The Life Designing Paradigm: from Practice to Theory

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Introducion

There are two fundamental processes applied in the building of knowledge: one theoretical and the other the practical. The first, usually designated as top-down, is the process through which scientists make use of theory to give order to reality, to formulate hypotheses and to offer guidance in chaos and the multiplicity of that reality. The second, designated as bottom-up, is the starting point and reality which, in acting as the source of new experiences, updates or innovates scientific theories, thereby allowing for a continuous development and adaptation to that reality.

The Life Designing framework for counseling aims to frame counseling (practice intervention) as an inter-subjective process, focused primarily on work or career issues, and is structured to be a life-long, holistic, contextual and preventive (Savickas, Nota, Rossier, et al, 2009). The origin of the framework can be viewed as being the result of a complementary approach to top-down and bottom–up, in being the two processes through which knowledge is built.

The epistemology of social constructionism (Gergen, 2001), particularly as relative to research methodology (research methods in favor of qualitative approaches) and also in the emphasis that it places on "social and cultural milieu as the lens or medium through which individuals construct their experience, positions culture as a primary force in human development" (Richardson, Constantine, & Washburn, 2005, p.57) and the theory of life-span/life-space of D. Super (1957; 1980), supports a conceptual

structure capable of guiding the actions of researchers and the practices applied in analysis and intervention in the field of career guidance.

The complexity of the current context of the globalized economy also presents challenges, both in terms of research and of practice, which are fundamental for the continuous development of theory.

The importance of the theory for the evolution of the Life Designing Paradigm is recognized in the research agenda that considers a range of studies based around theories and other studies that are based around the analysis of practices (Savickas et al., 2009). From the theoretical arises the use of intervention methods and techniques, such as the development of self-knowledge and ecological variables, in that they can be facilitating or inhibiting, in decision making processes. The stories and activities developed by individuals are the focal point of methodological aspects, rather than the utilization of test scores or profile interpretations. The existing techniques and tools are reconfigured for use in a social constructionist approach. From the practical arises contact with the complexity of reality and an invitation to reflect on the ideas that guide actions, which is fundamental in the innovation of that which had previously been believed.

In this chapter, after having made some brief considerations of a theoretical nature, focus is placed on the analysis of practices that contribute to the improvement and evolution of the Life Designing framework to counseling. The development of the chapter is done via four main sections, followed by a conclusion. The chapter begins by highlighting how the gap between career counseling theories and reality has contributed to the emergence of the Life Designing Paradigm. In the second section, considerations are given to some topics which are currently debated in light of the new Life Designing Paradigm, with its relationship with counseling activity being presented. An approach to

the process of counseling according to Life Designing perspectives and the importance of the analysis of practices for the continuous update and innovation of this framework for counseling follows. Finally, a research into the practice of career counseling and a case study that illustrates the practical contribution to the Life Designing framework to counseling is discussed.

The Existence of a Gap between Career Counseling Theories and Reality

The following presents an attempt to demonstrate the existence of a gap between career counseling theories and reality. The realities of change, including the significant changes in the nature of work and employment, lead to a conclusion that traditional career counseling theories have failed due to the fact that the fundamental elements that such approaches are built upon were being ignored. These changes signal many important transitions to the territory in which career counselors work or will work.

Career counseling has traditionally been linked with a positivist epistemology. The traditional concept of counseling may indeed be misleading, as it is based on the separation between the counselor, seen as the "owner of knowledge", and the counselee, seen as the "object of knowledge". This approach can be seen as one that is stricken by a relative lack of attention to the issues of conceptual clarity in favor of correspondence between theoretical propositions and evidence given by empirical observations. Such an approach can no longer be applicable to the way of working in a contemporary world which requires attention to human variety, searching uniqueness at an ever increasing rate, in order to stand up to the artificiality of technology., which imposes standard ways of procedures

The lack of equilibrium between career counseling theories and reality still exists in part due to the utilization of pre-constructed models and partially due to the fact that

reality is invariably more complex than theory and, as such, represents only a small part of reality and the context in which individuals act and live. Career counseling when seen as an objective process, in which assessments are made through the scientific method of collecting facts and "interpreting numbers and figures", is no more in tune with these new realities that the above mentioned approach. It is an accepted fact that knowledge is fundamental to the development of both societies and individuals; it is also a known fact that technology has brought about the dissemination of such knowledge. However, it is through the importance of intellectual capital, giving rise to the creation of value and in which the structural changes to the economy, knowledge and communication systems are rooted, that great differences emerge: a career counseling approach based on constructivism proposes addressing counseling activities as a process of individual meaning-making rather than as a restricted analytical perspective of logical positivism (Duarte, 2010).

Following the thinking of Immanuel Kant (1781/1996) in his criticism of empiricism and rationalism, *criticism* is characterized by a critical analysis of the possibility, origin, value, laws and limits of rational knowledge. It is a philosophical position in principle and not dependent on a person, or, more specifically, on a sensitive experience and the limits imposed on knowledge. On the other hand, *critique* – originating from the Latin *Critica*, and designed on the basis of the Greek expression *kritikê tékne*, "critical art", which designated the ability to separate, judge, decide – is a voluntary act belonging to the sphere of the individual and is an activity of reasoning which sets out to distinguish true from false. In short, it is an act of the mind stemming from a doubt about a given situation (Duarte, 2012).

Another way to examine the problem is related to the importance of "the critical art" as an attempt to minimize the gap. Applying such a critique to the construction of

reflexivity, that means the self-awareness that emerge from the construction of social realities(Savickas, 2011b; 2012) can essentially lead to and drive an approximation between theory and practice.

To this end and in addressing "the moral of the story" that is of interest here: career counseling has been influenced by the tradition of empiricism, which is one of the reasons behind the current distance between theory and the reality of practice. The theories and practices that emerged to serve contingencies up until the end of the 20th century are no longer appropriate for the new, although transitory, reality. This is not a paradigmatic standard, rather it is more of a critical look at past theories in consideration of the criteria of the new realities of the 21st century (Duarte, 2012).

Considering the framework of actions which are supported by theories and prediction techniques based on employment and environmental stability, for example developmental theories and their subsequent model of intervention, along with those which set out to place the individual in a continuous process within certain contexts in harmony with the critical perspective (Duarte, 2009a), we can see which actions have the potential to create more value in a contemporary society characterized by uncertainty in the labor market.

As Herr & Cramer (1996) noted, developmental models tend to center on the longitudinal expressions of behavior, thereby highlighting the importance of self-awareness and driving conceptions for the understanding of development and career behavioral changes over time. Such models can be applied to both youths and adults as part of a variety of practical guidance settings and a diverse array of contexts. When dealing with youths who are part of the education system, the emphasis generally centralizes mainly on the decision making process, as there is a basic assumption of a need to make vocational decisions (Savickas, 1992). In the case of adults, focus is

towards the possibility of knowledge and comprehension of the life cycle, the discovery of values applicable to certain situations, the roles which are developed in adult life and even the influencing of the careers of individuals. However, this is also a model which has already been overtaken by newer organizational structures present in both the professional environment and society: the results of career counseling done on the basis of an understanding of that which each instrument measures does not consider all of the needs of the individual, namely those which cannot be satisfied via the application of tests (Duarte, 2009b).

In this light, we look not only to an understanding of the ways in which an individual can develop and progress in their career, but also a reflection of what is a key question in the making of a change: how do individuals construct their lives and what are the factors and processes that form part of that construction? The construction of working lives is no longer independent of the construction of other areas of life, meaning that an understanding of how individuals construct their other areas of life via their working life is needed. It is with a basis built on this type of issue that the Life Designing Paradigm develops (Savickas, et al, 2009).

In terms of action, the consideration of not only the context of the self but also the construction of the self is fundamental. Thus, in more than simply aiding to clarify self-perception, it is important to aid in the co-construction of an understanding of the coherence and continuity of the construction process itself (Guichard, 2009). In other words, the focus is not placed purely on the individual, which is not only viewed as an actor but also as the author of its own destiny.

As indicated by Guichard (this book), Life Designing dialogues do not aim to aid clients in thinking about their lives from the perspective of the current social norms of employability. Their purpose is more of a fundamental one: it is to help clients define

their own norms; norms through which they can give a meaning to their lives and therefore design them.

In short, in taking a glance at the existence of a gap between career counseling theories and reality it is possible to reflect as to if intervention models based on the Life Designing approach are indeed capable of surpassing that gap. To reduce that gap, the promotion of an analysis of practices is needed, thereby permitting a particular understanding and contextualization which is needed in order to learn about the non-linear dynamics and to predict stable configurations for the multiple psychological variables that are part of the career guidance process. In that light, it would be possible to identify empirical evidence that indicates the efficiency of such activities, as is recommended by one of the five presuppositions of Life Designing counseling (Dauwalder, 2003; Savickas et al., 2009).

Theoretical Considerations which are currently debated in relation to the New Life Designing Paradigm and their Relationship with Counseling Activity

This section introduces some of the theoretical considerations which are currently being debated in relation to the new Life Designing Paradigm and its relationship with counseling activities. Life Designing – the paradigm for career construction – requires reflection of the self and the environment, as well as receptivity to feedback and the imagination of new opportunities for narrative self-construction (Savickas et al., 2009). The nature of certain changes that are taking place, which demand people to be flexible, necessarily result in dynamic and flexible practices (Niles & Karalic, 2009). The demands of action (counseling process) imply a new relationship that supports the process of self-exploration, thereby helping the individual to construct a narrative capable of expressing the central problem in his/her life and synthesizing needs and

resolutions by formulating goals and ways through which to retain and reach those goals.

Some case studies carried out by the authors (Cardoso, 2012; Duarte, 2012) and various other colleagues during interventions have given support to the possibility of using this model, noting: (a) it is an approach that is more explicative rather than being explorative or a descriptive approach; (b) it is possible to explore intra-individual variability; and (c) it gives space to the importance of contextual variables.

As proposed by the research agenda for Life Designing activities, namely bottom-up research, it is through the conducting of a wide variety of case studies that the conditions in which Life Designing can lead to the redefining of one's vocational identity in terms of social processes in a given culture that the topic may be better understood. From one point of view, this is essentially the putting to one side of simple and linear causal explanations. The observation of these types of cases may assist in the understanding of a client's reference framework though those that are described by counselors. The more relevant and utilized life-designing methodologies may also be discourse analysis, narrative or ethnographic analysis. Such types of analysis can certainly help with the understanding of the influence that cultural context has on the process of career construction. With the combining of cross-cultural studies and ethnographic approaches a great step forward can be taken in the field of career studies in a way that looks to describe the influence of cultural aspects on career guidance issues (Duarte, 2011).

Research that identifies the underlying processes to be dealt with by Life Designing activity, especially in relation to work roles, should be conducted. However, the direct assessment of these processes is not an easy task; as such processes are effective only temporarily, or are unknown or inaccessible. It is in this context that studies could

combine various methods to formulate a research strategy that draws information from a variety of fronts; thus increasing the external validity of findings as similar results would come from several sources, while at the same time giving more information to aid in a more complete comprehension of the problem.

The promotion of a diverse range of perspectives, techniques and methods contributes to the bettering and widening of an understanding of the construction of life projects, better, co-construction within one's dependent context and dynamic.

This point of view is clear: a co-construction perspective is integrated into the Life Designing Paradigm and consequently counseling activities are made around a self-construction process. The nature of the changes that are taking place and the demands of action (counseling process) imply a new relationship process based on individual narratives and stories, along with the establishment of a dialogue that permits the expression of emotion and that seeks to reveal one's own lives and allows the identification of the salient elements of the self.

What is at stake is that is fundamentally important to transform the idea, or the model, into reality, or rather to transform the concept into a real object guided by the individual as the construction instrument. This transformation would of course be motivating, as the construction of anything is based on motivation and motivation can then lead to action. In short, the model does not consider implementation strategies, but rather the decision of implementation, of choice and of involvement. Whenever one looks to implementation as a competency, the non-rational and non-formable aspects of the human condition are most certainly being ignored. All formulae and descriptions are essentially concepts, words, ideas and theories. To this end, we can ask the question of what it is that makes counseling activities real? It is involvement, adherence and commitment; it is a personal choice and not a decision of a strategic nature. The theories

and concepts that each individual wishes to make real, and the '*I*' that exists in each of us, belong to two different worlds. What can be described and, therefore, what exists? In a work relationship between a counselor and a client, what matters are life stories and not the concepts applied. Put another way, the human being is not an idea, but rather he/she is human because he/she is alive and what is alive can essentially die when transformed into a disembodied idea. Therefore, the key to success may also be found in making something happen, namely constructing, or better, co-constructing and constructing is essentially having a vision (Duarte, 2011).

In conclusion, at a glance at the theoretical considerations and its relationship with counseling interventions, focus should be on the "liaison" between the theoretical and the activity in a way that implies a consideration of the characteristics and skills of each individual, so that each individual can sustain themselves without losing his/her condition as an active and supportive element within the historic chain from which he/she has emerged. Having obtained knowledge, the inclusion of his/her own experiences and the associated interpretations of those experiences can give continuity to this very chain and go on to project it into the future.

The Process of Counseling according to Life Designing Perspectives

This section is focused on the process of counseling according Life Designing perspectives: the process of constructing and conducting a counseling process is a dynamic one that acts and reacts according to each individual element that is introduced. Whereas the success of this kind of relationship has traditionally relied upon a specific counselor's training, the most important difference found here in going against the grain of traditional approaches is that individuals are considered people that construct themselves of how they perceive others reacting to them, with those "others" not simply

being considered as elements which are separate and located elsewhere (Markus &
Kitayama, 1991). In this way, the individual uses the notion of his/herself to organize
his/her understanding of life; inclusive of working life (Guichard, 2009). Based on the
perspective of self-dynamics, the career counselor takes the role of a meaningful co-
constructor, thereby trying not to come across as an expert of the client´s experience,
but instead acting as a facilitator of the deepening of such experience. The counselor's
position is essentially to take the problem and the experience of the client in a way that
facilitates the client's own transformation process (another way to consider what a
bottom-up process is). Much like an experienced jazz musician, there is no need to play
a huge variety of notes, but simply those necessary to open the rest of the band up to
new creative possibilities.

According to Life Designing perspectives, when a counselor meets an individual
that person is not separate from him/her and that individual may condition the
counselor's own behavior much in the same way as the counselor does with individual.
An interdependent relationship is thereby created in which nothing that is perceptible
remains indifferent to either one of the parties involved. It is precisely here that the
importance of identity as a process of social construction emerging from a molded
continuum is recognized, thereby following new directions as other constructions are
being edified. It is of course possible to question as to what extent it is reasonable think
that collective wellbeing depends on one having to renounce one's own personality and
become enclosed against one's own will and nature itself, within a rigid space which is
on one hand functional, but on the other conditioning and restricting of one's creativity.
Through this prism, the whole basis of the counseling process can be seen as a being the
unmolding the actual '*I*': it can be seen as the rewriting of one's own narrative in a way
that allows for an understanding of how people interpret and represent reality. It is the

understanding of how people look to perform the tasks that a particular context presents, what meaning they give to those tasks and how such interpretations interact in a person's own personal history (Duarte, 2012).

The presentation and discussion of one particular case study and research based on career counseling practices helps to illustrate this new way of facing career counseling. In summary, the aim is to emphasize the role of the analysis of practices in the Life Designing framework for counseling.

Examples of Practice-Based Contributions to Improve the Life Design Framework for Counseling

The following is a discussion of the results obtained from a qualitative investigation into the dilemmas faced by psychologists in the practice of career counseling, along with a case study in which the Life Designing Paradigm for career counseling was applied (Savickas, 2011b). The following analysis is structured along the lines of the recommendations presented by Stiles (2003), which highlight the need for case studies to not simply be an illustration of theoretical models, but rather an opportunity to verify and/or to innovate theoretical approaches.

Psychologists' dilemmas in career counseling practice. Psychologists' dilemmas in career counseling activities were analyzed by Cardoso, Taveira, Biscaia and Santos (2012). The aim of that analysis was to further the understanding of the career counseling process in its complexity. The study of dilemmas fits this purpose because the experience of dilemma, as counselor doubts or conflicts about what to say or do when all of the possible alternatives are equally unsatisfactory (Scaturo, 2005), reveals the interplay of the technical and the ethical dimensions of the intervention with the relational dimension and the context in which it takes place.

Participants included in the study were comprised of 24 Portuguese Caucasian psychologists who were/are working as career counselors (22 women and two men), ranging from 30 to 53 years of age ($M = 41.54$; $SD = 5.89$). Their experience in career counseling ranged from seven to thirty years ($M = 15.56$; $SD = 6.69$). The activity of these psychologists was analyzed based on an interview constructed around the principle question of ''Would you like to talk about the dilemmas you experience most when performing career counseling?'' and a variety of secondary questions designed to clarify the experiencing of a dilemma. Responses were analyzed using Consensual Qualitative Research (Hill, 2011).

The multiplicity of the participants' dilemmas (neutrality, assessment, dual loyalty, role boundaries and confidentiality) shows the inter-subjective nature of the career counseling process. The results obtained are now discussed from a perspective that touches upon the dimensions of the counseling process such as (a) a working alliance, (b) the co-construction of meaning, (c) the ethical challenges faced and (d) the interface between career and personal issues. In this sense, this discussion seeks to deepen reflection about the career counseling process as an inter-subjective experience, while contributing to the development of the Life Designing framework for counseling.

The challenges posed to the quality of a working alliance are generally present as part of the dilemmas experienced by participants, which effectively demonstrates the management of dilemmas as one of the expressions of management of a working alliance. Indeed, all dilemmas reveal the psychologists' attention to possible ruptures in the working alliance resulting from the frustrating of the client's hopes/dreams (e.g. to support versus to confront career plans), expectations (e.g. asking oneself ''Should I satisfy demands for psychological tests?'') and needs (e.g. whether or not to intervene

in the client's emotional problems and whether or not to give or not to give more time to this client).

For example, the *doubt about whether or not to confront the client's career plans*, which is a typical dilemma tackled by psychologists practicing career counseling, reveals the balance between how much to confront and how much to support clients is especially challenging when psychologists confront clients' career plans. As stated by Savickas (2006) the challenge is to support clients to manage the dynamic balance between aspirations and realism, between personal goals and the conditions of the labor market, as well as to maintain the balance between closeness to the client, which facilitates the exploration of new possibilities, while also maintaining a position of greater distance, representing the society against which career plans are confronted.

If identity is indeed socially produced (Savickas, 2011b), then the double role of the counselor is therefore fundamental within the space of counseling for the activation of a dialogue that replicates the client's daily life, thereby defining the client's identity in relation to the context in which he/she lives. From this perspective, the dilemma of the counselor is an extension of the challenge that clients have to cope with: to design realistic career plans based on the balance between dreams and reality. This dilemma can be managed by the counselor with consideration for the co-construction matrix in which the career counseling process occurs. In this sense, the counselor can negotiate the counseling alliance with client by clarifying his/her double role. To this end, such development can facilitate the client's acceptance of confrontation stemming from career plans and help to deconstruct the misconceptions surrounding the role of a counselor, namely when it comes to indicating the most adequate path for a client to take. This suggestion complements the results of the research that highlights the importance of the working alliance for the effectiveness of career counseling

(Masdonati, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2009) and the need to negotiate objectives, tasks and the other dimensions of the relationship in a way that thereby strengthens that relationship (Masdonati, Perdrix, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2013).

The results of the study into the dilemmas faced by psychologists in career counseling also permit a better understanding of the process involved in the co-construction of meaning, which does of course have implications for the framework of Life Designing for counseling. Generally speaking, the co-construction of meaning is understood as a collaborative process between the client and the counselor in a way that promotes changes within the client via, for example, empathic reflection, inference and hypotheses about the client's behavior and motives (Hook, 2001). From a narrative perspective, it is a dialogic space which permits a mutual reflection rather than a cascade of ideas given by the counselor as solutions to the client's problems (Hermans, 2003). The study of dilemmas suggests that counselors also changes as part of the process in a way that facilitates the change of the client. To effectively deal with the client's dilemmas, the counselor must deal with his/her own dilemmas. For example, to solve the dilemma "to confront or to support career plans?", the counselor is opened to the clients' experience and asks himself on the meaning of client's career plans. However, that is not sufficient to act (to support or to confront career plans) with sensitivity to the client's needs. It is also important to understand the reasons why the counselor consider irrational client´s career plans and to review his position if necessary. The continuous exercise of this practice of self-reflection contributes towards the counselor more flexible, that is, accepting both the experience of the client and the relativity of his positions. This opening up to both the client's experiences and to revise his/her position is not only transformative for the client but it also an effective model for the opening up of the client to change and prepare the client to better deal with his/her

career challenges. In this sense, the co-construction process is also a co-transformation process, which is according to the Life Designing framework for counseling herein presented.

The wider understanding of the co-construction process also touches upon the ethical dimension of career counseling, as the reflection by the counselor relative to the relationship with the client is also a reflection about the clash between two ethical positions. The epistemological perspective of social constructivism, wherein the Life Designing framework for counseling can be found, gives an important contribution to the understanding of this meeting of principles (e.g., ideas about solidarity, social justice, personal fulfillment or liberty) which can guide the action of each of the participants in the career counseling process. In the Life Designing paradigm for counseling, the emphasis given to inter-subjectivity and the context of meaning construction results in a perspective in which ethical principles are not viewed as absolute truths, separated from the life of individuals which therefore lead to rational and linear ethical decision-making. On the contrary, ethical decision-making is an interpretative act, as the definition of what is good and correct involves ethical principles as well as individual idiosyncrasies and context particularities which are characteristic of the counseling process (Betan, 1997). The confrontation between the ethical view point of the counselor and of the client, along with the interpretative nature of ethical decision, is particularly evident in dilemmas in which the counselor and the client shape their action around the same ethical principle. It is the typical dilemma faced by psychologists in career counseling: *to confront or to support career plans*. As is suggested in the results of the study, the *good action* of psychologists is in fact guided by various ethical principles, of which concern for the client's wellbeing of course stands out. That is, the ethical principle of 'serving the client's benefit' acting as a

reference guide for the assessment of what type of action to take in a given context (Cardoso et al., 2012). On their part, the client, in defining certain career plans, is also guided by ethical principles which also include his/her own wellbeing. The dilemma results when the parties involved make different interpretations of the consequences resulting from the client's career plans. If, for the client, his/her plans are essentially the solution to problems which are being experienced, then such plans can aggravate this problem for the counselor. The following passage illustrates well the role of subjectivity in the evaluation performed by the counselor: "The dilemma is between what one thinks is good for her and what I think are the person's abilities and cognitive limitations. This raises the dilemma whether to indicate what we think is good for the person or what the person really wants and intends" (Cardoso et al., 2012, p. 233).

In showing that the ethics of the counselor and the ethics of the client closely relate to each other in a way that aids in deepen the understanding of the relationship between both parties, this study highlights the importance of a reflection on dilemmas. This reflection is facilitated by research and practice and is a fundamental part of getting to know more about the principle ethics that direct the lives of people and for a deeper understanding of the processes involved in the construction of a life.

Finally, the analysis of dilemmatic experiences also reveals that career counseling is personal counseling. Sharing with other forms of counseling (or psychotherapy) in being a holistic practice opens up the possibility of intervention in emotional issues originating from career issues (Amudson, 2006; Hackett, 1993; Savickas, 2011b). In this sense, seven counselors (29.2%) refer the dilemma of *whether or not to intervene in the client's emotional problems*. Amongst the study's participants, this challenge occurs when there is a risk of exceeding the limits of their competence and/or established boundaries for a career counseling relationship. The results also suggest an influence of

the setting in the frequency of dilemmas. The dilemmas of *whether or not to intervene*

in the client's emotional problems and *to give or not to give more time to this client* are

almost exclusive to a work/employment setting. This result was justified as (1)

characteristics of the target population in this setting, mainly consisting of unemployed

and low-skilled people, with whom it is more likely that career problems coincide with

personal problems; (2) limitations in training of the participants for intervening in

emotional problems; and (3) pressure for cost containment leading to pressure for

briefer interventions. Of these factors, note is also given to the influence of productivity

rates in the experiencing of dilemmas, as such rates are one of the main challenges for

psychological intervention in general and for career counseling in particular, resulting

from the economic logic of the best productivity for the lowest cost. The practices

constituting the Life Designing Paradigm for counseling are advantageous in helping to

deal with this challenge due to their flexible and dynamic nature and because they

integrate career construction in the process of self-construction. In this sense, these

practices reduce false dichotomies that may exist between career counseling and

personal counseling and may easily be integrated as part of other practices. Thus, we

suggest that in future, these practices are integrated in New Opportunities Services

(NOS) and Public Employment Services (PES) where the dilemma *to give or not to give*

more time to this client is more frequent. In the NOS, employees manage the assessment

and recognition of prior experiential learning. People of all ages and backgrounds

receive recognition and formal credit for learning acquired in the past through non-

formal and informal learning, as well as through work and other experiences. The

methodology used is based on the analysis of life stories so that counselors who are

familiar with narrative approaches can easily integrate life designing practices as part of

the accreditation of competencies without reducing attendance levels. In turn, the

integration of life designing framework for counseling in PES allow the possibility to continue benefiting from the use of tests for assessing groups and thus achieve high rates of attendance. However, assessment results will serve the process of meaning construction rather than adjusting clients to courses and/or occupations.

The possibilities presented by the Life Designing Paradigm of offering brief interventions and integration into other psychological practices should not promote the *status quo* or the processing of people rather than the application of counseling. In this sense, the dilemmas of *whether or not to intervene in the client's emotional problems* and *to give or not to give more time to this client* should also function as markers for re-thinking the organization's criteria of efficiency and productivity in order to maintain professional standards in relation to personalized services (Sultana & Watts, 2006).

Case study. Other possibilities for the analysis of practices for the innovation of theory can be found in the making of a case study (Stiles, 2003; 2007). Such studies permit the analysis of the peculiarities of action and non-linear processes which are difficult to grasp through the application of nomothetic approaches (Savickas et al. 2009). The Maria case is illustrative of this, as the resolution of the case goes beyond that which was anticipated by theory. However, the Life Design Paradigm for counseling was fundamental in the exploration of new possibilities. In this sense, the novelty lies in the fact that change requires intervening in the repetition of maladaptive relationship patterns underlying career decision-making difficulties. The client was incapable of making a decision, because their life narrative was saturated by one single theme, thereby impeding a multifaceted representation of one's self and reality, as the person was continuously making a redundant construction of their experience. As such, the person was incapable of choosing a new path in life that could break the cycle of maladaptive repetition (Cardoso, 2012).

Maria (pseudonym), is a 38 year-old woman that sought help in coping with her feelings of ambivalence regarding whether she should continue to pursue her career as a civil servant or become a full-time psychotherapist. Like many others, she faced a dilemma between pursuing her dream (the occupation she had always hoped to have) and facing reality (the economic security provided by her job and the avoidance of any risks involved in making a change). The Career Construction Interview (CCI: Savickas, 2011b) was used. This is a semi-structured interview inquiring about five topics that form life themes and inform decision making about the current transition. The topics are: (1) role models for self-construction; (2) magazines, television shows or websites for manifest interests, (3) favorite story from a book or movie for the script for the next episode; (4) sayings or mottos for advice to self; and (5) early recollections for the perspective on the present problem or transition. From the answers obtained, it was possible through a process of self-exploration to help Maria construct a narrative that expresses the central problem of her life, namely the search for knowledge and caring for others. It also helped Maria to understand that working as a psychotherapist could accommodate the main roles of the characters in her narrative. On the one hand, it would allow her to act as a helper by being in contact with the real lives of people and it would allow her to share experiences with them and aid them in overcoming the challenges that they face. On the other hand, it would also allow her to act as a thinker by reflecting on the human condition and allow her to delve into the mystery of the complexity of human behavior. This, in turn, would help quench her thirst for knowledge. However the meanings that had been constructed failed to offer the level of coherence that was necessary to resolve her ambivalence. Her own words revealed the extent of that ambivalence: "I know what I want, but I cannot make the decision". The impasse was due to a cycle of maladaptive repetition which was interrupted when the

counselor affirmed: "It is time to take care of yourself." The exploration of this affirmation allowed her to understand how the theme of helping others permeates other dimensions of her life and how it leads to the suppression of the full expression of other needs. This dialogue gave a new meaning to her career decision and goals: becoming a full-time psychotherapist meant choosing herself and breaking an interpersonal relationship pattern that had become saturated with the theme of helping others.

The discussion of this case begins with a focus on the contributions of the Life Designing framework to counseling and the solutions that it provides. A reflection on the contributions of this practice for the conceptualization of the Life Designing framework for counseling will follow. This reflection considers a follow-up session taking place 10 months after the intervention. Finally, the four dimensions of career counseling (working alliance, the co-construction of meaning, the ethical challenges faced, and the interface between career and personal issues), highlighted in the study of the dilemmas are discussed in the perspective of practice contributions for life designing framework to counseling. The first contribution of the Life Designing Paradigm for counseling for the resolution of the case is related to the repetition of life themes in explaining the process of career construction. The 'dynamics of life themes' is the structure applied by the counselor to facilitate the client's own structuring. This dynamic is essentially the continuous search for a solution to the central problems of life that, in the vocational domain, reveal the close relationship between needs, interests and objectives (Savickas, 1995; 2005). In this sense, it is a reflection of how the structure of an individual's early needs (past) leads to the construction of aspirations (future) that might meet those past needs. In addition, an individual's interests (present) are instruments used to meet goals and thereby satisfy his/her needs (Cardoso, 2012). Guided by the relationship between needs, interests and objectives, it was possible to

help the client in understanding the themes which structure his/her narrative. Then, attention was then given to the markers of narrative saturation, which is an examination of whether a single personality/position dominates the different positions of a person's life, or if there are different personalities/positions present in the multiple areas of a person's life. This holistic dimension of the intervention facilitates a response to the challenges posed by the emotional issues of career problems and allows the intervention to consider other roles beyond those applicable to the work role. In this case, focus was given to the role of the family, as the indecision shown by Maria was identified as being related with the consequences of choices stemming from the economic stability of the family. This holistic character does of course have consequences in the holistic dimension of the results. Maria integrated career problems within a global functioning dynamic and the associated changes were extended to the other areas of her life. In this sense, her words about the experience of change are enlightening: "It is not only occupational ...it is an all-important aspect of knowing the direction that things should go" (Cardoso, 2012, p.). What is fundamentally being examined is a change that justifies career construction counseling as counseling for Life Designing (Savickas, 2011a).

The second contribution was in the conceptualization of the process of career counseling as relative to the co-construction of meaning. The adoption of this approach is the practice of an epistemological position in the counseling process, in that the counselor rejects the role of omnipotence and of being the holder of the truth. On the contrary, the counselor reflects on his/herself, on the client and on the process of counseling itself. This closeness and attention to self-experience within relationships with others permits the identification of markers that guide decisions relating to what to say and do in the moment by moment of the counseling process. In the case of Maria,

this allowed to give attention to the feeling of being held prisoner by a repetitive cycle and ask myself about the reasons behind the impasse. The response was the identification of maladaptive repetition markers (Cardoso, 2012).

The third contribution was the proposal of resolution by contrast (Savickas, 2011b). This counseling task seeks to validate neglected but nevertheless vital aspects of lived experience (White & Epston, 1990; Gonçalves, Matos & Santos, 2009). The use of contrast as a solution for the gaps being experienced in life permits the application of this solution to the needs of the person. In Maria's case, the identification of a problematic narrative that was saturated with the theme of caregiving suggested that a theme of helping herself could be used to resolve her dilemma. Thus diversity and complexity was added to the narrative and consequently facilitated the reorganization of self-experience in a way that attributed a new meaning to career decisions: the choice to become a psychotherapist was no longer made to help others, but to help herself.

Focus is now given to the innovation that the analysis of this case can bring to the Life Designing framework to counseling, such as the integration of the concept of maladaptive repetition into the dynamics of life themes. The analysis of this case suggests that maladaptive repetition should be understood as a dysfunctional evolution of the conception of repetition to mastery proposed by Savickas (2011b). In this sense, it is considered that maladaptive repetition begin when early life experiences introduce and/or intensify certain themes, thereby leading to a subsequent tendency to exclude, distort or avoid experiences that are inconsistent with the themes that have given order to the individual's previous experience. Individuals who have limited contact with experiences that threaten their precarious narrative organization may become prisoners of a redundant construction of their experiences and, as a result, such an individual may then become incapable of building a narrative that allows them to support a multifaceted

view of themselves. This proposal is inspired in constructivist (Mahoney, 1991; Greenberg, Rice & Elliot, 1993) and social constructionist (Fernandes, 2007; Ribeiro & Gonçalves, 2011; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2004) frameworks of human functioning and in research showing the importance of the role of attachment (Blustein, Prezioso & Schultheiss, 1995; van Ecke, 2007), early dispositions of personality (Savickas, 2003) and dysfunctional narratives (Cochran, 1997) in career construction difficulties.

The case also allows for a reflection on the process of a client's change in Career Construction Counseling. The analysis of a client's perspective about his/her transformation revealed both what had changed and how it had changed. In the follow-up session, held 10 months afterwards, Maria described her experience of change as being one of peace and harmony and of now having meaning in her life. She became aware that she could not distance from her core self in order to follow a genuine path. This is essentially the reorganization of the narrative identity as something that was lived in a way that is fundamental for the establishment of the stability needed to deal with the challenges of her career construction. However, the case also reveals that the change is not a linear process but a cycle of advances and retreats that express the continuous management of tension between the new and the old order. In the follow-up session, Maria noted that she sometimes forgets to look after herself and that she needs to make an effort to not distance herself from what she needs. This gradual and non-linear evolution reveals how the self-organization dynamics avoids discontinuities that threaten personal integrity (Ribeiro & Gonçalves, 2011; Mahoney, 2003). The gradual evolution of change was first revealed with Maria's understanding about the presence of the theme of helping others across the different dimensions of her life, then with the implementation of career changes and the subsequent search to break the maladaptive repetition cycle present in her relationship with family members. She purposefully

affirmed that she was satisfied with the career choice that she had made but that she was worried about her nurturing tendencies in other aspects of her life, especially in relation to her dependent sister.

To clarify the dynamics of change in the epistemology of social constructionism, the integration of the construct of dialogical self in the Life Designing Paradigm for counseling is proposed, as was also suggested by McIIeeven & Patton (2007). The dialogic self means that the self is a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous characters or voices. Each voice has the ability to move from one position or perspective to another in accordance with changes in situation and time. This multiplicity entails divergence, conflict and negotiation, all of which ensure the articulation of different perspectives (Hermans, 2006). From a dialogic perspective, the tension and ambivalence shown by Maria reveals the conflict between the dominant themes of helping others and the theme of helping herself. This conflict is one the one hand the opposition between the position of the caregiver and on the other the silenced position of helping one's self. As has previously been noted, the counselor's advice – "It is time to take care of yourself" - gave voice to the silenced character and permitted a rupture of the maladaptive repetition cycle. From a dialogic perspective, this change occurred because the "position moves from the background of the system to the foreground, … when deeper layered positions are brought to the surface" (Hermans, 2003, p. 110), thereby introducing more complexity and differentiation into the narrative and subsequently permitting the establishment of a new order that required constant dialogue between the various characters/perspectives for continuity.

Finally, Maria's case also adds to the reflection on the dimensions of career counseling process (working alliance, the co-construction of meaning and the interface between career and personal issues) approached in the study of psychologists'dilemmas.

In that sense, the case shows how in the life design framework to counseling the working alliance can be used both to obtain markers on what to say or what to do in the moment-by-moment of career counseling and to favor meaning construction. For example, in the case of Maria, it was the counselor awareness of his experience in the relation with the client that allowed him to recognize the therapeutic impasse and make the confrontation - "It´s time to take care of yourself" – enabling innovation in clients' self-narrative.

The importance attributed to working alliance favour holistic approaches placing career problems in the matrix of personal issues. Again, Maria's case is illustrative of both the holistc character of Life Design Counseling and its possibilities to manage the dilemma "Whether or not to intervene in the client's emotional problems". In this case, the counselor assessed client´s problem by taking into account the interface between family and work roles and then placing Maria's problem in the context of her psychosocial (dis)functioning. Finally, Maria's understanding how her narrative saturated in the theme of caring for others influenced other dimensions of her life allow both to attribute new meaning to career decision-making and to generalize change to others career roles beyond work role.

Conclusions

This chapter discusses the contribution of the analysis of practices for the Life Designing Paradigm for career counseling with the intention of contributing to the bettering and evolution of this model, thereby following one of the parts of the research agenda, while looking to complement theory and practice.

By analyzing the positivist approach, a search is made to demonstrate the inter-subjective nature of the practices that are founded in the epistemology of social

constructionism. Seeking a counter-power within the human variety against the artificiality of technology and finding solutions which do not shape the individual as if he/she were contained within a mold may constitute a new, different way of approaching the work of career counselors.

In theory as well as in practice, one never knows all of the aspects of a system's definition. In this light, it is important to not only act but also to reflect on what is being done in order to reduce the gap between theory and practice. The Life Designing Paradigm opens up possibilities capable of responding to this challenge. On one hand, the design of the counseling process as an inter-subjective experience suggests that the counselor should listen and create conditions so that the client may affirm him/herself relative to his/her specificity, thereby creating a situation that enables him/her to feel at ease as an active agent. Beginning with the client's experience demands that the counselor have a reflective posture that is capable of moving his/her own experience closer to that of the client. On the other hand, the appreciation of individual and localized understanding within this paradigm leads to the consideration of analysis of practices for the reduction of the gap between theory and practice. In this chapter, the practices analyzed reveal the complexity of the career counseling process and the possibilities that this type of study can offer for aiding in a better understanding of this complexity, namely as relative to the working alliance dynamic, the ethical challenges faced throughout the process and what it is that actually characterizes change. To provide this type of understanding is to project career counseling into new possibilities capable of responding to the challenges faced in the real lives of the people who seek its aid. As a Portuguese philosopher put it: "A theory that focuses on the same questions, that kneads and grinds without ever transforming them, that reproduces them without

producing something else, without ever truly working on those questions, that is a dead theory" (Prado Coelho, 1967, p. LVII-LVIII).

Both theory and practice should be kept within the psychological domain, because the constant search to find the uniqueness of each is essentially the best thing that a psychologist can do. For that to happen, perhaps the best way to turn an idea into a reality is to feed theory with a touch of the real.

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