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The Need for Career Counseling in the Czech Context

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Abstract

Significant processes of transformation associated with the transition to post-industrialism and the postmodern era are evident in many aspects of societal, organizational, and individual life, including careers and career counseling. New career patterns have emerged accompanied by career counseling methods that stem from postmodern approaches. Such changes have taken place in the Czech context and throughout the world. Differences in the prevailing Czech contextual variables influencing careers constitute a challenge for career counseling.

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1. Introduction

Radical changes in the global socioeconomic environment associated with the transition to post-industrialism and the postmodern era have had a significant impact on working conditions and on organizational and job design throughout the world. The consequences of such changes are evident in many aspects of societal, organizational, and individual life, including careers and career counseling.

The need for future changes in organizational and work design first became apparent through the work of Burns and Stalker in the 1960s concerning the interrelations between external socioeconomic and organizational factors and the impact of such factors on organizational effectiveness, competitiveness, and development (Rollinson & Broadfield, 2002). Their identification of two organizational systems – the mechanistic and organic – is significant and continues to be valid. Burns and Stalker focused not only on the need for structural change in organizations, but also on the various characteristics of organizational design. Hackman and Oldham examined the various aspects of job design in the 1970s. The results of their research led to their proposal of a new model that highlighted five aspects of a given job – skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback relating to job performance – that are of decisive importance for the perception of the meaningfulness of work, the feeling of responsibility for the work done, and individual performance (Hitt, Miller, & Colella, 2009). Hackman and Oldham’s work provides a framework for the further application of various types of job design and redesign in...
organizations, and it continues to be of great importance today.

The change in contextual factors related to organizational functioning has constituted an urgent challenge in respect to organizational transformation that is of decisive importance for the continued existence of organizations. Organizational transformation, which has centered on restructuring and flattening, has been accompanied by changes in all aspects of hard and soft management. This has also influenced changes in organizational and work design, including new organizational requirements for employees. New types of jobs have been emerged, particularly in connection with the changing role of ICT, while others have disappeared, especially in primary and secondary sectors of the economy.

2. From Traditional to New Career Patterns

In spite of the fact that careers comprise a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research issue, they have traditionally been regarded from the perspective of bureaucratic organizational types or in respect to mechanistic types of organization. As McDonald, Brown and Bradley (2005) note, careers were traditionally externally oriented to the individual. That is to say that the primary emphasis was typically placed upon a broad range of socioeconomic and organizational external factors relevant to the individual. This general approach was implicitly an element in the traditional psychological contract, which reflected the prevailing organizational structures, organizational and work design, managerial approaches, HR practices, and the expectations and attitudes prevalent among employees. The dominant and decisive role in career management and planning within organizations pertained to organizations.

Traditional approaches to careers were associated with the industrial era, during which mechanistic organizations, with all their fundamental characteristics, were common. This type of organization, including the related types of organizational and job design, was appropriate to the relatively stable socioeconomic factors which characterized that period. Employees were expected to correctly carry out all work assignments with no consideration given to their own activity, creativity, and so forth.

Traditional career patterns were characterized by vertical organizational paths, and upward transitions were mainly dependent on employee seniority, which was favorably regarded in HR policies. This feature of traditional career models is interconnected with permanent employment contracts, a low level of employee mobility, a relatively high level of employee loyalty to organizations, and, in general, with a job-for-life attitude among both employees and organizations. As Baruch (2004) observes, organizational structures and hierarchies represented career ladders during the industrial era. Upward mobility within the organizational hierarchy, the attainment of a more prestigious work position, and increased salary were used as criteria of career success or development. In such a situation, the approaches typical of organizational career management and development were often regarded as parental in character.

The radical changes connected with the transition to post-industrialism have had a wide-ranging and decisive impact on the various aspects of individual, organizational, and societal life. Careers, which have obviously and considerably been influenced by socioeconomic and organizational factors, are no exception in this respect. Presti (2009, p. 126) alludes to the fact that the majority of scholars indicate "that the major changes that have occurred in our world in the last thirty years had a great influence on the way people live their jobs and enact their vocational behavior." As was mentioned above, transformation processes have significantly impacted organizational and job design, and the results have greatly influenced organizational requirements for employees and career patterns.

New career patterns, including changes in planning, management, criteria of development, and so forth, in fact represent reactions to new socioeconomic and organizational contexts. Organizations no longer offer jobs for life, but instead prefer temporary work contracts. Baruch (2004) notes that organizations may now be said to offer opportunities for employee and career development, adding that "Careers have become more open, more diverse, and less structured and controlled by employers" (ibid, p. 61). These characteristic have played a decisive role concerning changes in career patterns.

The primary responsibility for career planning and management has shifted from employers to employees, from the organization to the individual. In general, different individual characteristics and competences, particularly individual activity and responsibility, are now expected and required for career management than was the case during the industrial era.
3. New career models

There are various career approaches and concepts denoted by the term new career types. They reflect different aspects of the developments associated with the transition to the post-industrialism.

The protean, boundaryless, portfolio, and intelligent career models represent perhaps the most well-known new career types. While there are significant differences between, they also have many common features, the most important of which is the emphasis upon the individual characteristics of each person's career track.

Hall and Moss (1998) explain the shift from the organizational career to the protean career in reference to the fact that the latter is managed by the employee, not the organization. A protean career is composed from the individual knowledge, skills, and experiences one has garnered from her/his education and various work contracts in different organizations. Hall and Moss (1998, p. 25) state that "The protean person's own personal career choices and search for self-fulfillment are the unifying or integrative elements in his or her life. The criterion of success is internal (psychological success), not external." In addition, they regard individual career management, self-directed development, and continuous learning as characteristic features of the new protean psychological career contract. Career development is thus not merely a question of upward mobility, but also involves the development of competences, a shift in emphasis from job security to employability, and the psychological (subjective) measures of career success. Briscoe, Hall, and DeMuth (2006) note that Hall stressed that individual activity is needed for career management and development. Success in psychological terms is attained by means of individual career management throughout one's life, and is thus interconnected with developmental progression.

Hall first used the term protean in 1976 to describe a new type of career model appropriate to new types of organization that were emerging. It refers to the early Greek sea-god Proteus, who, according to Homer's *Odyssey*, was able to change his form as the circumstances required. Hall used this metaphor to symbolize individual flexibility and adaptability to the situation, having in mind analogies between Proteus' actions, today's changing organizations, and new work requirements for employees.

Another concept typical of new career models is the boundaryless career, first proposed by Michael B. Arthur. This metaphoric notion emphasizes the various boundaries within a career course, including physical and psychological boundaries, which individuals cross. The former are interconnected with work positions, organizations, and regional or state boundaries, and the ability to cross them involves physical employment mobility. The latter are interconnected with an individual's state of mind and one's attitudes "toward initiating and pursuing work-related relationships across organizational boundaries" (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006, p. 31). This dimension of individual mobility is termed psychological mobility. The notion of boundaryless career, like the protean career, also focuses on the various aspects of individual activity, development, flexibility, and so forth.

Both the protean and boundaryless career models involve the concepts of multiskilling and employability, which are implicitly included in the new psychological contract. Today's new career models, emphasizing individual flexibility, responsibility, activity, proactivity, and so forth, reflect and at times predict organizational requirements for employees that represent the consequences of contemporary organizational and work design. In general, a greater emphasis is now placed upon individual responsibility in career development, including both career planning and career management.

4. Career counseling in the contemporary global context

New career counseling practices have emerged in response to these changes in career models and socioeconomic contexts. It is important to note that although the changes mentioned are in general global in nature, they are influenced by local historical and cultural factors that generate important local differences.

New career counseling methods are more relevant to changing socioeconomic contexts than the so-called "matching" approaches that were appropriate during the industrial era. They are influenced by postmodern approaches that are to a certain degree opposed to the positivist and rationalist approaches favored previously (Brown et al., 2002). Postmodern approaches emphasize the contexts in which individuals live and the complex interactions between individual and contextual factors. A constructivist approach to career counseling, represented by Savickas' developmental theory of vocational behavior, is typical of a number of significant and influential contemporary counselors (Savickas, 2000) and is particularly appropriate for counseling in the new career models.
from which it follows that careers are constructed by the individual. Savickas' theory focuses on core social roles and on how these roles influence individual career patterns, vocational self-concepts, the implementation of these concepts in work roles, vocational changes, vocational maturity, career adaptability, and the individual developmental stages of career construction. The emphasis is placed upon such contextual factors as physical environment, culture, family, neighborhood, and school.

Other contemporary career counseling approaches include Gottfredson's theory of circumscription, the cognitive information processing approach (CIP), and Brown's theory concerning the role of work and cultural values in career choices. These theories analyze significant individual and contextual factors that influence individual career choices, development, success, and satisfaction.

Amundson (2009) remarks in regard to contemporary career practices that the process of career development is not always logical since individuals do not always plan and manage their careers as efficiently as they might. Furthermore, new paradigms and approaches are needed because of the rapid changes in societies today. Amundson suggests that the term career craft is more relevant to the dynamic and volatile career developments in the contemporary context than career management insofar as it focuses on a career as the "creation of something that is practical and useful" (ibid, p. 29). He utilizes the metaphor of crafting in order to stimulate and assist people in reframing their understanding of themselves and the context and in adopting creative approaches to the careers, and he suggests various methods that help clients in these respects. One example of Amudson's active client approach during career counseling sessions that indicates how it differs from the positivist approach is the utilization of positive uncertainty or planned happenstance. These ways of thinking are more suitable to today's rapid changes in socioeconomic contexts, which are marked by a low level of predictability.

5. Career patterns and career counseling in the Czech context

In recent decades there have been global changes regarding career patterns and the types of career counseling practices that are needed. These observations are valid for the Czech context as well, with one important additional remark. In addition to the ongoing worldwide changes in organizations and work contexts, Czech society has recently undergone a complete transformation involving the political system, the economy, the legal system, and so forth. This has affected all aspects of individual and social life, including careers.

The emphasis above on a brief examination of the interactions between organizational and work design and their consequences for various aspects of careers was intended to address the fact that such interconnections are seldom emphasized in literature on career counseling. For example, due to different contextual variables in the Czech socioeconomic environment, such as the long period of Soviet-style economy and the consequences of and ideas associated with mechanistic or organic organizational types, job design or redesign approaches have not been very common in practice, and many individuals are not even familiar with them. Although various concepts concerning flexible organizations were utilized during the transformation processes after 1989, which resulted in organizational restructuring, the results have been less than fully satisfactory due to the greater emphasis that was placed on the technocratic aspects of transformation. Such changes have not been sufficiently empowered by relevant managerial practices or HR approaches. Briefly stated, there is a difference between rhetoric and reality.

Consequently, new career models and contemporary career counseling practices have not been widely practiced in spite of the need for them and their importance. Many Czech employees have perceived unemployment or changes in the traditional psychological contract as very difficult challenges. Against this background, contemporary career counseling approaches, which regard individuals as active agents who are capable of shaping their lives and careers, would appear to be more appropriate. In this context Vendel (2008) emphasizes the opportunities and possibilities of career counseling

Not everyone has adapted easily to the new challenges – some have welcomed them while others feel lost. Even the young generation were not prepared for the demands of increased individual responsibility, activity, and employability, which contradict previous Czech historical experience and national values. Although active or positive attitudes concerning ambiguity are not typical Czech characteristics, they are nevertheless needed within the contemporary global context.

Career development theories are focused both on describing and explaining the development of various individual characteristics, such as social roles, personality traits, and cognitive processes, and on interactions between individual characteristics and variables in the relevant context. In addition, values, attitudes, and
stereotypes, which are resistant to change, are interwoven with educational practices, organizational behavior, and vocational practices. Career counseling capable of addressing such matters has not been adequately implemented in either the educational or organizational contexts. Consequently, the introduction of contemporary career counseling methods is of great importance in the Czech context.

6. Conclusions

Although we are living in a globalized and diversifying world, there are differences in many aspects of our lives. One can identify today various career patterns, such as traditional models, new career models, as well as combinations of the two. In addition, the application of these models is conditioned by local contextual variables. Contemporary career models and career counseling approaches generally emphasize individual activity, development, responsibility for one's own career, and interactions with changes in organizational and socioeconomic contexts. An adequate understanding of the contemporary global career context thus demands the use of interdisciplinary approaches.

The recent series of changes in the Czech educational system, together with changes in other contextual variables, would appear to promote the application of contemporary career counseling practices that focus upon individual satisfaction with one's personal life, career, and contributions to organizations and society.

References