

The Next Decade in Career Counseling: Cocoon Maintenance or Metamorphosis?

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The authors, using a cocoon maintenance or metamorphosis metaphor, articulate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and future vision for career counseling. Major strengths in career counseling include the growth and development of career theory, research, and practice. Weaknesses are identified in terms of career counseling practices that maintain localized career standards. Opportunities exist for the profession to assist clients in redefining their careers on the basis of ownership and life stories. The continued devaluation of career counseling in counselor education programs is seen as a threat. The authors conclude with their vision for the future for the discipline and profession of career counseling.

After reading the task articulated by the editor of this special issue, a first thought was, "How can we possibly capture the essence of an organization that is 90 years old and provide strategies to advance the discipline in a short article?" "The Culturally Encapsulated Counselor" by Wrenn (1962) immediately came to mind, because in a few pages Wrenn created a classic article about change that has value some 40 years later. Wrenn noted that in the process of change, the world becomes increasingly smaller. Yet counselors continue to surround themselves "with a cocoon of *pretended* reality" (p. 445). Being unable to see outside the walls of our impermeable cocoons is a phenomenon Wrenn called "cocoon maintenance," or "cultural encapsulation" (p. 445).

In constructing our vision by identifying strategies to advance the discipline through a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis, we are mindful of our "pretend reality" and "cocoon maintenance." At the same time, we are also mindful of how the chrysalis does not become a beautiful butterfly without undergoing a change process. In fact, the insect must shed many layers to undergo a complete metamorphosis and produce the rich array of diverse colors. Thus, we attempt to advance the field through a progression from cocoon maintenance to "*cocoon metamorphosis*," as we examine career counseling—yesterday, today, and tomorrow. More specifically, we advance the vision of career counseling for the next 10 years by addressing the questions

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of (a) strengths: Where is career counseling past and present? (b) weaknesses: What forces are at work as career counselors face the future? (c) opportunities: What can career counselors do to better help clients? (d) threats: What are the specific challenges faced by the profession? and (e) vision: What do we see ahead for career counseling in the next decade?

Career Counseling Strengths—Cocoon Metamorphosis

The strengths of career counseling can be observed through the examination of the 90-year metamorphosis of the discipline. Out of concern for the human condition in society, Frank Parsons and other social reformers decided to attack the problems created by a time of unprecedented change and growing pains. Career counseling began as the vocational guidance movement out of a need for social reform that was spawned by a major technological shift from an agrarian society to an industrial society. DeBell (2001) characterized the period accordingly: "It was a time that ushered in industrialization, urbanization, and immigration—three factors that would shape the world of work in America for the rest of the century" (p. 78).

These technological changes were characterized by population shifts that came about through immigration to the United States by members of White ethnic groups, migration from rural to urban areas by freed slaves, and soldiers returning from World War I. Today, there are many global parallels to the problems of the early twentieth century (DeBell, 2001; Zytowski, 2001). Here in the early twenty-first century, individuals have moved from a postindustrial manufacturing society to the Information Age, maintained by telecommunications and technological gadgets. Over its 90-year history, career counseling has undergone a number of shifts and transitions.

There has been a dedicated cadre of career counseling professionals and a wealth of theories, research, and practice standards that have evolved from each transition. Much of the research has been theory driven—investigating numerous aspects of career behaviors and culminating in the practical application to career counseling. The section, *Getting Down to Cases*, which began appearing in *The Career Development Quarterly* in December 1986 under the editorship of David A. Jepsen; *The Career Counseling Casebook: A Resource for Practitioners, Students, and Counselor Educators* (Niles, Goodman, & Pope, 2002); and *Experiential Activities for Teaching Career Counseling Classes for Facilitating Career Groups* (Pope & Minor, 2000) are excellent examples of this praxis. There have also been the adoption and codification of career counseling practice standards. The career counseling movement has made enormous strides in its 90-year existence. This growth has been a major source of the field's strength.

Career Counseling Weaknesses—Cocoon Maintenance

Although career counseling is a well-grounded profession, it may be that 90 years later, the greatest weakness is that we, as career professionals, suffer from enclosing ourselves within a cocoon of pretend reality. Accord-

ing to Wrenn (1962), such a reality is based on the notion that the “present is enduring” and that reality is “based upon the past and the known, upon seeing that which is as though it would always be” (p. 445). A belief in an enduring present may limit serving present and future constituents and do little to perpetuate the discipline of career counseling. At this point, we reflect on Super’s (1993) admonition that counselors should be ambiverts “who turn either way or to any point on the compass and meet client needs” (p. 135). Thus, as career ambiverts, career counselors must examine the adverse forces that may have an impact on the vision for the future.

Globalization has placed the world at the front doorstep of the career counselor. People live in a culture of global markets, where the old adage “think globally, act locally” no longer applies, because new global markets require that people think and act in both arenas. Absent this new way of thinking, the career counselor may not be equipped to serve the global marketplace. Thus, acting locally may serve to impede the discipline of career counseling in several ways. First, the way that we, as career counselors, conceptualize work and career terminology may not be reflective of thinking from the perspective of both local and global arenas. In our view, we may be limited in our perception because there do not seem to be consistent ways to define career or career counseling terms. Herr (1996b) noted that language was often a problem when terminology was considered to be synonymous or interchangeable. In the literature, working definitions of career terminology are often defined in the context of an article by the author (e.g., Harris-Bowlsbey, 1996; Jepsen & Choudhuri, 2001). Watts (1996) supported the necessity for change by stating, “finding new meanings for career is one of the key tasks in the postindustrial age” (p. 52). This change may begin by examining the terminology of the discipline to establish “new meaning.”

A second limitation in the discipline of career counseling that is also related to global markets concerns the concept of work. Work is a universal phenomenon that defines who we are in relationship to society and others on the basis of cultural context. Understanding the many facets of work for an individual is a complex process that is linked to cultural context. In global markets, individuals must develop work-related activities that are indigenous to their cultural context. We are reminded of a story told by a colleague who served in the Peace Corps in a country in Africa. He created a One-Stop Career Center in the local library; however, none of the indigenous people used the center. He learned that in the culture of that African society, work-related problems were not resolved through the Western process of career counseling. Herr (2000) noted “the need to articulate a new theory of work that is, in many nations, not institutionally based but focuses attention on . . . elements of the ‘new career’ concept of self-management” (p. 295). Hall (1996) noted that career was an important aspect of work because “career represents the person’s entire life in the work setting” (p. 5). However, he stated that the career as previously known was dead, but he was quick to add that “people will have work lives that unfold over time, offering challenge, growth, and learning” (p. 1).

Career Counseling Opportunities—Breaking Out of the Cocoon

Inevitably, the chrysalis receives a signal that it is time for a change. Change involves twisting, turning, and breaking out of the cocoon that

was once thought to be impenetrable. Wrenn (1962) noted that change was a certainty and awesome, given “the rapidity and extensiveness of the changes anticipated” (p. 444). The awesome changes (e.g., changes in the demographics of the U.S. population, further unraveling of the welfare system, “rightsizing,” massive technology systems, rags-to-riches millionaires, and the gradual disappearance of the middle class) in all sectors of society in the previous decade have had a major impact on career counseling. Given the rapidity of change in the previous decade, even more drastic occurrences can be expected to influence ideas about work and career during the next decade. Career counselors must take advantage of change and seize the moment by once again advancing the discipline of career counseling.

We envision a paradigm shift in which all clients are considered “diverse populations” and meaning is assigned from a culturally relative perspective. This approach is especially significant in global markets where individuals participate in international consultation and collaboration. Stead and Harrington (2000) addressed context by calling for the indigenization of career counseling concepts that might then be suitable for international collaboration. Consistent with this line of thought, there continues to be a call for the examination of theory, research, and practice in context (Collin, 1996).

Subich and Simonson (2001) noted that “the call for the development of career counseling theories has become the anthem of the field” (p. 258). Several issues may be hampering this process. Although the call for new career theories is promising, there remain few congruent approaches suitable for understanding career counseling as a subjective and personal process (Parmer, 2002; Subich & Simonson, 2001). Yet, according to Subich (1993a), career as a personal process is an important concept, as attested to by the 22 submissions received for a special section of *The Career Development Quarterly* that Subich (1993b) edited.

The subjective and personal approaches emanate from the belief that career and work are socially constructed processes (Gergen, 1985). In these processes, meaning is assigned by the individual from a relational perspective. Savickas (1993) noted that as counselors explore meaning with clients, “career counseling [becomes] much more similar to personal counseling and psychotherapy” (p. 212). The process of meaning also facilitates what Savickas termed the clients’ “subjective career, that is life story” (p. 212). A new reality of personal and subjective career counseling needs to be explored from the following perspectives: systems (Worden, 2003), ecological (Herr, 1996a), and narrative (Worden, 2003). This new reality may facilitate understanding unresolved workforce issues such as sexual harassment, sexuality, violence, and mental health. Thus, as career counselors understand career choice, decisions, and transitions in the context of “life story,” they may be forced to emerge from their current encapsulations. As has been widely stated, “You are the one you have been waiting for!”

Career Counseling Threats—Shedding Layers of the Cocoon

There is an inherent vulnerability when old layers are shed. During this period of transition, threats to career counseling must be explored. Lack

of full workforce participation is a global threat. To ignore career issues globally threatens the discipline of career counseling and will have negative consequences for the workforce worldwide. Similarly, given the connectedness of global economies, career counselors should in concert begin addressing collaborative cross-cultural career initiatives. Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) noted that “the question of career development in other cultures is ignored” (p. 328). Although career counselors have begun to study Asia (Leong & Pope, 2002), they must also begin to study career counseling in Africa and Latin America. Career counselors must ask whether their theories and methods have relevance cross-culturally. For instance, in order to work in global communities, there must be recognition of nuances in language that may not be understood by non-native speakers. As such, career counselors have an added responsibility for finding inventive and creative methods for communicating information across language barriers.

Another threat is the perception (which has been documented) of a lack of interest in career counseling (Fitzgerald & Osipow, 1988; Heppner, O’Brien, Hinkleman, & Flores, 1996). The remaining vestiges of academic indifference toward career counseling in many counseling programs are a threat to both future counselors and clients. The devaluing of career counseling preparation in the academy speaks to a continued lack of understanding of the intersection and integration of career and personal counseling. Yet, we are reminded that good general counseling skills are the basis for effective career counseling competence (Engels, Minor, Sampson, & Splete, 1995).

Another threat is the possibility that career counselors will not be able to keep up with the demands of technological growth. Career counselors have used computers in the process of career exploration for 30 years. The vast amount of career information found on the Internet is available worldwide and offers numerous opportunities. However, Iaccarino (2000) noted that often the information was not presented in an organized manner and frequently lacked credibility. This has implications for service delivery enhancement and the creation of user-friendly ways to present information to clients. In addition, career counselors must teach their clients how to assess the vast amount of information available through technology. The counselor himself or herself must also be competent in sorting through the large amount of information. As Walz (2000) noted, “Cybercounseling is an idea whose time has come, but we as counselors are not yet ready to say with conviction what it really is or how it should be employed” (p. 406).

Absent the means to confront these threats, career counselors’ ability to meet the demands of a constantly changing workforce will be compromised. Any change worldwide is significant because in spite of who we are or where we live, we are all closely linked with the ills or well-being of one another. Thus, career counseling professionals must not succumb to what is termed *cocooning*—the illusion of comfort and feeling safe and secure (Popcorn & Marigold, 1996). Instead, we, as career counselors, must work to support a workforce that is fully engaged in a global community. If career counseling fails to move beyond security in the next decade, we can only expect that

the gaps will continue to widen between winners and losers, between the Haves and Have-Nots. What we’re talking about goes beyond money. We’re talking about the vast division of Techno-Haves, Education-Haves, Family-Haves, and Happiness-Haves with their counterparts, the sadly Have-Nots. (Popcorn & Marigold, 1996, p. 10)

Career counselors and career educators have the requisite knowledge, skills, and competencies to counter these threats. Their clients and profession are counting on them to do so!

Vision—Metamorphosis to the Butterfly

Metamorphosis represents our vision of the future. As part of this vision, we offer the following mission statement:

Career counseling is a discipline of trained professionals dedicated to providing holistic, contextual, life-span counseling to a diverse clientele. The goal is to provide counseling services that address both career and personal issues in order to meet the needs of individuals in schools, families, and communities worldwide.

In our view, Richardson's (1993) thesis about work is quite contemporary and offers the opportunity to assist clients toward the future. She advocated that career counselors move from the study of career to what she termed *work as a location*, with the focus on the study of the role of work in people's lives. Richardson suggested that studying work in people's lives presented the opportunity to pursue new lines of inquiry not previously examined in career research. Examining work and career from new perspectives affords clients the opportunity to take ownership of their career choices and decisions, thus, placing work in the holistic cultural context of the individual (Parmer, 2002). This is an important concept in the work of the career counselor both locally and globally because it has application to any client. This is also consistent with Hall's (1996) notion about a "*protean career*—a career driven more by the individual than the organization" (p. xi). This approach of career ownership may allow career counselors to provide life-span career counseling to all segments of the population.

As part of career counselors' metamorphosis, it is necessary to provide direction in the discipline by operationalizing competencies. The new work environment does not support the status quo, but rather is an environment in which competence is paramount. Competencies based on standards are now the driving force in education and counseling disciplines (e.g., Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992, and Competencies for Counseling Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Clients; Association for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues in Counseling, n.d.). The National Career Development Association (NCDA; 1997) has embraced 11 competencies that could be indigenized intra- or interculturally. Therefore, career counseling's greatest opportunity for the future lies in the ability to operationalize competencies for the next decade.

Another aspect of the mission of career development is to correct the lack of attention to mental health issues and the emotional components of work in career counseling (Herr, 1989). For example, topics such as work dysfunctions (Lowman, 1993), racial anger (Abernathy, 1995), disparity in earnings for similar educational attainment (Grotsky & Pager, 2001), or feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness (Wallerstein, 1992) are important aspects of work. Rapid change in the next decade is likely to create

additional stressors that cause mental anguish for individuals and families. It is vitally important that the work of the career counselor, in combination with the work of other service providers, creates a climate of support for families, which over time might forestall workplace violence or other ills.

Career counseling and intervention with persons of marginalized identity remain ongoing goals. When we refer to marginalized identities, we are speaking about the groups in society that have been historically relegated to the fringes of society and that career counseling has yet to serve fully. Included in this group are women, gay men and lesbians, and people of color. Although there has been considerable recent research dealing with the career issues of women and people of color, these areas have yet to be fully developed. At the same time, Pope, Prince, and Mitchell (2000) indicated that career counselors and theorists have yet to provide appropriate career counseling for gay male and lesbian clients.

In our opinion, other constituents in dire need of career counseling include non-college-bound individuals, urban and rural youth, persons living with HIV/AIDS, along with individuals who have limited command of English. The career opportunities for these groups may be especially restricted, given the environmental constraints and barriers that they will need to transcend on their career paths. It is incumbent on career counselors to examine and assess their biases and prejudices so that they can provide the needed career services to these growing populations.

Finally, if career counseling as a discipline is to live up to the many demands of globalization, career counselors must be proactive in the next decade. The cocoon metaphor provides insight into the evolution and change process in career counseling. However, Popcorn and Marigold (1996) offered a unique perspective on what it takes to guide and facilitate the necessary changes revealed in this SWOT analysis. From their perspective, change is facilitated through a bright idea or surge of information referred to as a *CLICK* (Courage, Letting Go, Insight, Commitment, and Know-How).

In sum, through each transition from vocational guidance to career counseling, an identity and culture of professionalism have been created. Among the many influences have been the status of NCDA and the relationship with its parent organization, the American Counseling Association. In addition, the many publications of NCDA, including *The Career Development Quarterly* and materials published after NCDA national conferences, have been heuristic in guiding theory, research, and practice. At each juncture, career counseling has made major contributions to work and career development. Ninety years later, we conclude that all of these events have made career counseling a viable and strong discipline. We congratulate you and extend to you the mantra of "only the strong survive." *CLICK!*

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