
Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century

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The post-modern world is characterized by globalization and unpredictable fast changes. This puts heavy demands on the existing career theories and guidance techniques. The present theories are, however, rooted in a modern world characterized by stability, and by predictable and slow changes. Because of this situation, there is now, within the career guidance field, a strong demand for a new and adapted approach. A group of international scholars, who are strongly involved in the guidance and counseling practice, are proposing a new paradigm to respond to these new demands. They no longer speak about "career development" or "vocational guidance", but concentrate on "life trajectories" and "construction" in which the individuals design their own lives including their work career. The main question is no longer which career shall I choose, but what am I going to make of my life? This approach has far-reaching consequences on career interventions, which should be refocused. Also, career counseling needs to be restructured and the co-evolution of the individual, the economy and society recognized. This will require new basic suppositions and a new framework. Counselors and other guidance workers will need more flexibility with regard to their aims, instruments and "where" they conduct their support. The presenters will, within the scope of this symposium, tackle the different issues and sketch a framework to highlight their position. The learning objectives of this symposium are to (1) Develop an awareness of the need for new paradigms in the 21st century, (2) Recognize that work role is part of a broader set of life-roles, and (3) Learn about a new counseling method and its implication for practice and training.

Life designing: Framework and introduction

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In the 21st century, a new social arrangement of work poses a series of challenges to scholars who aim to help people develop their working lives. The theory of career construction and its life-designing counseling model endorse five presuppositions about people and their work lives: contextual possibilities, dynamic processes, non-linear progression, multiple perspectives, and personal patterns. Thinking from these five presuppositions, the life design international research team has crafted a contextualized model based on the epistemology of social constructionism, particularly recognizing that an individual's knowledge and identity are the product of social interaction and that meaning is co-constructed through discourse. The life-design framework for counseling implements the theories of self-constructing (Guichard, 2005) and career construction (Savickas, 2005) that describe vocational behavior and its development. Thus, the framework is structured to be life-long, holistic, contextual, and preventive. The life-design framework for counseling interventions aims to increase clients' adaptability, narratability, activity, and intentionality. The life-designing model assists individuals to formulate adaptive responses to developmental tasks, vocational traumas, and occupational transitions. In addition to fostering adaptability, the interventions seek to increase clients' narrative competence in telling an autobiographical story that portrays their career and life with coherence and continuity. The story should enable clients to better understand their own life themes, vocational personality, and adaptability resources. In addition to enhancing narratability, activity must be exercised to produce significant changes in "conclusions" of the life stories of many people and in particular of those that seem already written. Thus, life-designing interventions encourage clients to engage in activities in the different domains of life. By engaging in diverse activities, individuals learn which abilities and interests they prefer to exercise. Action is central to life-

designing interventions thinking because it involves behavior plus meaning. The meaning may arise from prospective aspiration or retrospective reflection. Either way, the intentional process is central to the tasks of deigning a life and constructing a career. In sum, life-designing interventions foster development through adaptability, narratability, intentionality, and action.

Keywords: *career construction, vocational guidance, life-designing, transition, social constructionism*

The role of the theory of career construction and self-constructing in life-designing

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The aim of this study is to outline a theoretical framework for life-designing interventions. Two similar models will be summarised: The Career Construction Model and the Self-Constructing Model. Both of these models refer to the epistemology of social constructionism and assert that (a) an individual's knowledge and identity are the product of social and cognitive processes taking place in context of interactions between people and groups as well as negotiation between them, and (b) the meaning an individual gives to reality is co-constructed in a social, historical and cultural context through the discourse with which we form our relationships. Their difference lies in that the Career Construction Model puts a greater emphasis on career construction and the Self-Constructing Model emphasises identities construction. Career Construction theory describes career as a moving perspective that imposes personal meaning on past memories, present experiences, and future aspirations by patterning them into an evolving life theme. It is the meaning contained in these biographical themes that will equip individuals to adapt to the social changes that are playing out in their work lives. Self-constructing approach shares this view but understands career construction as only one element in identities construction. It considers career as an occupational "subjective identity form" (SIF), as a piece of a broader structure. A SIF denotes a set of ways

of being, acting, and interacting in terms of a certain view of oneself in a given context (past, present or future). "Identity" is seen as plural and evolving: It is described as a dynamic system of subjective identity forms, in which some of them (often the occupational one) plays a core role. These models constitute two perspectives on the life designing issue. Career construction sees it as a major question addressed to individuals: What is the meaning of my career in my life? Self-construction would formulate it this way: What in my life (could) give it a meaning to me? These models are complementary. Perhaps the first question is more likely to be the one of mature adults and the second one that of adolescents or emerging adults.

Keywords: *life-designing, career construction, self-constructing model, cognitive processes, career*

Restructuring career counseling: objectives and instruments

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The life-design framework for counseling aims to face counseling as a process of continuous interactions, which helps in the resolution of problems, which places the process of decision making within a systematic and realistic frame, and which allows the conjunction of the necessities of individuals with those of the contexts they act, develop and live. Thus, the framework is structured to be life-long, holistic, contextual, and preventive. From theory we will use intervention methods and techniques: the development of self-knowledge and ecological variables, facilitating or inhibiting in decision making processes. The stories and activities developed by individuals are the focal point concerning methodological aspects instead of utilization of test scores or profile interpretations. The existing techniques and tools are reconfigured for use in a social constructionist approach. The presentation and discussion of a case study following the outline of the life-design career counseling illustrates this new way to face career counseling. The international life-design research group has set several projects for the development of life-design intervention model. Some of these projects are presented.

Keywords: *life-design intervention model, decision making, social constructionist approach, career counselling, counselling*

Training practitioners for life-designing

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Huge challenges confront vocational guidance in the 21st century. Practitioners must be ready to deal with them if they are to succeed in supporting and helping those individuals who risk making inadequate choices or having unsatisfactory prospects. In order for counselors to pursue significant aims, their training must be carefully planned and assessed. Emphasis would be placed on (a) future counselors' active participation during their training, (b) reduction of the gap existing between the world of research and that of training and application, (c) ensuring that graduates model what they will advocate, and (d) preparing counselors for collaborative projects (Savickas et al., under review). Fifty career counselors and career service providers (mean age 40 years; 40% male and 60% female) were involved in this study. They had a degree in different subjects (education, humanities, economics but mostly in psychology) and worked in diverse contexts (vocational guidance centers, school services, private practice). They reported a range of one to 15 years of experience in providing career service. All participants completed a battery of measures, to assess professional self-efficacy, professional goals and satisfaction, and an open-ended questionnaire that examined their beliefs regarding vocational guidance, before and after the training. The training had been planned based on the points outlined above and special emphasis had been placed on the issues of the Life-design model. It consisted of 120 hours, with 8-hour sessions every two weeks, over a period of 8 months. The analyses carried out show that, after the intervention, the practitioners showed higher levels of professional self-efficacy beliefs, more specific professional goals, and higher levels of satisfaction. Moreover, they tended to consider vocational guidance as a "discipline of change" and counselors as change agents rather than professionals that deal mainly with diagnoses, or with more or less accurate

predictions. These results will be discussed in light of our conviction that counselors themselves should show clear identity and strong adaptability; they should emerge from training as proactive, self-determined professionals with high levels of self-efficacy for performing their professional duties.

Keywords: *vocational guidance, training, career counselor, life-design model, self-efficacy*