



REVIEW

Contemporary Approaches to Career Counseling: Critical Perspectives on the Life-Design Paradigm

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Because of the ease with which ideas originating from trait-and-factor theory can be implemented in practice, these have had, and still have widespread acceptance (Brown, 2002). The objective perspective on careers has been challenged by many researchers and led to the development of theories that account for individuals changing life situations and the subjective meaning they ascribe to their choices. The increased interest in understanding how subjective factors influence career choices has resulted in the emergence of several different theories based on constructivism, each offering new perspectives on how individuals may influence their career. The most recent contribution to the field of career counseling is the life-design paradigm (Savickas et al., 2009) adhering to social constructionism and thus emphasizing the significance of the stories that individuals construct about themselves and their career. Comparing some of the key assumptions underlying the life-design paradigm with ideas originating from other theories, this article invites further discussion about the methodological implications of relying on different assumptions about the individual and the context in which career choices are made. Questions will be raised about the emphasis on people's stories and whether these have the potential to help them overcome the many different challenges they may face during their career. It will be argued that overemphasizing individual learning and promoting adaptive behavior and self-governance might contribute to individualize career problems that may have a structural origin.

Keywords: life-design; self-governance; decontextualization; individualization; responsabilisation

Idéer der udspringer af træk-faktor teori har længe været og er fortsat meget udbredte indenfor vejledningsområdet, fordi de relativt let kan implementeres i praksis (Brown, 2002). Det objektive perspektiv på karriere er blevet udfordret af flere forskere, hvilket har ført til udvikling af teorier der har fokus på betydningen af menneskers foranderlige livssituation og den subjektive mening, de tillægger deres valg. Den øgede interesse i at forstå, hvordan subjektive faktorer påvirker karrierevalg, har resulteret i fremkomsten af flere forskellige konstruktivistiske teorier, der giver nye perspektiver på, hvordan personer kan påvirke deres karriere. Det seneste bidrag til karrierevejledningsfeltet er life-design paradigmet (Savickas et al., 2009), der bygger på social konstruktionisme og har fokus på betydningen af de historier personer konstruerer om dem selv og deres karriere. Artiklen sammenligner nogle af de nøgleantagelser, som life-design paradigmet bygger på, med ideer fremsat i andre teorier. Hermed inviteres til diskussion af de metodiske implikationer det kan have, at teorier bygger på forskellige antagelser om individet og den kontekst, hvori karrierevalg træffes. I artiklen rejses spørgsmålet, om konstruerede livshistorier har potentiale til at hjælpe personer med at overvinde de mange forskellige udfordringer, de måtte stå over for undervejs i deres karriere. Der vil blive argumenteret for, at et ensidigt fokus på individuel læring, tilpasning og selvledelse kan bidrage til at individualisere karriereproblemer, der kan have en strukturel oprindelse.

Nøgleord: life-design; selvledelse; dekontekstualisering; individualisering; ansvarliggørelse

Introduction

In this article we present and discuss some of the key assumptions about career and career choices underlying the life-design paradigm and compare these with suppositions presented in a selection of other career theories. At the outset is a brief introduction to some of the constructivist ideas that have influenced the development of the included career theories. The intention is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of the life-design paradigm, but rather to stimulate discussions about a selection of key concepts originating from this. Inspired by an analytic model developed by Petersson (2000) we present different ways to understand career counseling, the individual, and the context in which career choices are being made and we invite further discussion about issues related to these. Different views on the human subject described as an object, a subject or a self-designed project will be presented and discussed in relation to their implications for practice. We include assumptions about how contextual factors and developments in the labor market affect careers and encourage reflections on whether contemporary career theories contribute to lessen the influence of trait and factor thinking on the practice of career counseling (Brown & Brooks, 1996).

The article concludes by adding some more general questions to our discussions that might likewise deserve further scrutiny and more research. In the final section of the article, questions are presented about the possible impact on shifting our guiding paradigm from constructivism to constructionism and about how we treat people's stories of struggles and career problems and respond to these in counseling. We question whether the increased focus on personal development and self-governance contribute to an individualization of career problems that may have a structural origin and whether adaptation should continue to be considered as an important outcome of counseling. Are there limits to what we believe people should adapt to, and if there are, how do we address this question in theory and practice? The reader is encouraged to reflect upon the significance of changing a perspective and theoretical outlook and the implications this may have for future practice and research.

Assessing Career Theories and Their Methodological Implications

When assessing a specific career theory and its methodological implications a good starting point is to reflect upon the significance of the theoretical foundation from which it derives, and how the concept of career is being defined in the theory. General assumptions about the human subject and objectives of career counselling may have a profound impact on how a theory guides practice and how we understand the potential of different methods to address diverse counselling needs. As an example, Super (1990) describes careers as a series of career mini-cycles which emerge as a result of the multiple transitions people encounter throughout a life-span. Transitions may vary in nature and lead to different types of choice situations, a variety of career concerns, and a unique pattern of challenges for the individual to overcome.

The objective of career counselling is to help the person connect their past, present and future and consider how accessible choice options may correspond with the life they are currently living or wish to live. Thus, the counsellor must consider the individuals changing life-space and life-structure and the web of life-roles they may be engaged with when being in choice situations and/or confronted with various types of career questions. Subsequently, careers unfold as a result of both individual and contextual factors influencing an individual's opportunities for choosing and acting throughout life. But careers do not unfold, Savickas (2002, 2015a) argues, they are constructed and individuals need counseling when they have become dislocated from their stories or need assistance in their identity work. The course and content of life-structures is designed and structured by individual strategies and choices and individuals are assumed to construct their identities through the stories they are living (Savickas, 2015a, 2015b) which emphasizes the significance of the stories they construct about possible selves and future scenarios. Increasing client's narrative competencies is therefore an important goal of life-design counseling, because the ability to construct a revised life story are assumed to prompt action and enhance client agency. Increasing clients' career adaptability is presented as a central goal of career construction counseling (Savickas, 2005) and as specific sets of attitudes, beliefs, and competencies.

Savickas (1997) describes adaptability as the quality of being able to change to fit with changed circumstances emphasizing the continual and unending need to respond to novel situations. Career adaptability is the readiness to cope with both predictable and unpredictable tasks connected with preparing for and participating in a work role, and to adjust to changes in work and working conditions. The life-design research group (Savickas et al., 2009) emphasizes human flexibility, adaptability and life-long learning. They present a counseling model in which the counselor facilitates empowerment and flexible adaptation or the re-construction of one's eco-system.

As illustrated through the examples above, many different factors are relevant for assessing theories apart from addressing the significance of different theoretical approaches and general assumptions about careers and career counseling. Petersson (2000) has developed a model which can be used to analyze and understand career choices from different individual, contextual and methodological perspectives. He describes career choice as a relationship between an individual and an alternative and the way this relationship is handled, as the choice method. He argues that career choice is a complex process including series of transitions and choice situations and that individuals may be in a choice situation for many different reasons and on several occasions throughout their lives. Accordingly, assessments of career theories must include an analysis of their underlying assumptions about the individual, and about the alternatives considered in a specific choice situation, and how these assumptions influence a particular practice and the types of choices it supports or facilitates.

Analyzing career theories from an individual perspective includes reflections about their general assumptions about the human subject and how individual factors are assumed to influence career development and choices. In a contextual perspective, Petersson suggests we analyze how alternatives are perceived and presented to the individual as choice options and how situational and environmental factors that may influence or restrict these choices are addressed in a particular theory. In a methodological perspective, we may analyze how or if a counseling model reflects a particular view of the individual, and the context in which they are making career choices, and how the choice of methods may influence not only the choosing process but also the outcome of counselling.

This type of analysis will enable the counselor to reflect upon the significance of adopting various theoretical approaches or using different methods in career counseling and to assess their relevance for their practice and the counselees they are working with (see Højdal & Poulsen, 2012 and Højdal, 2019). In the following we present and discuss a selection of key assumptions about the individual and the context in which career choices take place as they appear in some of the established career theories and in the life-design paradigm (Savickas et al., 2009). We also discuss the constructionist assumptions underlying the life-design counseling model presented by Savickas (2015b).

Shifting Paradigms and Outlook

Several career theories presented during the 20th century rest on a positivistic paradigm and the assumption that a close match between a personality type and a work environment type will increase the likelihood of job satisfaction (see e.g. Holland, 1997). This assumption is challenged by researchers like Super (1990) who, through his life-span and life-space approach, draws attention towards the meaning individuals ascribe to their choices when in changing life situations and positioned within changing opportunity structures. Super integrates ideas from the personal construct theory (Kelly, 1963) about how individuals interpret phenomenon and build constructs to view the real world and uses them to anticipate and control events. The outset is an existing real world, not solely composed by a person's thoughts or imagination, but to the extent that a person is able to construe their circumstances they may thus be able to influence them. Regardless of how the counselee or the counsellor has interpreted specific phenomenon and built constructs about these, these constructs may be biased in their representation. Hypotheses are always related to a theoretical structure, Kelly argues, and therefore the counsellor must strive to maintain personal independence from whatever theory they use to guide their practice.

The attention towards the significance of the subjective meaning people ascribe to career choices has led to the development of several theories, based on constructivism (see e.g. Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2002), each representing different views of the human subject and about factors presumed to influence careers. As an example of how theoretical approaches change career construction theory was first presented as at theory adhering to epistemological constructivism (Savickas, 2002) and later described as a theory using social constructionism as a meta-theory (Savickas, 2005). The life-design paradigm was presented by an international research group (Savickas et al., 2009) as a new paradigm for career intervention and counseling based on the epistemology of social constructionism. They encourage a fundamental shift in paradigm which allows guidance techniques to be reformulated to fit the postmodern economy and the methods suggested in the life-design intervention model. This implies moving away from relying on scientific facts and adopting a new approach that views career as individual scripts and focuses on the client's narrative realities.

In their introduction to constructivism and social constructionism Young and Collin (2004) describe how the two concepts have gained more attention in social science and psychology, both separately and subsumed under the generic and undifferentiated term 'constructivism'. They argue that 'constructivism' is now firmly established in the career field, though general agreement about the definitions and usages of the

different terms has still not been reached. As an example, they describe how material labeled 'constructivist' in Brown and Brooks (1996) is re-named 'social constructionist' in Brown (2002), which may lead to confusion about the differences and similarities between the two terms. Raskin (2002) argues that the confusion about what constitutes the many varieties of constructivism is unfortunate and could undermine the attraction of larger audiences. According to Raskin (2002), all constructivist psychologies share the belief that people cannot develop a purely objective view of the world, because all constructed meanings reflect a point of view. At the same time, theorists disagree about the implications of this position, particularly regarding the nature of reality and the origin of constructed meaning.

Both Young and Collin (2004) and Raskin (2002) analyse the differences and similarities between the theories representing what Raskin terms 'constructivisms', reflecting the plural nature of constructivist theories. Constructivist theories differ not only regarding their basic assumptions about the existence of an external reality, but also regarding how individuals are assumed to be able to influence or construct their environment. Despite these differences, Raskin (2002) argues, that there is a room for a cross-fertilization amongst the various constructivist theories but also a need for further exploration of the connections among them. I believe that at the heart of this endeavor is the question of whether it is possible to bridge the realist and idealist approaches to our understanding of knowledge. The two approaches either accepts or rejects the idea of an external reality existing independently of our consciousness about it, which challenges attempts to combine and use techniques based on different theoretical assumptions. As discussed later in this article, Savickas (2015b) presents a narrative approach to the identification of the client's manifest interest but also suggests that counselors apply Holland's (1997) typology of vocational personalities and work environments.

In an attempt to clarify similarities and differences among constructivist theories, Raskin (2002) provides a description of some of the key assumptions represented in epistemological constructivism and social constructionism. According to this description, epistemological constructivists accept the existence of an external reality that is independent of the observer and thus they do not represent a purely idealistic approach. Even so, they accept that the observer's knowledge about the external reality relies on their constructions of it. People may construct knowledge about an external reality that may be more or less accurate, and they cannot know for certain whether their construction corresponds with this. Contrary to this constructivist approach the social constructionists reject the existence of an observer-independent reality and the notion of an isolated knower. Knowledge is regarded as local and fleeting and reality is constructed through language and socially negotiated between people within a given context or time frame. As mentioned earlier, the life-design research group suggest that we stop relying on scientific facts and focus our attention on the subjective realities people construct through their narratives. This makes some of the questions raised by Young and Collin (2004) relevant to address e.g. in respect to challenges connected with the exclusion of what is outside of language or how human agency and change is possible in a multitude of possible constructed worlds and realities.

Assumptions about the Individual Who Makes Career Choices

Drawing from differential psychology, Holland (1997) posits that most people can be categorized as one of six personality types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (the RIASEC-model) each presumed to exhibit a particular pattern of personality traits and behaviors. A personality type represents a specific repertoire of attitudes and skills for coping with environmental problems or tasks believed to be a product of interaction between a variety of cultural and personal forces. Parents transmit a particular biological endowment of physical and psychological potentials, but though the specific biological influence is not clear, we are not created with equal potentials, he argues. Holland describes the parental influence of the development of vocational interest as an unknown mixture of biological and social inheritance but argues that genetic influence probably plays a major role in the stability of interests.

Work environments are characterized by types in a similar way, mirroring the six personality types presumed to dominate each environment. Holland (1997) describes a type as a model against which we can measure the real person, establish their resemblance to one of the model environments and subsequently identify fitting niches of occupations. Apart from using the Self-Directed Search (Holland, Fritzsche, & Powell, 1994) or other quantitative methods to assess a person's personality type, Holland (1997) suggests that counselors include qualitative methods. He argues that everyone has a personal career theory and that the content and structure of this resembles the typologies of people and environments and their interactions presented in his theory. The qualitative assessment of personal theories may be performed through listening

to and evaluating a person's account of problems, asking for their origins, and exploring their perspective on potential solutions. When using the life history approach, counselors should regard expressed interests as useful but imperfect estimates of biological dispositions and learning experiences. They should be skeptical about attempts to change a person's interests unless there is persuasive evidence that these have been distorted, for example due to discrimination or lack of experiences. No single assessment method stands out as being the most suitable for all purposes, he argues but using qualitative assessments in conjunction with diagnostic tools should increase the understanding of career problems and interventions.

In career construction theory (Savickas, 2005, 2007) the self is described as a process, shaped through language and the stories a person constructs about themselves. This emphasizes the interpretative and interpersonal processes through which individuals impose meaning and direction of their vocational behavior. Savickas (2005) argues that career related 'traits', like interests, do not reside within an individual, and they cannot be excavated from within by interest inventories. Interests and values are relational phenomena that reflect socially constituted meanings that should be viewed as strategies for adapting, rather than as realist categories. Individuals can adopt or drop selected strategies which may coalesce into a style, which can be compared to that of other people and form a type. But these should not be treated as anything more than similarities and as socially constructed categories. They have no reality or truth value outside themselves because they depend on the social constructions of time, place and culture that support them. Savickas (2015b) differentiates the practice of vocational guidance, which he claims is based on logical positivism and the use of scores, from that of life-design counseling which is based on stories.

In accordance with Savickas (2015b), vocational guidance is concerned with client's objective resemblance with prototypes and occupational groups, whereas life-design counselors use stories to show their uniqueness. Rather than using traditional interest inventories, the counselor uses a narrative approach to identify the individual's manifest interests. He does however, present Holland's (1997) RIASEC-model as a knowledge system that offers a vocabulary of distinctions with which to type people and occupations, that enables counselors to be more efficient in thinking about individuals and the world of work. In the Life-design counseling manual Savickas (2015b) describes how counselors use the individual's stories to assess their manifest interests, by identifying characteristics of the environments in which they routinely place themselves. Having identified the individual's interests, he suggests that the counselor assign these to the vocational personality types suggested by Holland (1997) that are assumed to help the individual to identify fitting niches of occupation. Hence, Savickas does not appear to escape from relying on what could be considered as being established, scientific facts, e.g. about the existence of specific personality types and about the personality types who occupy various occupations. Though Savickas' (2015b) methodological approach may differ from the type of assessment of personal career stories suggested by Holland (1997) the two approaches seem to arrive at the same conclusions. This raises questions like whether it is possible to maintain focus on individuals' uniqueness if their stories are assessed with the intent to assign them to types or how counselors are expected to address the many contextual factors that may have influenced the stories people have constructed and present during counseling.

The life-design research group (Savickas et al., 2009) offers a new look into the human subject which are now described as 'plural' (Guichard, 2015) emphasizing the co-existing multiple identities and Savickas et al. (2009) argue that future methods in counseling should encourage individual's exploration of possible selves. Through their engagement in activities in diverse roles, individuals are assumed to be able to identify activities that resonate with their core self. How the individual or the counselor is able to identify a core self among the various constructed selves is not explained in any detail. People are believed to construct themselves through the activities they become engaged in and through the narratives they construct about their experiences. The research group embrace the life-long learning discourse and suggest that counselors promote career management through a proactive regulation of person-context interactions (Hirschi & Dauwalder, 2015). Proactive career behavior includes the 'selection of environments' that corresponds with ones needs, skills, and preferences, 'adaptation of oneself to current environments' and the 'active shaping of the current environment to oneself'. Flexibility is viewed as a requirement to succeed in the modern work context, expected to enhance individual's ability to adjust to new work situations and adapt to existing and future work environments. Career adapt-ability is linked with a set of resources that a person can draw from to master challenges in the domain of work. Among other things, this implies focusing on promoting the necessary resources, abilities, and readiness among clients that will enable them to actively take charge of their working lives. The acquisition of career management abilities is also assumed to enable individuals to shape their environment according to their personal needs, skills, and preferences.

The subjective perspective on the human subject and how they interpret phenomenon and build constructs about themselves and career varies across different theories and their respective assumptions or hypothesis. The objective assessments suggested by Holland (1997) are expected to help people make more realistic career choices that match their personality as well as a work environment type. This type of objective measurement produces what Super (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996) describe as the public perspective of the 'me' or the 'self-as-object', as seen by the counselor. In his research he is primarily interested in understanding the 'self-as-subject' (Super, 1963) and concerned with the subject's own perspective on and private meaning for the 'I' (Super et al., 1996). He describes the individual as a self who, throughout the life-span, constructs different self-concepts linked to the private and social roles and activities they become engaged in through their interaction with their environment. Thus, the subjective meaning a person ascribes to career choices may vary, whilst throughout their career they are positioned in different life situations and encounter different types of challenges. Individual constructions may be biased, as suggested by Kelly (1963) and the types of activities an individual is able to construct meanings about may be influenced by their limited access to gain experiences from a broad variety of career options. Thus, the counselor needs to reflect on the possible impact of the complex interplay between influences from the environment and the individual's thoughts and actions and how the latter may have a social origin, as suggested by Bandura (1986).

Super (1990) argues that individuals develop a unique pattern of changing and role related self-concepts that are shaped through social processes in which the individual interprets the results they have gained from prior performances and the feedback they have received from their environment. He describes the career choice as the individual's attempt to implement their preferred self-concept, which may change over time and be influenced by their perception of a given choice situation and by how they prioritize their engagement in different life-roles. Hence, the individual's unique life-space and their unique pattern of life-roles and engagement in different types of activities at a given time, should be considered during counseling.

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 2002) emphasize the significance of individual's self-efficacy beliefs, which refers to the beliefs individuals have about their ability to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy beliefs are linked to specific performance domains and constitute a changeable network of self-assumptions, that affect the development of interests. Among other things, the individual's self-assumptions originate from the experiences they have gained from taking part in various activities or performing different types of tasks. Therefore, they may be influenced by the range of activities they have been exposed to and to the learning experiences they have had an opportunity to acquire. An individual's earlier performance outcomes and the interests they have developed at a certain time may thus be the result of a complex interplay between many different individual and contextual influencing factors. This may caution against drawing general conclusions about what an individual at a given time may articulate about themselves and their interest in various types of activities.

As previously described, the life-design research group suggests that individuals have multiple selves that are being constructed through the activities they have chosen to engage in and through the narratives they construct about their experiences. In accordance with Bandura (2000) theories 'cast in terms of multiple selves [...] requires a regress of selves to a presiding superordinate self that selects and manages the collection of possible selves to suit given purposes' (p.26). There is only one self, he claims, that can visualize and select courses of actions designated to attain cherished futures and escape feared ones. If we accept the existence of multiple selves, how do we know which one of these is the core self?

Assumptions about the Context in Which Choices are Made

Matching personal attributes to specified job requirements assumed to characterize occupations within a certain field has a long history in the field of career counseling but has also been challenged by several researchers. According to the life-design research group (Savickas et al., 2009), life in a postmodern world is shaped by changes in the global economy and a new social arrangement. These changes seem to make occupational prospects less definable and predictable, and require workers to develop skills and competences that differ substantially from the knowledge and abilities required by 20th century occupations. They criticize traditional scientific reasoning and question the predictive validity of differential psychological career assessments. The assumption that aptitudes and interests are sufficient to succeed in a job or that job requirements remain stable and predictable is no longer true, they argue.

I believe that this implies that the content of various jobs and the requirements attached to these must be expected to change. Furthermore, new types of occupations must be expected to emerge in the labor market

which makes it increasingly problematic to make use of universal and fixed descriptions of vocations. Rather than focusing on how personal characteristics fit with the requirements of a specific job, Super (Super et al., 1996) is concerned with how different types of jobs correspond with the life a person is currently living or wishes to live. The process of career development is essentially that of developing and implementing occupational self-concepts which involves synthesizing or compromising between individual and social factors and between self-concepts and reality. The same job may hold different meanings for two individuals who live in different situations and therefore it is important to appreciate the web of life roles that embeds a person's career concerns and to address issues related the individual's life-space and the social situation in which they live.

Savickas (2015a) acknowledges the existence of normative boundaries and social constraints but argues that life in knowledge societies has become more of an individual process, still influenced by environmental factors but, to a large extent, constructed by the individual (Savickas et al., 2009). When building a research agenda that corresponds with the 21st century labor market, the life-design research group suggests that we distinguish between core, peripheral and marginalized workers. They describe core employees as workers who, in order to survive in a boundaryless labor market and adapt to new demands, must learn how to make the best investment of their current competencies and be encouraged to develop new ones. Peripheral workers are presented as workers who will face frequent career decisions focused on the shorter-term, having careers 'dictated by their employability'. With reference to Super et al. (1996) the research group argue that their working lives will unfold as sequences of career mini-cycles, including multiple transitions, which they must learn to cope with. Finally, marginalized workers are presented as workers encountering additional barriers and constraints on their employment, which may cause them to concentrate on just a 'day's labor'.

Savickas (2002) presents his theory on career construction as an updated and expanded version of Super's theory of vocational development. The theory of career construction conceptualizes development as adaptation to a constantly changing environment and holds the central claim that careers do not unfold, they are constructed through individual narratives. However, as part of the life-design research group he does present the careers of peripheral workers as unfolding, dictated by their employability, thus it remains unclear whether life-design counseling is assumed to apply to all three categories of workers. If some worker's careers are being dictated by their employability and shaped through their adaptation to changing demands how does that correspond with their alleged ability to shape their environment in accordance with personal needs and preferences?

The life-design research group (Savickas et al., 2009) argue that today's employment is more and more based on mutually recognized 'win-win' situations, but at the same time they advocate for counseling methods that focus upon strategies for survival and the dynamics of coping. They also promote the idea that insecure workers in the information age must become life-long learners who embrace flexibility rather than stability, maintain employability and create their own opportunities. Emphasizing what the individual worker must learn to become employable seems to ignore the fact that contextual factors might have a much greater impact on people's employment. Guichard (2015) argues that individuals rely on a group of competencies to manage their career, but how do they know which competencies to acquire, to secure a place on a future unpredictable labor market? As described by Standing (2014), anyone is potentially at risk of becoming marginalized, regardless of what competencies they have acquired, because of the fluid and changing nature of national, regional, and local employment structures. As a Danish study (Magisterforeningen, 2020) shows, the number of 'precarious' academics are growing. The number of people aged 25–34 years who have completed higher education but are unwillingly employed in time-limited positions has currently exceeded the number of unskilled people holding similar positions. This may caution against the assumption that people can become governors of their own work pathways, as suggested by Guichard (2015), through the acquisition of competencies.

According to Rossier (2015) people can no longer select the work context that suits them, but must constantly adapt to new environments. He describes career adaptability as a crucial competence which is defined as abilities that contribute to individual's capabilities to manage their career or to design their lives. It is linked to the concept of employability and assumed to help the individual to face numerous and frequent career transitions, and increase their ability to tolerate and face uncertainty by increasing their flexibility and autonomy. But how does it challenge our profession, if some workers don't have the privilege of being able to choose their career, and what answers do we have for those who don't, other than encouraging them to continuously enhance their personal abilities and competencies? If a person is led to believe that their difficulties stem from internal but changeable factors, the net result may be self-blame, rather than heightened

motivation (Bandura, 1997), and thus a narrow focus on individual capabilities might even counteract the intended objective of empowerment and agency. Job insecurity has become the new norm, Standing (2014), argues and the precariat is told that it should be in control of their destiny, answer to market forces and be infinitely adaptable. But there might not be any personal strategy that can prevent the vagaries of life opportunities, Bauman (2002), argues, and he questions whether individuals have been doomed to seek biographical solutions to systemic contradictions.

Life-Design Counseling

In the Life-Design Counseling Manual, Savickas (2015b) presents a model consisting of two sessions named 'career construction interview' and 'counseling process', and an intermediate phase between the sessions named 'reconstructing a life portrait'. During the first session clients tell their transition narrative, which helps the counselor to understand their views of themselves and their problem. A structured interview is proposed, which is organized in accordance with five predetermined topics including questions related to the client's favorite magazines, television programs or websites. The client's responses to these questions take the shape of small stories, expected to help them make sense of past experiences, formulate intentions and eventually prompt actions. The counselor identifies the adjectives included in the client's constructions and self-conceptions, which are used to assess manifested interests. In the intermediate phase the counselor de-constructs the client's small stories and condenses the most important aspects of these, for example how they understand themselves and their career problem. The counselor then re-constructs the client's stories and combines these into a new life portrait, which intends to unfold deeper meaning and foster decision making and client transformation.

The re-authoring of the client's stories into a new life portrait includes assessing their vocational interests, which are believed to manifest themselves through the client's responses to the questions about favorite magazines, television programs or websites. The descriptions clients attach to their answers to these questions enables the counselor to identify fitting occupational niches. Savickas suggests using Hollands (1997) typology of vocational personalities and work environments (the RIASEC-types), which is assumed to help the counselor to assign types to the client's descriptions and prepare a list of occupations that matches these types. In the second session the counselor retells the client's stories, enriched by the counselor's own commentary and with a new plot, and the reconstructed life portrait is presented. The reconstruction of client's stories is expected to provide them with a more accurate picture of themselves and enable them to reconstruct their identity and understand their past and future in a new way. Having discussed the new life portrait, the counselor and client co-construct a plan for bridging the transition and the counselor emphasizes the client's most adaptive behaviors and encourages agentic action in their pursuit of the life they want to live.

Savickas (2015b) argues that the six vocational personality and work environment prototypes included in the RIASEC-model are useful in distinguishing the attributes that differentiate work environments and the people who populate them. If counselors prefer to inventory interest with a commercial product instead, rather than using the suggested narrative method, the result will fit in his model as well. Savickas does not explain how the descriptions individuals use to account for their attraction to specific magazines, television programs and websites provides a better foundation for establishing their vocational personality, than using the results gained from the tools developed by Holland. Consequently, it appears that the counselor will reach the same conclusions about a client's resemblance with an occupational type and fitting niches of occupations, regardless of whether they make use of their tests scores or small stories to identify these. Thus, it remains unclear, what the benefits are from using the latter.

Different validity issues connected with allowing the counselor to be the one to extract and organize data from the person's stories was presented many years ago by Super (1963). When self-concept data is organized by an observer and not by the person themselves, it will reflect the outsider's concept of that person, and result in an inferred self that might not represent the person's own views. These validity problems may increase during the counseling process, when the counselor de-constructs a person's small stories and condense from these what is believed to be important themes to include in the reconstructed story. Savickas (2015a) acknowledges that the stories of person neither will be objective nor idiosyncratically subjective when the counselor retells them with a new plot. But what are they then? If counselors analyze a person's stories through the lens of Holland's RIASEC-types and summarize their conclusions in the new life portrait, can it be other than a biased and directive reconstruction of that person's stories? What could happen if the person received counseling from another counselor who used different types of questions and analyzed their stories through other lenses?

Further Research Needed and More Questions to be Asked

This article has identified and discussed some of the key assumptions underlying the life-design paradigm and compared these with propositions made in a selection of other career theories. Questions have been raised regarding our understanding of career counseling, the individual and the context in which they make career choices with the objective to encourage further scrutiny and more research. We conclude by raising some more general questions about how we treat people's stories about their struggles and career problems and how we respond to these in counseling, which might likewise deserve more attention.

The life-design paradigm is presented as the new paradigm for counseling in the 21st century and may stand out as an example of what Zuboff (2019) describes as an 'unavoidable' discourse, which might lead to an uncritical acceptance of, or adaptation to technological developments and company demands. We probably all agree that our societies are undergoing changes and that we need a new outlook on the implications that may have for counselling. But we may need to discuss the possible impact of the shift from constructivism to constructionism, and what currently appears to be a narrow focus on individual competencies and the ability to adapt to changed circumstances. It may be time to ask ourselves whether there are limits to what we believe people should adapt to, for example regarding what appears to be a continued worsening of working conditions. If we do believe that there are limits, what implications may it have if counselors continue to promote adaptive behaviour and argue that this is the most sensible way for individuals to respond to changing environmental demands?

In the concluding chapter of the *Handbook of Life-design* (Nota & Rossier, 2015) the authors argue that the clients are the authors of the problem they present in counseling. They suggest that we strive to develop their narrative competencies and help them adjust their stories to better fit their current situation and to become engaged in learning new skills that could enhance their employability. The research group are aware that their new paradigm needs to prepare more for some of the major collective issues with which mankind is currently confronted, e.g. the decrease in salaries and the deficit of decent work in the world and that this requires interventions at a broader societal level. They also acknowledge that an impoverished environment may constitute an important barrier that will impact on people's careers but emphasize that this especially is the case when they are lacking personal resources. Therefore, they suggest that we focus on individual's personal strengths and abilities to change themselves and the environment which are supposed to help them compensate for or surmount the various deficits and difficulties. But, as Bandura (2000) reminds us, the individual may not have the power to remove environmental constraints and the quest for a share of benefits and control often requires collective efforts and a long struggle. Equipping people with a firm belief that they can produce valued effects through their action will not be enough if they are not, at the same time, provided with the means to do so. Creating awareness of how contextual factors influence people's lives and careers is an important objective in counseling but will that suffice to enable them to gain more influence?

Self-governance is introduced as an important outcome of life-design counseling and the research group (Savickas et al., 2009) emphasize that people must be encouraged to engage in learning and acquire the competencies that will enable them to manage their career and adapt to changes in their environment. Promoting self-governance may be regarded as an act of 'governmentality' which Foucault (2008) presents as a form of governance that can be exercised indirectly through processes that transforms citizens into self-steering and responsibility-taking individuals. Governmentality has been linked with the emergence of the neoliberal paradigm accompanied with an accentuated emphasis on individual's personal efforts and responsibility, which he describes as technologies of the self. It may be exercised by various agents, like teachers and counselors, who engage in discursive sensemaking processes through which individuals come to see themselves as responsible for their own fate and for the outcomes they gain within different life areas.

Self-technologies lead to 'responsibilisation' (see e.g. Rose, 1996) which refers to the reshaping of sense-making that makes individuals shift their explanations for problems or concerns from external agents or forces to the self. This mode of governmentality, thus emphasizes self-development and promotes the development of abilities assumed to enable self-governance, aligned with specific (political) objectives. According to Savickas (2015b) the role of the counselor is that of 'sense-giving' which he explains as an attempt to influence client 'sense-making' through a deconstruction and reconstruction of the clients stories that adds a new meaning to them. The counselor is asking questions not offering answers he claims, though it seems to be a specific kind of 'sense' he suggests adding to people's stories, for example regarding their resemblance with a Holland-type or how they may adjust their thoughts and actions to better match the environmental demands.

Exposing individual's thoughts and actions for systematic scrutiny and intervention and imposing on them sensible ways to think and act, Nissen (2009) describes as exercising pastoral power, which could be the case when the counselor promotes self-governance and encourages flexibility and adaptation. As Held (1995) puts it, treating the self as a story represents an antirealist perspective that risks ignoring the importance of individuals extralinguistic realities, changing nothing else than the alleged 'problem'-causing narrative. Being dislocated from our current story may not be the reason why we encounter career problems and our reconstructed stories may not provide us with the power to design our own life and career.

As Standing (2014) reminds us, we may encounter career and life challenges regardless of how we respond to societal demands or whether we have embraced the lifelong learning discourse and tried to adapt to changes. Most people may not have control over how their career may progress and many might not be in a position to make choices based on their preferences. Standing cautions against individualizing career problems which might be the result of the promotion of career management skills and self-governance. The precariat's feeling of detachment from society and loss of influences over their lives may cause dissatisfaction, frustration, and anger. If we do not listen to their real-life challenges and problems or provide more collective responses to people's fears, insecurities, and aspirations, we risk that many will be attracted to populist politicians and neo-fascist messages, he warns. I concur with Castells (1998) who believes in the liberating power of identity but discourages attempts to individualize behavior and make individuals responsible for what happens to them. I also believe that research is needed that address the questions raised in this article which might challenge the persistent ideology of free choices.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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