richardson's post-modernist redirection.

As the modern concept of career fractures, career counsellors engage in developing new counselling techniques rooted in biography, hermeneutics, and constructivism. Working with the narrative paradigm, psychologists (Cochran, 1991; Savickas, 1989) are designing new counselling methods that authorise clients to act as agents in writing their career stories. This approach shares with the novel, as a literary form, the claim to truth through the particularisation of experience (Cascardi, 1992). While narrative psychologists emphasise meaning making and life themes, other postmodern psychologists are developing counselling models that emphasise context (Vondracek, Lerner and Schulenberg, 1986). This is because they view career development as a social process (Young, Valach, Dillabough, Dover and Mattes, in press). For example, Young and Collin

(1988, 1992) view career development as an action system that achieves social meaning through an interaction between individual intention and social context. A third post-modern model for career counselling follows constructivist psychology. Neimeyer (1992) and his colleagues are developing counselling methods that focus on how clients construe their actual vocational experiences. They seek to resolve client problems by reconstructing meaning through countering assumptions, breaking dichotomies, and challenging generalisations.

Although the effort has begun, vocational psychologists must continue to innovate career assessment and elaborate new models for career counselling to position themselves as cultural workers in the post-modern era.

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