
Reader

Summary of:
Life designing

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Career Learning as a Success Factor for Lifelong Learning

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

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Research of literature

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Landstede



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Savickas, M., Nota L., Rossier J., Dauwalder J., Duarte M., Guichard J., Soresi S., Esbroeck R. van & Vianen A. van. Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75 (2009) 239-250

Abstract

At the beginning of the 21st century, a new social arrangement of work poses a series of questions and challenges to scholars who aim to help people develop their working lives. Given the globalization of career counseling, we decided to address these issues and then to formulate potentially innovative responses in an international forum. We used this approach to avoid the difficulties of creating models and methods in one country and then trying to export them to other countries where they would be adapted for use. This article presents the initial outcome of this collaboration, a counseling model and methods. The life-designing model for career intervention endorses 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, we have 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, J. (2005). Life-long self-construction. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 5, 111–124] and career construction [Savickas, M. L. (2005). The theory and practice of career construction. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: putting theory and research to work* (pp. 42–70). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley] that describe vocational behavior and its development. Thus, the framework is structured to be life-long, holistic, contextual, and preventive.

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This position paper states that “a new social arrangement of work” between employers and employees is needed because of “the globalization processes now underway in different parts of the world” and the “rapidly improving information technologies”. “Insecure workers in the information age must become lifelong learners who can use sophisticated technologies, embrace flexibility rather than stability, maintain employability, and create their own opportunities”. And these new conceptions of work life “recognize that career belongs to the person not the organization”! “*What am I going to make of my life?* This question is at issue for everyone as they negotiate a series of major transitions in their lives occasioned by changes in health, employment, and intimate relationships”. Answering this life-design question arouses ethical considerations because firstly, “individuals nowadays are forced to reflect on what matters most to them, because ...the individual feels bereft and alone in a world in which she or he lacks the psychological supports and the sense of security provided by more traditional settings. This loss of bearings necessitates reflection on one's life orientation. Secondly, people are increasingly aware of the new risks associated with our current way of life”. Therefore a refocusing of the goals of career intervention is needed. Savickas et al. state that a life-design intervention model requires a fundamental shift in paradigm: one that



“emphasizes the permanent co-evolution of individuals, the economy, and society”. This new model is based on five presuppositions:

1. **From traits and states to context:** “Professional identities should be seen as changing patterns derived from client stories rather than as static, abstract, and oversimplified profiles of client test scores.”
2. **From prescription to process:** “counsellors must discuss ‘how to do’ not ‘what to do’.”
3. **From linear causality to non-linear dynamics:** “Counsellors should adopt iterative strategies for problem solving and acquiring polyvalent expertise by using many different tools and methods”
4. **From scientific facts to narrative realities:** “rather than relying on group norms and abstract terms, [clients] should engage in activities and meaning-making that enable them to build some new view of themselves.
5. **From describing to modelling:** “to focus on modelling fractal patterns, striving to forecast emerging stable configurations of variables, rather than any single outcome variable in evaluation of counselling”.

Thinking from these five presuppositions Savickas et al. conclude that the basic framework for life-designing interventions is structured to be “life-long, holistic, contextual, and preventive”. Being so, this framework aims to increase clients’ adaptability, narrability, and activity. Adaptability means to “increase the classical five ‘Cs’ of career construction theory: concern, control, curiosity, confidence, and commitment.” Narrability refers to career interventions that “use a dialogue between clients and counsellors to assist clients to construct and narrate a 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”. Through activities, people build new dimensions of themselves, for example self-efficacy beliefs. They interact with other people from whom they receive feedback and with whom they build collective systems of representations. Building up of new views and representations through activity and interaction transforms self-concepts and may prompt re-interpretation of some life themes. Savickas et al. stress that “action is central ... because it involves behaviour plus meaning...The meaning may arise from prospective intention or retrospective reflection”.

The intervention model for life designing “relies on stories and activities rather than test scores and profile interpretations. Briefly sketched, the model has six general steps”. Successively, client and counsellor define the problem, they explore clients’ current system of subjective identity forms, open perspectives: “Through common discovery and re-authoring, stories can be reorganized, revised, and revitalized” , place the problem in a new story/perspective: this “enables the client to think about self from a perspective of some new or expected identity forms”, specify some activities: the client crafts a plan, and finally a “follow-up, both short-term and long-term”.

Savickas et al. stress that “vocational guidance should be see as a discipline of change and counsellors as change agents rather than professionals that deal mainly with diagnoses, or with more or less accurate predictions”. They end their interesting article with some remarks on training of practitioners for life designing, a research agenda and the next steps.