

New Realities in the Work World: the Impact on Workers and on the Professional Practice of Career Counsellors

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Abstract

This article starts out by describing the main changes that have occurred in the work world from the middle of the last century till today. The authors then discuss the results of recently conducted research into new types of employment, the diversity of career paths, the growing complexity of career choices, the difficulty of work-family balance, and new social representations of work. Finally, they briefly analyze how these changes are affecting the professional practice of career counsellors.

Once associated with difficult situations and largely reserved for the poor, paid work began to serve, starting in the 1940s, as the main safety net for social risks and as a clear sign that a person was participating in the development of society (Castel, 1995). Modernity, which accompanied the effects of the industrial revolution, started out as a period of collective fulfillment in which paid work played an important role as a regulator of social order (Chalifour, 1997). In the last twenty years however, the work world has undergone considerable change at the economic, social, and technological levels. These changes have led to the emergence of new forms of work that are more demanding, flexible and nonstandard, and to the appearance of new issues in socio-occupational integration.

The reconfiguration of the work world is reducing, for a large segment of the work force, the chances of finding a lasting and satisfying job. Workers now have to make several transitions in this evolving, uncertain context where career paths are no longer straight, upward-bound, and lifelong.

Consequently, they must re-evaluate their work market status all throughout their career and make numerous occupational and personal choices. These challenges encourage people to adopt a different view about their career and re-define the place of work in their lives. For some people, the diverse statuses and employment situations give them the freedom and space they need to fulfil themselves in other life roles. Others, however, feel it is impossible to find a stimulating, enriching job that also meets their daily needs. In certain cases, the lack of occupational and financial stability can, regardless of age and gender, result in a decline in living conditions and make it increasingly complex to manage occupational, family, and social responsibilities. These circumstances indirectly contribute to making guidance and career counselling an important social issue as well as a process likely to last from the beginning to the end of people's working lives (Guichard & Huteau, 2001). In order to maximize their chances of finding and keeping a job and their ability to deal with the related problems, a growing number of people are turning towards career counsellors. However, while the current structure of the work world affects many types of people, this structure also makes it more complicated for career counsellors to help their clients make personal and occupational choices. Counsellors must adjust to the characteristics of the people they are guiding, to the possibilities of different fields of work, and to the demands of the work world to which they themselves are subjected.

Given the above briefly outlined elements, the first goal of this article will

be to discuss the results of recently conducted research into the many new forms of work that are being created, focusing, in particular, on how workers are affected and how they attempt to deal with the inherent challenges. The second goal of this article will be to analyze how these changes are impacting on the professional practice of career counsellors.

Changes in the Work World

The economic benefits of the Second World War (1939-1945) pushed Canada and most of the industrialized countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) into a period of prosperity (1945-1975)¹ which was without precedent in terms of its scale (Crompton & Vickers, 2000; Singh, 2004).

The relative stability of this prosperous period was characterized by full employment and facilitated by the emergence of the welfare state, all of which helped to reinforce paid work and the redistribution of wealth (Chalifour, 1997). Because the workforce was not sufficient enough to ensure industrial productivity, countless workers, many of whom came from the rural sector, seized the chance offered during this period to escape poverty and improve their living conditions (Paugam, 2004).

In addition to full employment, it was normal for workers to find a stable, permanent job (Marchand, 1998). The governments of that period likewise invested in social security policies and programs dealing, in particular, with unemployment, health, family, and retirement (Bédard & Grignon, 2000; Desrochers, 2000). Unions were most

active during the 1970s, and, due to the economic stability of the time, had more bargaining power when negotiating their work conditions. Moreover, a large number of women and young baby-boomers also began to work.

Nonetheless, certain authors such as Singh (2004) have stated that 1945-1975 period, from a purely statistical point of view, was an "anomaly" in the history of industrialized countries' economic development. The 1973-1975 oil crisis and the 1981-1982 recession quickly demonstrated that the "thirty glorious years" were nothing other than an exceptional economic period. These crises were marked, among other things, by high unemployment, loss of jobs, and increased inflation (Crompton & Vickers, 2000). The recession in the 1990s created similar effects and though fewer workers lost their jobs than during the 1980s, those who did tended to stay unemployed longer (Bédard & Grignon, 2000).

There has clearly been a considerable change in the work world when we look back over the last few decades. Currently, even though countries like Canada, and in particular some of its provinces, have full or close-to-full employment, socio-occupational paths are nonetheless becoming increasingly precarious. The upheaval that occurred in the middle and particularly at the end of the 1970s disillusioned many workers. Indeed, stable work is no longer the norm. It has given way to nonstandard work² which, according to Matte, Baldino and Courchesne (1998), increased by 135% between 1976 and 1995, and could even proportionately surpass standard work by 2017. People who are entering or re-entering the labour market are especially affected by the rise in this type of employment. This is particularly true for women, immigrants, younger, and older workers (Conseil permanent de la jeunesse, 2001). Many people now find it very difficult to find suitable work because of this more flexible, nonstandard, and complex type of employment. In this context where one's educational level is no longer enough to ensure a stable career path (Fournier, Pelletier & Beaucher, 2003), workers, young and old alike, are experimenting with numerous social and occupational transi-

tions that are often unpredictable and involuntary (Fournier & Bujold, 2005).

There are those who believe that these changes in the work world are the result of structural factors such as globalization, international competition, and technological improvements (Matte & al., 1998). At the same time that world trade is being liberalized, international competition is becoming more intense. This competition is most evident in North America and Western Europe where labour costs are high (Van Liemt, 2004). Companies have consequently adopted a series of "flexible" measures intended to increase competitiveness and confront constant, ferocious, and unpredictable competition by producing more at a lower cost (Desrochers, 2000; Vinokur, 1997). These structural changes have also made the work lives of people more complex, in particular because of the new skills and the new efficiency standards that are required (Appay, 1997).

This new configuration has led to a different view of the role of workers and greater recognition of their knowledge (Capron, 2004). Workers are no longer expected to be drones who execute a simple task (Paugam, 2003). They are required, whatever their qualifications, to play a more active role in their work (Paugam, 2000).

Even though the greater recognition accorded to employees has resulted in more work latitude, this latitude can also be attributed to a general improvement in the workers' qualifications and the introduction of new technologies (Paugam, 2003). Improving technologies have not only made the production process more mentally demanding, they have made it more flexible and continuous (Capron, 2004). New information and communication technologies such as the Internet, e-mail, telephone, and videoconference services are resulting in an ever faster work rate. Nonetheless, while greater use of technology tends to favour an ever-more qualified labour force, it also excludes unqualified workers, thereby widening the gap between the two (Desrochers, 2000).

Even though these recent changes are making some workers' tasks easier and more satisfying, the greater intensity, stress and fatigue has engendered more suffering for other workers

(Capron, 2004; De Bandt, Dejours & Dubar, 1995). Subjected to tight deadlines and intense productivity pressure (Paugam, 2000), workers, to be efficient in their work, must deal every day with sometime paradoxical demands involving prescribed work, their expected latitude, and the real possibilities available to them in terms of the time, material, and information needed to carry out tasks (Huez, 1997).

Furthermore, more intense work and a lack of job and financial security sometimes contributes to a decline in living conditions and makes it increasingly complex to manage occupational, family, and social responsibilities (Burchell, Ladipo & Wilkinson, 2002; Fournier & Bujold, 2005; Hoque & Kirkpatrick, 2003; Lachance & Brassard, 2003; Malenfant, Larue, Jetté, Vézina & St-Arnaud, 2004; Spain, Bédard & Paiement, 2006).

Over the last few years, researchers at the Centre de recherche et d'intervention sur l'éducation et la vie au travail (CRIÉVAT, centre for research and interventions in education and work life) have conducted considerable research into the new forms that work is taking, examining, from different points of view, their impact on various clientele. Several of these studies have served as a basis for the following section, which pays particular attention to current career path challenges, ranging from complex occupational and life choices to work-family balance and changes in the social representation of work.

New Forms of Employment and Diverse Career Paths

Research that has been undertaken by researchers from CRIÉVAT in the last fifteen years among different groups of workers has led to a better understanding of career paths based on non-standard work. Three main studies were analyzed in order to describe how these new types of employment affect people's lives at work and outside work. The primary research method used was that of the interpretative paradigm in education research (Boutin, 2000; Poisson, 1991). Semistructured interviews were conducted with all the subjects. The first study, which was longitudinal, looked at the career entry of a group of 150 graduates³ up to six years after graduating

(Fournier, Pelletier & Beaucher, 2003). When the researchers realized that, even after this period, almost 60% of the graduates still held nonstandard jobs, a second, cross-sectional study was conducted with a group of 125 workers from 20 to 65 years old who had held nonstandard jobs for at least three years (Bujold & Fournier, 2008; Fournier & Bujold, 2005). A third study, likewise cross-sectional, was also conducted among workers 45 and over who were on an atypical career path.

Some interesting observations can be drawn from the results of these three studies concerning the repercussions of nonstandard employment on the work and non-work lives of these people. For example, close to one third of the people surveyed considered that their career path allowed them to fulfil themselves and gain work experience that they otherwise would not have had in a permanent job. These people reported being well integrated in the labour market despite the irregularity of their work life. They had the impression, moreover, of having achieved, over the years, some mastery of a particular field of which they were proud. And even though many of them pointed out that they would like to improve their general employment conditions, especially their revenue, most of them observed that they had a certain control over their work life despite their nonstandard work status. This control allowed them, furthermore, to pursue their goals in life. Some of the participants specifically mentioned that they were able to take advantage of periods of unemployment by spending more time with their families, in community activities, or in training programs. Nonstandard work provided them with the opportunity to undertake significant projects in other parts of their lives. In brief, for approximately a third of the participants who were interviewed over the years, their relationship with work was rather positive. Far from destabilizing them, their work lives, which were punctuated by a series of relatively unpredictable jobs, helped them to keep their lives moving in the right direction by meeting their needs, motivations, and aspirations.

However, for a majority of the people interviewed (approximately two thirds), the repercussions of regularly

occurring nonstandard work seemed to be rather detrimental. Some of them held jobs for which they were plainly overqualified and considered that their abilities were not sufficiently recognized, a fact which did not contribute to building a positive occupational identity. Others worked in relatively stable jobs that sometimes were even relatively well paid but which they did not enjoy. For others, each improvement in their situation was followed by a decline which gave them the impression that they continually had to start over from "scratch." These people were especially disappointed about not being accepted and integrated in a given field. They sometimes mentioned being tired of continuously having to prove themselves and depending on the good will of their employers. Their occupational situation generated considerable stress, in particular because of the uncertainty about their short and medium-term future and even, in some cases, their immediate survival. Finally, the vast majority of those who did not enjoy their atypical career path likewise reported feeling short-changed in non-work activities and projects. In short, close to two thirds of the interviewees felt that regularly occurring nonstandard work disqualified them from normal life and led to rather negative perceptions of work: self-fulfilment opportunities were limited, occupational identities took a beating, non-work life was greatly destabilized, and, for a few respondents, career paths were synonymous with failure and powerlessness. These people considered that the balance between the different areas of their lives was fragile and unstable, that non-work projects were difficult to envisage, and that atypical career paths led to a decline in general living conditions and to a very pronounced feeling of occupational and personal precariousness.

The interviewed workers developed strategies for navigating career paths founded on non-standard work, the main strategies involving a modification of their career and life goals. For example, some people decided to change from one field of work to another due to difficult work conditions that were jeopardizing their family life (e.g., irregular work hours) or that were keeping them from developing a more solid, coherent

occupational identity (e.g., too much part-time work). A second strategy consisted in redefining one's life values and goals. This was particularly the case for people who described how they had completely re-evaluated their life choices and deliberately renounced the competition of the work world and its corresponding performance, efficiency, and productivity values. This is likewise true for those who chose to change the way they consumed and thereby reduce their financial needs. A third strategy involved working very hard so as to cope with occupational and financial precariousness. People who adopted this strategy frequently felt overrun by workplace demands, often feeling they had no life outside of work. From their point of view however, overworking became the only way of ensuring their financial independence and meeting employer demands, and as such, constituted a relatively acceptable compromise. The last common strategy consisted in choosing to see work from a purely utilitarian viewpoint and to no longer personally invest oneself in this area of life. This was the case, for example, for those who actively searched for personal gratification and well-being outside of work life and saw their job as a means to pursuing personal projects. It is obvious that the strategies that people developed to adapt to the new realities of the work world involved choices whose repercussions extended well beyond their work life. In a context marked by insecure, convoluted career paths, the career and life choices that people made were constantly questioned, necessitating the consideration of complex and diverse elements.

The Growing Complexity of Career and Life Choices

Given these changes in the work world, what is a person's career path now based on? In an attempt to answer this question, two successive studies were conducted, the first with 60 women from 16 to 62 years of age, the second with 12 men from 24 to 62. These studies were exploratory, inductive, and qualitative in nature, and employed a semistructured interview for data collection.

The study conducted with the women indicated that the main way that

the participants shaped their identity and developed life projects was through their social relationships. Work life was not an isolated, separate aspect of their lives. All the different life roles, including in their love, family, and social lives, influenced the direction their career paths took. While participants saw work as an aspect of their lives that was essential to their fulfilment, they did not separate it from the rest. This view, which is referred to as a global perspective, led to complex, tortuous, and distinctive career paths. This type of path was composed of a series of commitments, stoppages, and rehiring in which continuity was found in the social relationships that gave meaning to the path, as described from a subjective, reflective viewpoint by the interviewed women.

The relationship dimension, as it has been progressively defined through previous research, consists in an openness to, quest for, and availability for social interactions that are made up of reciprocal relations which allow people to develop and know themselves. The relationship dimension has four dynamic, complementary aspects that motivate, initiate, orientate, and integrate the activities and values that are pursued as part of one's self-fulfilment at work.

The careers of the interviewed women did not unfold in a linear manner. In addition to being influenced by the current changes in the work world, they were also affected by conjugal, maternal, family, social, economic, financial, and technological realities (Spain, Bédard & Paiement, 2003). A typology of the strategies used by the interviewed women emerged from the first results. It was comprised of three main types, namely: the exclusive strategy, which was used by women who concentrated on one role at a time; the integrated strategy, used by those who invested in work and family life by planning various life cycle stages; and the intermittent strategy, employed by women who approached work life and family in an unpredictable and sporadic manner (Spain & Bédard, 1990).

A subsequent study explored the career paths and choices of men. There were linear paths where the initial training led to a job with one or several employers. There were also sinuous paths

where the initial training set the starting direction, though several paths were then taken. Fractured paths were, however, the most frequent. They were made up of a series of career breaks where the initial training did not necessarily correspond to the subsequent choices. The participants on this path had a weakened occupational identity and difficulties making employment choices. Their career progression was unpredictable, sporadic, and interspersed with periods of unemployment. The men in this sample displayed a path diversity that was attributable not only to the new parameters of the work world but also to family, social, and economic contexts. According to them, taking other, significant people into account had affected their occupational decisions many times (Spain, Bédard & Paiement, 2004).

The occupational decisions that the men took involved pragmatic, relationship, and developmental issues. The pragmatic issues could be seen in the need to earn a living or increase one's income, the desire to seize an opportunity or be more comfortable, the wish to improve their work or living conditions, and the way they wished to spend their time and organize their lives. Relationship issues could be seen in the proximity or distance between teenagers and their parents, siblings and peers, between young workers and their colleagues, boss, and clients, between spouses, between parents and their children, and between mentors and their apprentices. They could also be seen in the citizen's view of their social usefulness and the adult's quest for recognition, influence, or power. As for developmental issues, they refer to the stimulating effect on one's personal evolution of returning to school, taking training courses, drawing lessons from colleagues, taking pleasure in one's work, being promoted, using one's skills, fulfilling one's ambitions, meeting challenges, taking on responsibilities, performing, succeeding, creating, respecting oneself, and giving priority to one's quality of life. These issues were combined in various ways depending on the person. The choices made by participants increasingly had to take into account spouses and other family members, obliging people to learn how

to reconcile their occupational role with their other roles in life.

Work-Family Balance

Changes in the work world, particularly the feminization of the labour force and the growth in two-income couples, has given rise to a lifestyle in which many people have to deal with several occupational and family responsibilities (Lachance & Brassard, 2003). Given that the risk of incompatibility and conflict between the different life roles has increased, couples must now reconsider who does what in the family and house so as to respect both members' occupational aspirations. These changes led the researchers and practitioners to ask questions about the relationship between work and family life. It soon became clear that a better understanding of the factors underlying inter-role conflicts was needed due to the conflicts' harmful consequences for the participants, their families, and their workplaces.

Though the inter-sex differences in the reconciliation of life roles have been studied many times, the results have often been contradictory. A quantitative study (Lachance, Brassard & Tétreau, 2005) was conducted with 106 professionals (53 men and 53 women) who were matched in terms of age and job title so as to control for third variables that might influence the results. The results seem to indicate that there were more similarities than differences between the sexes with respect to individual, family, and organizational characteristics. The women were similar to men in terms of career concerns, life role salience, work attitudes, dyadic adjustment, and life satisfaction. Likewise, they did not report more work-family conflicts, even though the description of family roles highlighted a significant difference in work-home management conflicts. Furthermore, the considerable differences in the distribution of tasks were in keeping with the traditional model of male and female roles and suggest that family responsibilities were primarily the mother's domain whatever her work status. Even though male involvement with the children and the domestic chores has been increasing over the years, the men's participation in these activities was still less than that of

the women. The results of a quantitative study conducted among 133 ophthalmologists were consistent with the above-mentioned results (Viviers, Lachance, Maranda & Ménard, 2007). The ophthalmologist study revealed, moreover, that the large number of hours devoted to parental and domestic responsibilities was related to family-work conflicts and distress, women under 45 being particularly affected. That being said, these ophthalmologists noted that work interfered with personal life more than personal life interfered with work. This result might have been attributable to the personal investment required by their profession that limits the energy and time available for their other activities. Given that there are precise professional expectations and formally prescribed roles, it was easier for the ophthalmologists to limit their family commitments since they had more control over this area of life.

Given that people invest more in roles that they deem important and that the stressors stemming from these roles have more impact on well-being, it was postulated that the risk of experiencing conflict and its consequences is greater in people who accord considerable importance to several life roles. This postulate was examined in a quantitative study of 486 adults (Lachance, Gilbert & Tétreau, 2006). Three commitment profiles for the roles of worker, spouse, parent, and person in charge of a home management were identified. The first two were characterized by a high level of engagement in either the family (FAMILY) or worker (WORK) roles, whereas the third group was comprised of people who were strongly committed to both areas of life (DUALITY). Contrary to expectations, the people in the DUALITY profile did not report more inter-role conflicts or consequences. This finding not only reinforces the growth hypothesis stating that having several roles has beneficial effects, it underlines the importance of considering the reasons why people take on their life roles. The study likewise revealed that people in the DUALITY and FAMILY profiles had greater life satisfaction, a better dyadic adjustment, and less work-home management conflicts than people in the WORK profile. The family would thus seem to represent one of the

most important areas of life.

Surprisingly, gender distribution across the profiles was not significantly different. A similar commitment to work among highly educated people, as well as the modern desire to fulfil oneself both in one's work and family life could explain these results. Moreover, it is important to distinguish between commitment, which corresponds to the importance of a role for a person's identity, and participation, which refers to time invested. This distinction helps us to understand why the men and women in the sample showed similar profile distributions even though they were different in terms of work-leisure, work-home management, and family-work conflicts, as well as in terms of the time devoted to their various roles.

So as to identify the strategies that facilitate the reconciliation of life roles, three studies were conducted among populations that were likely to find it difficult to assume their occupational and family responsibilities due to the amount of time invested in the care of a child or older family member. In the first study, home-based interviews were conducted with 139 parents of school-aged children with an intellectual disability and 4 focus groups were held (Lachance, Richer, Côté & Poulin, 2004). The second study involved 159 couples from the "sandwich generation" who had to care for both children and an aging parent. Of the 159 who answered the questionnaire, 36 then participated in semistructured, individual interviews (Lachance, Maltais & Ducharme, 2005). The third, qualitative study involved 60 semistructured interviews of caregivers helping aged family members and living in 7 different environments (Maltais, Lachance, Richard & Ouellet, 2006).

The result of the quantitative parts of the first two studies showed that the average level of inter-role conflict was fairly low (Lachance & al., 2004, 2005). Indeed, undertaking several roles seemed to represent a source of personal accomplishment and to contribute to a feeling of competency. Some of the parents and caregivers stated that holding a job gave them a break from caregiving, in addition to the financial advantages.

The analysis of the focus groups and the semistructured interviews nonetheless added nuance to these con-

clusions. Many of the parents and caregivers, in particular the women, had lowered their occupational goals by opting for a non-standard job, taking temporary retirement, or dropping out of the labour market because it was too difficult to reconcile their various life roles (Lachance & al., 2004, 2005; Maltais & al., 2006). Furthermore, this decision was more often imposed than chosen. Insufficient social and organizational measures for work-family balance led these people to consider more personal solutions which, though they undoubtedly reduced inter-role conflicts, also put several of the respondents in more precarious financial and social positions (Lachance & al., 2004). It is thus not at all surprising that there was a disturbing proportion of participants with a high stress level in the quantitative part of the studies.

Even though the traditional family model of the male provider might seem outdated to younger generations who are entering the labour market expecting equal employment opportunities and equal sharing of family responsibilities, the research results from groups at risk of inter-role conflicts suggest that the gap between the sexes is far from having been closed.

The latest changes in the work world have thus had a considerable influence on people's personal and occupational paths, particularly on the way they see work, that is as an activity which plays a central role in their existence.

Social Representation of Work

Whether it be because of new post-materialist values (Inglehart, 1997), a social representation of work based on pleasure (Flament, 1996), the new capitalist spirit (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999), or the promotion of self-fulfilment at work (Lalivie d'Épinay, 1998), people are forming new representations of their work which are influenced by and are in turn influencing the new conditions of socio-occupational integration.

For example, a recent study of business administration students showed that these students had internalized, during their university career, the new norms of the business world (Negura, Maranda & Yergeau, 2006). Twenty-one

of these students were invited to take part in a semistructured interview on "objective and subjective time." The data revealed that the students' social representation of time was strongly influenced by the ideas of excellence and productivity conveyed by the present-day managerial culture. The students' time was structured to optimize the use of available resources so as to satisfy the most demanding requirements of employers. This representation perhaps explains the excellent competitiveness of these students in the labour market. According to the research results however, their well-being was greatly affected; the students talked about the strong emotional tension that stemmed from the conflict between their perception of their internal resources and that of institutional, university requirements.

An earlier study that was carried out among 70 company managers from the Quebec City and Montreal regions shed light on the internalization of new productivity standards (Negura & Maranda, 2004). The study looked at how the managers' attitudes toward hiring of former drug addicts are produced by two «natural logics» (Grize, 1993), based on their social representations of ex-addicts and companies. The managers who had a business-related education (MBA, industrial relations, etc.) tended to refuse to hire former drug users since the latter represented a risk for the company. In the managers' eyes, the sole goals of their companies were productivity and excellence, concepts which were incompatible with the acknowledged failures of ex-drug users. On the other hand, managers who had completed non-business-related studies (work psychology, sociology, etc.) were more open to hiring these people. Their openness was based on the idea that companies had a social responsibility and that drug abuse could not be considered as a uniquely personal weakness. This study thus demonstrated that the social representations of managers gave rise to specific attitudes when hiring new employees, especially with regard to those whose profiles seemed out of keeping with the expected performance criteria.

In another study (Negura, in press) conducted with 14 independent⁴ workers from the Ottawa and Montreal re-

gions, a paradoxical perception of their general work situation was observed. Despite the fact that the participants in this study declared that they felt overloaded and distressed about their unstable work status, they also said that they were generally satisfied about their work situation. Their social representation of work could explain this apparent paradox. The fact that they saw work as a constant, disciplined effort eliminated the psychological tension created by the heavy workload that they considered to be normal. They perceived self-employment as an entrepreneurial activity that involved risk and instability, flexibility and performance, thereby leading them to put the insecurity stemming from their job status into perspective and to reduce the probability of being dissatisfied with their work. The latitude that came from this type of work was even sometimes seen as a means of self-fulfilment as well as a possibility to reconcile work with other areas of life, particularly spousal relationships.

The social representations of both employers and employees play an important role in the present-day socio-occupational integration of people, especially people who are at risk of being excluded. Knowing these representations could greatly help career counsellors in their work.

Impact on the Work of Career Counsellors

As has just been shown, the current labour market is dominated by incessant changes – some companies start up while others close down, while still others develop at such a fast pace that their employees must be able to adapt quickly and acquire new skills. Likewise, the choice in training and career possibilities has increased steadily since the 1950s (Cooper & Burke, 2002). All of this has had a direct influence on people's educational and career-integration paths. Many young people now find it hard to choose, integrate or re-integrate into careers, keep a job, deal with reassignments and new jobs, conciliate work and personal life, and prepare their retirement. Consequently, more numerous and diversified requests for professional career counselling are arising out of the complex situations created by this uncertainty, instability and questioning.

These new realities demand a broader approach from counselling. As has been noted in the literature, there is no one theory or practice in helping relations that can pretend to be universal (Hansen, 2002, 2006; Kemmis, 2005; Le Bossé, Chamberland, Bilodeau & Bourassa, in press; Polkinghorne, 1999). Counselling that is sensitive to labour market, social, and life-style changes, to the numerous personal and occupational paths, and to the ensuing difficult guidance choices does not easily incorporate stereotypical, unequivocal answers. When modern career counsellors work every day in a precise context with clients experiencing "common" problems, they must regularly reconsider the way they see and do things in order to meet the particular needs of each client even if they as counsellors prefer a certain theoretical approach. For example, the medical model,⁵ which has strongly inspired the approach to helping relationships and the expectations of clients, is increasingly revealing its limitations in this regard (Le Bossé & al., in press). Indeed, another epistemology of our practice is slowly taking root (Schön, 1996) which encourages practitioners to adopt another approach that is better adapted to contemporary situations. Several studies have recently examined the evolution of professional practices – in particular those in career counselling and in education (Bourassa, Leclerc & Filteau, 2005; Peavy, 2001; Perrenoud, 2001, 2004a). The various possible implications of this new approach for career counsellors are briefly presented here.

The counsellor as guide

One thing is becoming increasingly clear when the work of present-day practitioners such as career counsellors in education or employment related services is studied: if they are to understand and resolve the specific difficulties their clients are going through, they cannot do so without their clients. Seen from this viewpoint, clients are no longer considered to be "undecided, wounded, or destitute patients" whom practitioners must treat with remedies derived from accepted theories. Rather, they are seen as being competent,⁶ and this competency is just as necessary for successful counselling as that of the

counsellor. Clients have a valuable understanding of their situation along with personal and even professional experience that should be put to use in the helping process. Clients also, however, ponder about where they are going, run into difficulties, and perceive needs that they cannot always satisfy by themselves. Counsellors thus become valuable allies who help clients find answers and solutions that are useful and significant. In this approach, practitioners no longer fulfill the role of specialists in the classical sense of the term, of holders of a grand theory (Polkinghorne, 1999) that is used to reveal the true nature of things and to indicate the precise measures which need to be taken to solve career problems. Rather, they act as guides (Ardoino, 2000; Beauvais, 2006; Clavier & di Domizio, 2007) who bring their personal experience and skills to a task that involves the co-construction of meaning, projects, and alternatives that will allow their clients to progressively overcome the difficulties they encounter.

The counsellor: an astute handyman

Because they cannot rely on absolute truths and unfailing procedures, and because they must continually reinvent the wheel and adapt their approach to the situations facing them, counsellors can also be seen as astute handy-men (Peavy, 2001; Perrenoud, 1994, 2004b). They must work with and for their clients to find possible ways of solving problems or carrying out important projects. To accomplish this, counsellors must rely on their professional habitus,⁷ modifying it when need be, draw inspiration from pertinent concepts and theories, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, turn to colleagues and other people, and develop new ideas and strategies to be tested in real life. The process and results of their work become a unique composition that is validated through its progressive adjustments and concrete effects.

From an epistemological viewpoint, this is a socio-constructivist and eclectic approach. It is deemed socio-constructivist because of its intersubjectivity and its relationship with the Other, whether real or symbolic, and also because of its attempt to develop more viable ap-

proaches to dealing with the questions and problems stemming from the personal, cultural, and social realities of their clients (Peavy, 2001). It is also deemed eclectic⁸ (Hansen, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1999) because it draws, fairly explicitly, on different approaches and disciplines (Morin, 1997), and because it uses diverse means to help its clients. Nothing is neglected by counsellors to help clients develop solutions and personal abilities that can be employed to overcome their obstacles, uncertainty, and distress.

The counsellor: a complexity analyst

As we have seen, career counsellors are operating in a new socio-occupational reality by trying to find the best possible solutions for the different needs of the people and groups they accompany. Counsellors find themselves at the centre of different, complex situations that influence both their professional choices and the possibilities available to the people consulting them. To take advantage of these complex situations, practitioners must first be able to analyze them and understand the dynamic relations between the various elements and levels; in short, they must be capable of complex thinking (Morin, 2005). This is accomplished for example by: understanding how clients represent their current difficulties; taking into account the clients' specific skills and limitations; considering and even including other people involved in the problem; cooperating with other practitioners; identifying institutional and other constraints and resources likely to affect the helping process; dealing with the different, even contradictory goals of the various actors; comprehending the influence of their goals as practitioners and people; and understanding the current state and variations of the worlds of education and work (Bourassa & al., 2005).

When practitioners consent to work with a complex representation of the modern world and the counselling problems to which this gives rise, they must also then be aware of how the numerous elements at play, be they contextual (personal, interpersonal, organizational, institutional, social) or temporal (short, medium, or long term), influence the situation and each other.

The counsellor: a reflective practitioner

The counselling practice, as we have seen, cannot be reduced to a strict application of idealized intervention models, which Schön (1996) refers to as "technical rationality." Counsellors must regularly invent, review, and modify their approach. Because they must work with different actors, with unusual requests for help and, in particular, with the changing realities of the education and work worlds, counsellors must exploit the knowledge they have garnered over the years (which nourishes their professional *habitus*), and adapt and even develop it further. Nonetheless, this constant refining and adjustment of their counselling expertise does not occur without some effort. If they are to achieve this, counsellors must fully exploit their reflective abilities by seeing themselves as an object worthy of attention and analysis. As Perrenoud (2004a) wrote, drawing on Schön (1987, 1994): "Reflective practitioners are those (...) who observe their actions as if in a mirror, (...) who reflect upon these actions and strive to understand how and why they do what they do, sometimes unwillingly" (p.37-38).

A better understanding of the postulates underlying their approach to counselling can help practitioners to better understand how they accompany people, why they are sometimes ineffective, and where their unexplored, potential improvements lie. Otherwise, practitioners risk going astray themselves, subjected as they are to the numerous changes of modern-day life. They must therefore ensure they have the necessary tools to set their own course and enhance their counselling skills.

Conclusion

It is clearly evident that changes in the work world, and particularly recent changes, affect people, groups, and organizations in various ways and contribute to the emergence of new socio-occupational problems.

As the research conducted by the authors of this article shows, the reconfiguration of the work world in the last few years and the new types of employment have reduced many people's chances of obtaining or creating stable, satisfying careers. This reconfiguration has forced many people to follow irreg-

ular career paths marked by precariousness, assorted jobs, and periods of unemployment. Due to these situations and the related difficulties, people are led, at different moments in their lives, to redefine their personal and occupational projects by taking into account pragmatic, relational, and developmental issues, whether this be done explicitly or not.

Among the considerable changes in the work world, three are particularly noteworthy: the growth in the female labour force, the rise in dual-income couples, and the emergence of a related problem, namely work-family balance. Reconciliation attempts result in a constant search for realistic and efficient ways of managing the many investments and responsibilities inherent in each area of life. Some people adapt so well to reconciling the different areas of their lives that it becomes an important source of self-fulfilment. For others however, in particular women, work-family responsibilities give rise to inter-role conflicts that, due to a lack of social and organizational measures, lead them to make heartbreaking personal and occupational choices, such as opting for a part-time job, considering a relatively long absence from the labour market, or seriously reconsidering their career choices.

Other studies have shown that new ways of representing this human and social activity are arising out of the modern work world. The principles of excellence, performance, and latitude at work are increasingly transcending organizations and workers. The work practices ensuing from these principles provoke a justified feeling among workers of being overloaded, stressed, and even psychologically distressed.

The various studies discussed here have not only shed light on new problems in the work world but likewise on the unease that people feel and the imbalance they see between their life projects and career path. Some of these people will turn to career counsellors in order to better understand the difficulties they are encountering and to find relevant, adapted solutions. As might be expected, this new work world is also impacting on the work of career counsellors. Thus, the second goal of this article was to analyze the effect of these

impacts on their professional practice.

We observed in our studies that career counsellors, who are subjected to many diversified, changing, and complex demands, are striving to find an approach that provides optimal support for their clients. We have thus attempted in this paper to clarify this approach by proposing four dimensions that help to characterize it, namely the career counsellor as guide, astute handyman, complexity analyst, and reflective practitioner. Since none of these general analyses and solutions can always succeed in responding to the clients' various demands, it is increasingly clear that counselling must be adapted to each person or group. Furthermore, counselling must take advantage of people's abilities by inviting them to work with counsellors to co-develop alternatives to the difficulties they face. This co-development of alternatives should take the form of a joint, improvised, and adapted response informed by different types of resources and knowledge (scientific, experience-based, technical) from various sources (practitioners, clients, and others) to meet the clients' needs as well as possible. It is also noteworthy that, to achieve pertinent results, career counsellors must be able to analyze the complexity of the problems they encounter. This requires that several elements (e.g., the clients' requests, possibilities and limits) be considered and their consequences be evaluated. All of these aspects lend credence to the idea that if career counsellors are to refine their own expertise, then they must be the object of their own analysis. In short, they must be reflective practitioners in search of constant development.

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¹In the French-speaking world, this period is called "les Trente glorieuses" (the thirty glorious [years], Fourastié, 1979).

²There are many definitions of nonstandard or atypical work. Nonstandard work is generally defined as fixed-term employment whose status is poorly defined (Fournier, Bourassa and Béji, 2003; Matte et al. 1998). Job insecurity is an essential element of the definition of nonstandard work and several types of work can be qualified as nonstandard: part-time work, self-employed work without employees, multiple employment (more than one job at the same time), and temporary work (fixed-term, casual, seasonal, placement agency work, and all work whose finishing date is determined) (Vosko, Zukewich & Cranford, 2003).

³The three studies discussed here were conducted with samples that were equally distributed according to gender and educational level (high school, community college, or university).

⁴In this research, a restricted definition of independent work was used. It is de-

finied as work conducted only by the worker, without the help of employed workers, and excluding an employer-employee relation with their clients. This is the most precarious category (D'Amours, 2006) of all the categories of self-employed workers in Canada. In 2004, self-employed workers constituted 14.4% of the working population (Statistics Canada, 2005).

⁵According to this model, practitioners are seen as "healers" or "saviours," the holders of accepted knowledge and solutions that must be bestowed upon clients. Practitioners focus on the failings of their clients, who are attributed a passive role.

⁶This provides a successful alternative to the inadequacy perspective inherent in the medical model.

⁷Concept developed by Bourdieu (see especially Bourdieu, 1994), and applied by Perrenoud (1994) in his analysis of professional practice.

⁸This does not mean excessive eclecticism. It would, for example, be difficult to simultaneously support two theses that are epistemologically irreconcilable. Furthermore, practitioners can borrow ideas or strategies from other approaches to enhance those that they normally use (Polkinghorne, 1999).