The Career of Career

Mark L. Savickas

Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine

Rootstown, Ohio 44272-0095

Presented in M. Savickas (Chair)

The Birth and Death of Career: Counseling Psychology's Contribution

Symposium conducted at the meeting of the American Psychological Association

Toronto, Canada

August, 1996

The Career of Career

In this paper, I address two topics. First, I examine the "career of career" or the context in which careers emerged, flourished and have begun to fade. Second, I discuss how career psychology is responding to cultural changes in work.

The Context for Career

Survival and procreation are goals for almost all civilizations. Thus, work and family figure as central concerns as people construct their cultures, or set of shared assumptions and implicit values. By focusing on the evolution of work and family in U.S. history, we can examine America's three great cultural eras and their roots in agrarian, urban, and global economies.

Agrarian Economy

Throughout most of U.S. history, individuals lived in an agricultural economy. For example, during the 1800's, more than half of the U.S. population lived and worked on farms. The agrarian culture molded work and family roles to fit its needs. The dominant social institution was the family-- a large, multigenerational labor unit or production team who worked together in the fields or cottages. The family healed the sick, educated the children, cared for the elderly, and labored to support itself. If there was schooling outside the family, it was conducted in a one-room school house operated by the smartest or most sophisticated person in town, or at least someone who had visited the state capitol. Work, school, and family were intimately intertwined. In short, the family was THE social institution.

In terms of choice of work, individuals typically inherited their occupations from their parents. For example, people born on farms became farmers and children of craftsworkers followed that family tradition.

Occasionally, a family member heard a calling from the church, the court, or the village and left the family to become a minister, lawyer, or businessperson. Thus, the work ethic of the time came to be referred to as a calling or vocation. The secular version of the vocational ethic was called the craft ethic.

Urban Economy

With the advent of U.S. industrial society at the end of the nineteenth century, cultural changes occurred in the institutions of work, school, and family. Jobs were relocated from farms to urban areas. As people moved from farms to these hubs of industry, they formed large metropolitan cities. Rather than working for themselves or a small business, more and more people moved to cities to secure employment in large, bureaucratic organizations. These organizations gave birth to the concept of career as individual worklives followed a predictable course up an organization's ladder. Career path replaced craft and vocation as the dominant metaphor. Because the fundamental form of organizations was hierarchical, career took a horizontal perspective, one that defined career success as individual advancement up the corporate ladder.

Schools became institutions that educated people for the industrial society. School structure imitated the model of the factory. Graded class rooms and specialized teachers replaced the one-room schoolhouse. One system fit all students as teacher, who was expert in a subject matter or type of student, stood in front of thirty students sitting in rows and quietly working on individual tasks. Schools systematically socialized students for assembly-lines and organizational life. We did not need to research school-to-work transitions, they were small changes for which students were well-prepared.

This movement to urban jobs changed family structure, after all when you went to Detroit to make cars you did not take 20 people with you. The industrial economy's need for mobile workers changed multigenerational families on farms into nuclear families in cities. Like assembly line jobs, the functions of the family became specialized. Urban schools educated children, metropolitan hospitals cured the sick, county nursing homes cared for the elderly, and companies provided work. The nuclear family, relieved of its critical work functions, focused almost exclusively on its reproduction functions and emphasized procreation, sex, romance, and companionship. People now married for romantic love, rather than to merge farms. Family size continues to shrink.

Society no longer encouraged people to select a life work by following family traditions or praying for spiritual inspiration. Individuals now had to choose an occupation from the hundreds of specialized and compartmentalized jobs engendered by industrialization and its assembly lines. A specialized occupation even emerged to help them choose-- vocational guidance. Guidance applies the viewpoint of positivist science and its technical procedures to help individuals rationally choose occupations. Frank Parsons (1909) devised the paradigm for modern vocational guidance in urging counselors to objectify a client's abilities and interests and then use "true reasoning" to match these traits to occupations with corresponding requirements and rewards. Parson's paradigm for guiding occupational choice remains to this day the most widely used approach to career counseling. Today individuals describe themselves in responding to inventories and tests, and a computer compares these responses to occupational profiles in its data banks. The computer produces a profile that portrays objectively the degree of fit between an

individual and dozens of occupations. After discussing these empirical findings and objective facts with a counselor, clients select a few occupations for in-depth exploration, leading to a final choice. Parson's "true reasoning" paradigm provides career practitioners with a rational and objective model along with scientifically reliable and valid methods for helping individuals choose occupations in a society where occupations have become overly specialized. This paradigm has served twentieth century organizations and individuals well.

Global Economy

However, the end of the twentieth century finds U.S. industrial society becoming an information society. Huge corporations such as IBM, U.S. Steel, and General Motors are disappearing. Not too long ago, we had 200 manufacturers in the auto industry and one in every hundred employees worked in a steel company. Today only a handful of automakers remain and 2/3s of the steel jobs have disappeared. Without the hierarchical, bureaucratic organizations that gave form to careers, career paths themselves seem to be disappearing. U.S. Labor Secretary Robert B. Reich recently observed that "Twenty years ago, you could fairly easily plot a career. It might have had a few twists and turn, but you would progress though a hierarchy of positions that were more or less predetermined. Career paths are now gone. They're not even trails... The lack of a career path means that people... are more on their own" (Brazaitis, 1996). Daily newspapers are replete with stories of "re-engineering organizations," "downsizing," "learning organizations," "dejobbing," and "contingent workers." Fewer and fewer companies promise life-time employment following a career path. As the information age sweeps away the old hierarchies, its computer technology flattens organizations,

breaks middle management rungs off the career ladder, and hires "contingent workers" for term-specific contracts. Job security is history. Today's workers must manage their own careers, with resumes becoming a list of transferable skills and adaptive strengths. Increasingly, individuals working at overspecialized jobs that involve a single task are being replaced by employees who work in teams with each member performing many tasks. Given this transformation in society and its occupations, life-time employment must become life-time employability. Individuals can anticipate losing several jobs during their worklives, and thus should focus on skills that can get the next job.

Today schools do not prepare children for the future in which they will live. We talk about teaching problem-solving, lifelong learning skills, and teamwork. However, has you local high school changed its curriculum to match this rhetoric?

As the economy changes and careers fracture, so does America's nuclear family. Vice-President Gore at his Family Reunion Conference in Nashville, (June 26, 1996) stated the obvious when he said, "We have a workplace crunched by change. It is creating profound anxiety. Work and family are in fierce competition. Lifetime job security is a thing of the past. The family is the shock absorber for this tremendous social change." For the last 20 years, the fit between work and family has been grinding like gears that do not mesh. The emergence of family-friendly companies, that will give workplace flexibility and leave time to address family responsibilities, is an external bandaid for a nation experiencing internal hemorrhaging. Some families find that the schools are not educating their children, hospitals are not admitting their spouses, and nursing homes will not accept their impoverished parents.

With work harder to find and paying less, we encounter more and more have dual-earner, single parent, and alternative families. Our society is engaged in a redefinition of the family unit to include a variety or structures. In addressing these crises, either/or arguments and blaming victims has been tolerated for too long.

I should also note that urbanization of work was a democratic and humanizing advance for the majority of U.S. citizens. Modern life in the industrial era worked well for at least a century. Society is reorganizing the structure of work because it must, not because it wants to. Although our modern culture is collapsing, the alternative to rightsizing and reorganization is the collapse of our economy. The USSR disintegrated, at least in part, because it maintained workers in unnecessary jobs so that they could have a paycheck. U.S. companies and government officials choose to downsize, culling excessive workers. For example, in 1983 AT&T had a monopoly and one million workers. Today the Bell companies employ 750,000 workers yet handle twice the telephone calls, plus fax and cellular calls. On the one hand, people pay less for telephone calls and America remains a leader in telecommunications, but on the other hand, a quarter of a million workers have lost their jobs.

The U.S. continues to have a strong economy because we have adapted to change. Although there are only 18 million manufacturing jobs left in the USA, we are still number one in music, television, movies, forest products, paper, aluminum, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, electronics, telecommunications, and farm equipment. Organizations have adapted to the continual process of industries shedding their excess workers and new jobs appearing. Half of the jobs in 1995 did not exist in 1965. Small companies are blossoming.

Most surviving and thriving organizations have realized that the only real adaptation is to live with change; they have accepted permanent internal reorganization as away of life. They realize that, in a complex and fast changing marketplace, the bureaucratic form is maladaptive because the top of the hierarchy does not know what the bottom is doing. Organizations are breaking the middle management rungs off the career ladder, thereby destroying the ladder itself. Instead of looking up, employees are being taught to look over to colleagues and to move diagonally across departments. Even academia is starting to downsize and place its professors in transdisciplinary teams rather specialized departments. Tenure as a form of life-time employment is being replaced with five-year contracts.

Unfortunately, individual workers do not seem to be adapting as quickly as organizations. Layed-off workers need new skills, the most important of which is new cultural skills with which to adapt to the information era and the global economy. Because the family form is connected to how people work, families too must adapt. The family must be open to multiple forms with a diversity of family structures. Schools also need to diversify, no longer can they be the melting pot that molds homogeneous students to fit the system. Just as there will be multiple forms of families, there must be multiple forms of schooling. Whatever the outcome may be, cultural transformation is in full progress.

Career Psychology Responds to Cultural Changes in Work

Counseling psychologists have made noteworthy contributions in helping to shape the societal meaning of career and fostering career development among individuals. Now, some of these contributions may require renovation or replacement. The decline of career directly affects career counseling as a

specialized occupation. As we move into the information age our viewpoint must change. Like other occupations, our perspective has been positioned tradition and training. These social practices have produced a form of career counseling models and methods that are highly relevant to the modern industrial era. Our self- defining commitment has been to objectively measuring individual differences, studying occupations, and scientifically matching people to positions. These commitments have led us to emphasize and privilege the core values of rational decision making, independence, planning, individual achievement, advancement up the hierarchy, and personal success and satisfaction.

As the culture that embeds our scientific ideals and objective practices changes, it is hard for us to stand outside our training and traditions. However, we must because modern career education and counseling, based on linear projections of career, no longer seem as useful to workers who encounter twists and turns, with both good and bad surprises. Accordingly, we must participate in re-vision and re-interpretation in response to these cultural changes and the new difficulties that students and workers encounter. Our field's self-interpretation is at a turning point as we reexamine our ideals, reflect on our models, and choose new values to emphasize.

The core constructs that have been the foundation of modern career counseling are already being re-examined and, in many instances, transformed. At first blush, the cultural revolution which we experience seems to have separated career specialists into two camps--those who defend the numerous accomplishments of objectivism in producing trait-and-factor models and methods for career counseling versus those who devise constructivist methods for career intervention that are more sensitive to the needs of diverse

clients and individuals who are at the margins of objectivist career theory and practice. However, this dichotomy is simplistic. I have never heard a career specialist call for constructivism models and methods to replace objectivist theory and techniques. There is no attack on the trait-and-factor camp. On the contrary, leading constructivist career theorist such as Larry Cochran continue to applaud and build upon the accomplishments of trait-and-factor models as they try to produce supplemental models and materials. To exploit the camp metaphor, I view these individuals as having one foot in the camp and the other foot exploring the terrain around the camp. Furthermore, dedicated career researchers who continue to live in the trait-and-factor camp are leading the effort to transform career counseling into a specialty that remains relevant and useful in the information era and global economy. In short, there is as much change going on inside the camp as there is surrounding the camp. Hopefully, this means we can quickly get beyond metaphors of differing camps and focus on renovating career psychology for a second century of distinguished service to its clients and country.

Let us examine, in a little more detail, how constructivist and objectivist career counselors are responding to the changes in career. Maybe when I am finished you will see as more similarities than differences.

Constructivist Responses

The change in the structure of work and its social organization means that the modern paradigm of matching people to positions needs to be expanded to address individuals as managers of their own worklives, drawing meaning from the role of work in their lives not from an organizational culture. Career must become more personal and self-directed to flourish in the postmodern information age. You will probably start to hear the phrase career

management replace career planning. The emphasis on personal meaning and becoming an agent in one's own life draws inspiration and support from constructivist metatheory. The lens of constructivism allows counselors to view career, not as a life-time employment on an organizational ladder, but as a carrier of personal meaning that defines and structures significant events in a life (Carlsen, 1988, p. 186). In the postmodern era, career may become a framework for personal meaning and management, rather than a path through an organization.

Rather than looking just at how people fit into the occupational structure, constructivists envision how work fits into people's lives. Constructivism represents a metatheory and epistemologic stance that emphasizes self-conceiving, self-organizing, and proactive features of human knowing (R. Neimeyer, 1995). According to Young, Valach, and Collin (1996, p.364) career will become a process that "people intentionally engage in to acquire social meaning within the framework of their lives." From this perspective, career counseling should aim to increase self-reflection about meaning and prompt exploration of and experimentation with other ways of seeing and doing. In the words of Peavy (1993) constructivist career counseling is a "process which enables individuals to review, revise, and reorient how they are living their lives and with the assistance of another person who extends respect, cooperation, and hopefulness to them." Constructive methods enables people to fashion careers that carry meaning for their lives and imposes personal direction on their vocational behavior.

Objectivist Responses

While constructivist researchers attend to expanding contemporary career counseling by emphasizing the subjective perspective on worklife, traditional

objectivist researchers are expanding the meaning and contemporary applicability or core concepts in career psychology. Let us examine a few concepts and how they are being refurbished or replaced.

Career salience and work importance. Work as the central life role has long been a pillar of career counseling. Occupational roles tie individuals to reality and confer social identity. The career ethic emphasizes individualism and competitive self-advancement. Today, some psychologists such as Mary Sue Richardson call for a new work ethic, one in which work is viewed as a social activity that connects individuals to their communities and allows them to contribute to other people. The new ethic requires a shift from career salience to life role salience. Work itself must come to be valued in all life roles, not just occupations. No longer can we marginalize the work performed in the home because it does not advance one's career. This transformation moves from the assumption that occupation is the central life role to examining the role of work in each individual's life. This includes an emphasis on life planning, with attention to multiple roles and work-family interactions. Colleagues such as Duane Brown and Sunny Hansen are already articulating models and methods for life planning. Multicultural specialists such as Fred Leong and Nadya Fouad are showing us that all cultures work as they emphasize the diverse ways in which different segments of our population structure work and family roles and functions.

Career development theories. Career development theories are also being modified in response to the changing economy. For example, Super's construct of career maturity may be replaced by the construct of career adaptability. There is a resurgence of interest in the self being prompted by work in self-efficacy and vocational identity development. Holland and Gottfredson have

produced the "Career Attitudes and Strategies Inventory" that measures traditional variables such as job satisfaction and work involvement yet also measures skill development, interpersonal abuse, and family commitment.

Career counseling. Some of our colleagues are focusing attention on career counseling theory, as distinct from career development theory. While career development theories concentrate on matching people to positions, career counseling theories concentrate on enabling individuals to manage their worklives. For example, John Krumboltz has recently devised a learning theory of career counseling and Judy Chartrand has constructed a sociocognitive-interactional theory of career counseling. Both of these theories emphasize counseling process and outcomes rather than decisional and developmental tasks.

Decision making. Long a cornerstone of career psychology, rational decision making is being challenged as the sole method for choosing. Susan Phillips has recently emphasized the need to investigate the role of intuition and "other-than-rational" methods in career decision making as well as the circumstances under which they may be beneficially employed.

Occupational interests. Another cornerstone of modern career counseling has been occupational interests. As occupations become less stable, and occupational titles become problematic as items and scales in interest inventories because they involve a set of activities under continual transformation. Accordingly, some researchers are emphasizing activity interests rather than occupational interests. For example, Rounds and Tracey are focusing on basic interests, which lie between occupational interests and RIASEC types, because "these dimensions group together work activities that transcend particular situations; they share properties like context, setting,

object or interest, or process." In the new economy, basic interests may be more meaningful to clients. For example, writing maximizes meaningfulness in comparison to the general interest factor of artistic and the occupational title reporter. Other interest specialists such as Zytowski and Campbell advise more assessment of functional skills. Kuder's paper on person matching, rather than matching to occupational groups, charts an innovative path for the future of career assessment.

Work values. At midcentury, Super developed a work values inventory. Later in his career, when he noted the changing culture, Super replaced it with a values inventory that does not privilege the occupational role. Today, others like Duane Brown are following Super's lead in preparing values inventories that also assess the various life roles in which the individual wishes to seek their manifold values.

Career education. Career education in the schools, since the 1970s, has focused on preparing individuals for a linear career in stable organizations. Now attention is shifting away from developing career maturity and occupational plans to employability skills, life-long learning, and the school-to-work transition. Counseling psychologists such as David Blustein, Susan Phillips, Edwin Herr, and Robert Lent are urging us to attend to the problems youth encounter as they try to move from school to work.

Conclusion

My main point is that career psychology is not in the middle of an epistemic war between objectivist and constructivist career counselors. Instead, we are all in the middle of a cultural revolution in which our own worklives and those of our clients are changing radically. Whether we consciously attend to it or not, most of us are adapting our thinking and

doing to reflect the new realities. It might be to our advantage to me more explicitly and systematically self-reflective as a discipline in our adaptations to the new opportunities and difficulties that force us to revise and expand our vision of career theory and practice in the new era.