A General Model for Career Counseling

Mark L. Savickas

Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine

Rootstown, OH 44272

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As the form of work changes from stability to mobility to reflect the labor needs of post-traditional societies, so too must the form of career intervention change. The paradigms of vocational guidance and career education now must be supplemented with a new paradigm that fully addresses the life designing needs of workers in information societies that have de-standardized the life course (Duarte, 2009). The loss of stable structures and predictable trajectories decouples people from modernity's grand narrative about the life course and expectations about its pattern and structure. The "individualization of the life course" (Beck, 2002) calls for a science of intervention that deals with constructing a self and designing a career. With the shift in responsibility for career from institutions to individuals, people must "get a life" (Habermas & Bluck, 2000) and bridge transitions in that life by using what has been referred to as biographicity (Alheit, 1995) and identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

Autobiographical reasoning and identity work involve the reflexive activities of forming, maintaining, and revising identity narratives characterized by distinctiveness, coherence, and continuity. These narrative processes produce the identity capital of knowing and liking one's life story. Individuals may then invest their identity capital and their stories to cope with the uncertainties prompted by occupational transitions and work traumas. As workers move from one assignment to the next assignment, they must let go of what they did yet not who they are. If they let go of everything, then the loss may overwhelm them. By holding onto the self in the form of a life story that provides coherence and continuity, they are able to pursue their purpose and projects with integrity and vitality.

A New Paradigm

Practitioners and researchers now are formulating new constructs to help clients negotiate a life-time of job changes without losing a sense of self and social identity (Guichard, 2005). To better assist clients in designing their lives for the 21st century, many career counselors now concentrate on identity rather than personality, adaptability rather than maturity, intentionality rather than decidedness, and stories rather than scores. The constructs of identity, adaptability, intentionality, and narratability contribute to the formulation of a new model for comprehending vocational behavior, namely career construction theory (Savickas 2005a). This psychological theory of vocational behavior follows from an epistemological position called life-designing, which concentrates on contextual possibilities, dynamic processes, non-linear progression, multiple perspectives, and personal patterns (Savickas et al., 2009). Relative to career, this constructionist perspective highlights flexibility, employability, commitment, emotional intelligence, and life-long learning. This paper present a new paradigm for career intervention, one that complements the psychology of career construction (Savickas, 2005a) and the epistemology of life designing (Savickas et al., 2009). This conceptual model for career counseling is not just an addition to or extension of the old ideas. It represents a fundamental re-ordering of career intervention theory that

envisions career counseling from a different perspective and elaborates it from new premises about self and identity.

Life Design: A Paradigm for Career Counseling

Life-design represents a new paradigm for career intervention. Kuhn (1996) described a paradigm as a set of practices that define a scientific discipline at any particular period of time. A paradigm is a conceptual model that is widely-accepted in a practice community, and usually is the prevailing view of best practices. For career intervention, paradigm means the general pattern of practice, which includes many specific examples. Within a paradigm of practice, specific instantiations do not follow a rigid pattern; rather each realization of the general conceptual model shows a flexible and creative application of the abstract template.

The paradigm for vocational guidance is to (a) enhance self-knowledge, (b) increase occupational information, and (c) match self to occupation. Specific substantiations of this conceptual model include the person-environment fit approach advocated by Holland (1997) and Lofquist and Dawis (1991). The paradigm for career education is to (a) assess development status, (b) orient the individual to imminent developmental tasks, and (c) develop the attitudes and competencies needed to master those tasks. Specific examples of this conceptual model and its emphasis on learning can be found in instances known as career development and assessment counseling (Super, 1983; Niles, 2001), integrative life planning (Hansen, 1997), the social-cognitive framework for career choice and counseling (Brown & Lent, 1996), and the learning theory of career counseling (Krumboltz, 1996).

From my perspective, an implicit paradigm for career intervention has emerged to meet the self-construction and career design needs of 21st century clients. The present article seeks to make that paradigm explicit by abstracting several specific instances of constructionist and narrative interventions into the language of a new paradigm. To do so, I first gathered the instantiations that I could identify. The examples that invoke the general conceptual model include career-style assessment and counseling (Savickas, 1989), narrative career counseling (Cochran, 1997), constructivist career counseling (Peavy, 1997), career construction through goal-directed action (Young & Valach, 2004), *My System of Career Influences* (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005), *My Career Chapter* (McIlveen, 2007), *Discovery of Occupational Activities and Personal Plans* (Guichard, 2008), metaphor making (Amundson, 2010), and the chaos theory of career counseling (Pryor & Bright, 2011). Each of these specific instances of the life-design paradigm share the same goal—to prompt meaningful activities that further self-making, identity shaping, and career constructing (Savickas, 2010). Each method uses autobiographical stories to lead clients through their ambiguity by creating scenarios that link future initiatives to past achievements. In due course, each client authors a biographical bridge that expresses their personal truths and authorizes an identity that transports them into the future. The paradigm for life design structures interventions to (a) construct career through small stories, (b) deconstruct these stories and reconstruct them into

an identity narrative or life portrait, and (c)) co-construct intentions that lead to the next action episode in the real world. Let us consider each element in turn, starting with construction of a career story.

Construction

When individuals are dislocated from their current stories, they begin narrative processing of their biographies (Heinz, 2002). Some individuals seek counseling to assist them in this identity work. With these clients, life-design interventions begin by having them describe both (a) the incident that dislocates them from the current episode in their story and (b) their goals for a new scenario that they want to co-construct with a counselor. Then counselors ask clients to narrate micro-narratives, or tell small stories, that demonstrate how they have constructed their self, identity, and career. Life-design intervention focuses on narration because stories are construction tools for building identities and careers out of complex social interactions. Storytelling makes the self and crystallizes what clients think of themselves. The more stories they tell, the more they develop their identities and careers. Individuals compose stories to organize events in their lives into a sequence. Each educational and vocational position that they have occupied may be viewed as a short story in the novel of career. In career construction theory, the sequence of positions in a resumé presents the story that we generally think of as an objective career.

Deconstruction

In some cases, client stories include dominating expectations or insidious ideas that suppress more life-enhancing alternatives. Counselors must always think carefully about how a client's stories might be deconstructed to reveal self-limiting ideas, confining roles, and cultural barriers. In particular, they must be sensitive to axioms of meaning and ideological biases regarding gender, race, and social status. When stories require deconstruction, counselors may discuss with clients what a story assumes, overlooks, omits, forgets, or inadequately addresses. Deconstruction seeks to undo a story's uncritical domination over the client's thinking, not destroy the story. The goal is to access different meanings and new knowledge that open up possibilities and restart stalled initiatives. Having listened closely to how a client constructs her or his career story, and maybe deconstructing some of its ideas and incidents, it comes time to reconstruct the small stories into a large story.

Reconstruction

Narrative processing of identity constructions gathers micro-narratives about important incidents, recurrent episodes, significant figures, self-defining moments, and life-changing experiences. In working with the micro-narratives, the counselor actively gathers the story threads and weaves them together into one tapestry to craft a unified sense of individuality. Integration of small stories about the self in social situations constructs a large story or macro-narrative, that is, an identity narrative. The macro-narrative reconstructs experiences to make sense and to sediment values, attitudes, and habits into a grand story about the life. The person becomes a character in a world that she or he has constructed. Thus, the identity narrative confers a life story on the self as a social being. It bestows personal meaning and social mattering on a life as it tells about pattern and progress.

The macro-narrative of identity explains clients' past, orients them to the present, and guides them into the future. To do this, the identity narrative highlights the occupational plot and career theme in the sequence of small stories. Plots structure the sequence of episodes into a coherent whole, raising some facts to prominence while ignoring others. E. M. Forster (1927) explained that a story tells what happened while a plot tells why it happened. Forster exemplified this difference between story and plot as follows. "The King died, and then the Queen died" is a story because it has a sequence. In comparison, "The King died, and then the Queen died of grief" is a plot because it adds causality.

Having elicited several micro-narratives or small stories from a client, the counselor must eventually emplot them (Ricouer, 1984). This means to place the micro-narratives about what happened into the context of a macro-narrative, or large story, about why it happened. Emplotting the sequence of episodes into a larger story adds explanatory links and causal coherence to the experiences that may otherwise still feel random. So in life-design, reconstruction means to configure and integrate agent, goals, means, and interactions to form a unified and meaningful identity narrative or life portrait. Thus, emplotment reconstructs a subjective career from client constructions of their work life. The explicit *occupational plot* tells about the client's journey to reach certain goals and elaborate the self in social context. The explicit plot tells of the outer journey and why it happened. It is augmented by a career theme about what it all means. This *inner journey* traces an emotional odyssey shaped by a central conflict with its associated needs and longing. The implicit theme adds meaning and purpose to the plot of the macro- narrative.

Although the theme may explain emotional transformations, it is more timeless and abstract than the plot. The career theme provides an unifying idea that, through reoccurrence, makes a life whole. The career theme represents the controlling idea served by the plot. The thematic pattern weaved by this underlying idea provides the primary unit of meaning used to understand the facts of the occupational plot. As individuals incorporate new experiences, they use the implicit theme to digest the plot episodes by imposing the pattern of meaning on them. When individuals face challenges and disruptions, the recurrent pattern in the macro-narrative theme directs, regulates, and sustains their actions.

In addition to the central idea that the life serves, the career theme also carries the character arc, that is, how the person changes over time. The arc portrays where the individual started, is now, and wants to end up on some essential personal issue. The character arc begins with some flaw that propels and moves the individual. Usually, the flaw arises from something missing in life, something that the individual longs for and needs. To overcome this limitation or weakness, they seek to attain some goal that fulfills the need. They wrestle with and try to overcome the fear, limitation, block, or wound. In due course, they overcome the adversity and transcend their flaws as they become something more than they were. In this way, individuals use work to become more whole and complete.

Co-Construction

Having reconstructed an identity narrative from the client's micro-narratives, the counselor then presents to the client a draft of her or his life portrait, including the occupational plot, career theme, and character arc. A first goal in narrating the life portrait to clients is to have them consider the macro-narrative reconstructed by the counselor. Reflecting on the life portrait typically leads to the client editing the identity narrative. This revision involves amendments that correct mistakes, adjustments that come to terms with old conflicts and settle accounts, and alterations that enhance self-esteem and support a more optimistic view of life.

However, revising the macro-narrative involves more than just giving accurate voice to the client's life story. Clients need to modify the portrait to make it more livable and then extend it into the future. That is why they came to counseling. The processes of revisions and elaboration open possibilities for re-arranging story elements. Client and counselor join together to candidly craft a move in meaning with which to confront choices. The co-construction of the life portrait seeks to incorporate the current dislocation in a way that clarifies priorities, mobilizes central tendencies, and increases the possibility of transformation and development. This occurs as clients access different meanings and knowledge that open new possibilities and restart stalled initiatives. With new language, fresh perspectives, and expanded vistas clients may reorganize their meaning system and clarify what is at stake in the next episode of their career story. Then the client is ready to face challenges and disruptions using plot and theme to provide overarching goals, rules, order, certainty, and values. This self-clarity enables clients to make their intentions more apparent to themselves and their counselors. With this new found clarity, clients may envision the next scenes, form intentions, and begin to act.

Action

A good story about the self encourages clients to make career transitions while holding onto a self that is even more vital and intentional. A revised identity narrative enables individuals to meet the uncertainties of transition with comforts recalled from the past. Life-design interventions forge links to the world that lies ahead by promoting intention and action. While scripting the next scene brings client experience forward, activity starts clients living ahead of themselves. And, the necessary action is to turn intentions into behavior infused with meaning (Malrieu, 2003). Action inherently holds meaning from the past while it carries the person into the future. Through action, not verbal expressions of decidedness, clients engage the world (Krieshok, Black, & McKay, 2009). Going further and deeper into the world answers the questions brought to counseling. Action prompts further self-making, identity shaping, and career constructing.

To conclude the consultation, counselors ask clients whether they have accomplished the goals they brought to counseling. Counselors usually end with a few sentences that summarize what has occurred by consolidating the co-constructed story and explaining how it relates to why the client sought counseling. They may use the words tension, attention, intention, and extension to explain to clients the outcome of counseling. The client brought some tension to address in consultation with the counselor. Together client and counselor

paid attention to that tension in the form of career stories. Then they reconstructed the tension into intention. Following counseling, the client seeks some extension of the self in purposeful action that resolves the tension.

Career Construction Counseling

As already stated, the life-design paradigm for career intervention is implicitly present in several specific instances. Some methods emphasize more of the back story, many focus on occupational plot, others highlight the career theme, and still others concentrate on the character arc. Also, the different methods inquire about different stories as they elicit narratives about important incidents, recurrent episodes, significant figures, self-defining moments, or life-changing experiences. Based on the paradigm of life design described in the present article, I have crafted another specific instance of career intervention to explicitly apply the abstract conceptual model. Career construction counseling (Savickas, 2011a) begins with *a Career Construction Interview*, four to six questions about how clients construct their selves and careers. Next, counselors deconstruct these stories and reconstruct them into a life portrait. Then the client and counselor use that portrait to co-construct intentions and actions that begin the next episode in the client's occupational plot. Demonstrations of career construction counseling enable counselors to evaluate the usefulness of this life-design intervention (Savickas, 2005b; Savickas 2009).

Conclusion

Simply stated, the new general model for career intervention involves construction, deconstruction, reconstruction, and co-construction that leads to action in the real world. The paradigm of life design does not replace but rather takes its place alongside the paradigms of vocational guidance and career education. Its place is positioned by five sets of distinctions that differentiate among vocational guidance, career education, and life design: actor, agent, and author (McAdams & Olson (2010); object, subject, and project (Savickas, 2011b); resemblance, readiness, and reflexivity (Savickas, 2011a); scores, stages, and stories (Savickas, 2011a); and traits, tasks, and themes (Savickas (2001). Vocational guidance, from the *objective* perspective of individual differences, views clients as *actors* who may be characterized by *scores* on *traits* and who may be helped to match themselves to occupations that employ people who they *resemble*. Career education, from the *subjective* perspective of individual development, views clients as *agents* who may be characterized by their degree of *readiness* to engage developmental *tasks* appropriate to their life *stages* and who may be helped to implement new attitudes, beliefs, and competencies that further their careers. Life design, from the *project* perspective of social constructionism, views clients as *authors* who may be characterized by autobiographical *stories* and who may be helped to *reflect* on life *themes* with which to construct their careers. Depending upon a client's needs and social context, practitioners may apply career interventions that reflect different paradigms: vocational guidance to identify occupational fit, career education to foster vocational development, or life design to construct a career. Each paradigm for career intervention-- whether it be modernity's guidance, late modernity's education, or post-modernity's design—is valuable and effective for its intended purpose.

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