

Laura Nota · Jérôme Rossier (Eds.)

Handbook of **Life Design**

From Practice to Theory
and From Theory to Practice



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Handbook of Life Design

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EUROPE: Hogrefe Publishing, Merkelstr. 3, 37085 Göttingen, Germany
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Part I

Introduction

Chapter 1

Introduction

Laura Nota¹ and Jérôme Rossier²

¹Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education, and Applied Psychology, University of Padova, Italy

²Institute of Psychology, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

The contemporary world and our recent history are characterized by a very rapid evolution of social and economical structures. This is very clear both to the authors of this volume and to readers. Rapid technological changes, the globalization phenomenon, economic and social insecurity, new migrations, prolonged economic crises, and much more are before the eyes of everyone. These changes have important implications for each individual and each citizen, but also for career counselors and professionals in the field of vocational and career psychology. These new challenges underlie the development of the new life design paradigm, first presented in a scientific article in 2009, and now further developed in this handbook.

There has been a downturn in people's quality of life due to lower pay, loss of health insurance, fewer pension benefits, poorer labor conditions, and greater income inequality and instability. All this is increasingly affecting large groups of the population, among whom young people, older workers, short-term contract workers, migrants, and families having to manage long periods of school–work transitions experienced by their children, could be listed. It is evident that the change that characterizes the history of human beings is occurring so fast that it is resulting in significant hardships and difficulties. This present is also changing the idea of the future. Current conditions tend to stimulate a negative vision of it. Fairly frequently, it is perceived as involving considerable discomfort and feelings of despair and bewilderment. The tendency to think about the future as characterized by multiple perspectives, progress, improvement of living conditions, and new opportunities is lower than in the past. These unpleasant feelings and emotions are also associated with the spread of pessimism and the belief that it will be very difficult to get out of the crisis that is affecting different parts of the world and to contain its deleterious effects. Even counselors and career counselors themselves are not immune to all of this, as they often experience the same conditions of insecurity and underemployment as their clients.

Bearing in mind the conditions we are all living through, the increased number of at-risk individuals, the barriers and needs of career counselors themselves, the Life Design International Research Group was created in 2006, included scholars from diverse countries – Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland, The Netherlands, and the United States, who strongly believed that it is important to find answers which are different from those given in the past. The group is composed of Jean-Pierre Dauwalder (University of Lausanne, Switzerland), Maria Eduarda Duarte (Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal), Jean Guichard (Institut National d'Etude du Travail et d'Orientation Professionnelle – Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, France), Laura Nota (University of Padova, Italy), Jérôme Rossier

(University of Lausanne, Switzerland), Mark Savickas (Northeastern Ohio University College of Medicine, USA), Salvatore Soresi (University of Padova, Italy), Raoul Van Esbroeck (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium), and Annelies E. M. van Vianen (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands). The Vrije Universiteit in Bruxelles hosted this group for 3 consecutive years, from 2006 to 2009. During that period, the group wrote a position paper that appeared in one of the most prestigious scientific journals of our field, the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, to also stimulate a discussion and an international debate on some critical issues of vocational guidance and career counseling (Savickas et al., 2009). This position paper has since been translated into several languages – Brazilian Portuguese (Duarte et al., 2010), French (Savickas et al., 2010c), German (Savickas et al., 2011a), Greek (Savickas et al., 2010b), Italian (Savickas et al., 2011b), and Portuguese (Savickas et al., 2010a) – and it was one of the most cited articles from the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* in 2012.

With the aim of continuing the work of deepening and further developing ideas for research, training, and intervention actions, the group has met every year in different locations: at the University of Lausanne, at the University of Lisbon, at the INETOP of Paris, and at the University of Padova. We have organized several symposia in international conferences, to present our ideas and proposals, and discuss them with all of the colleagues of our field. In 2011, at the University of Padova, the idea of this book was born, to discuss how to use life design models, methods, and materials to assist people with coping strategies for important changes in our world.

This handbook is organized into five parts. Part II includes five chapters that address theory and conceptual reflections. Part III includes four chapters that apply life design to four different age groups. Part IV includes eight chapters that present ideas and suggestions for working with more at-risk people, in different contexts, and to facilitate the training of life design counselors.

In Part II, called “The Life Design Paradigm,” the conceptual structure of the life design approach is examined, and reflections derived from the position paper are provided. Also, a specific in-depth analysis, conceptual elaborations that enrich the early formulations, new developments, and relationships with other approaches, which are considered useful for further enrichment, are proposed.

The first chapter by Jean Guichard gives an introduction to the economic and cultural globalization that has taken place over recent decades, which in turn, has produced a reformulation of the major vocational and life design issues that people face. His chapter traces the conceptual developments that led to the birth of the career and life design paradigm. After a description of salient points, the author proposes three types of interventions – information, guidance, and dialogue – to focus on life design dialogues, which are useful to develop the reflexivity that clients need to design their lives.

Andreas Hirschi and Jean Pierre Dauwalder are the authors of the second chapter. After emphasizing the complexity of constructing careers today, the authors focus on the new life design paradigm, as a perspective that highlights the relevance of the complex dynamics and the unforeseeable results of multiple nonlinear interactions. They state that life design provides the basis for career interventions from a contextual and dynamic perspective. Moreover, the authors highlight the suggestion that career counselors should focus on the interaction between client and environment to obtain possible favorable career outcomes.

The third chapter was written by Maria Eduarda Duarte and Paulo Cardoso. After exploring the question of the gap between career counseling theories and reality that contributed to the emergence of the life design paradigm, they underscore the fact that life design involves not only the context of the self but also the construction of the self. They then provide con-

siderations on some topics which are currently debated in light of the life design paradigm for counseling, such as working alliances, co-construction of meaning, etc. Lastly, the chapter illustrates the practical contribution of the life design framework to counseling.

Jacques Pouyaud wrote the fourth chapter. He tries to make a synthesis of different, but quite close, approaches that could be included in the life design paradigm, under the auspices of the concepts of Ricoeur, the Savickas approach to career construction, the contextual action model of Young and colleagues, the active socialization conception of Malrieu and colleagues, and the making oneself self approach by Guichard. The personal reworking, synthesis, and conceptual anchor efforts allow him to emphasize the importance of the connection between meaning and action in the counseling process, pushing him to formulate a metaphor of identity constructing and directing as being like riding a bicycle.

The fifth chapter, by Mark Watson and Mary McMahon, addresses how several theoretical perspectives that have emerged in career psychology nowadays are embedded in postmodern, constructivist, and social constructionist approaches. It emphasizes a collaborative approach between the counselor and the client in which the focus is on making personal meaning and moving the client toward an action-oriented approach. Further, the authors delineate in particular the potential convergence and divergence between the life design and the systems theory framework, as an effort to ensure a new identity for the field and also to increase the opportunity to provide more personalized responses to clients.

Part III includes four chapters that apply life design to four different age groups. It is entitled “Life Design Across the Life Span,” and provides an overview of the issues relating to reflections that the life design approach has stimulated so far about what people are facing at different ages of their lives, as well as information on the processes that are important and should be strengthened to promote professional design and working lives.

The first chapter of this part, written by Paul Hartung, concerns children and childhood. He emphasizes how life design, which represents a third paradigm for career studies and career intervention, applies to childhood. After a review of the established results in relation to what happens in the developmental age, he points out that life design aims to foster self-making through work and relationships toward achieving life design’s core goals of activity, adaptability, narratability, and intentionality. In the conclusion, comments and future directions for advancing life design in childhood are presented.

In the next chapter, Gudbjorg Vilhjálmssdóttir gives an account of life design for the adolescent age group. After pointing out how previous theoretical paradigms that have centered on the person–environment fit are not adequate in an ever-changing work environment and new set of competencies are needed, she directs our attention to the key competences in adolescence in the light of life design approach, such as creating a life story, exploring how work fits into that story, and adapting to inevitable career changes. The author gives an example of an intervention with a teenager to highlight how we can proceed in line with what she has proposed.

The third chapter, written by Jonas Masdonati and Geneviève Fournier, examines young adults and the school-to-work transition, conceived as a subjective process. Referring to the life design approach, they propose four key processes to consider in facilitating transitions: contextual factors, relational environments, being a worker with an occupational identity, and the relationship to school and work, including work values and its importance. In the second half of their contribution, the authors focus on the implications of the life design paradigm for career counseling.

Finally, the last chapter in Part III, written by Mark Savickas, considers adulthood, during which people make new choices repeatedly. Particular attention is paid to the greater complex-

ity and diversity of life paths that we observe nowadays, which involve a shift from standardized, institutionalized life course patterns to individualized biographies. He suggests that career counselors and researchers have moved to the life design paradigm, which provides a model and methods for career intervention. He concludes the chapter describing biographical bricolage, through which clients engage in a dialogue with the sources of their own self.

In Part IV, special attention is paid to the potential contribution of the life design paradigm in proposing interventions to promote adaptability and new ideas to help people through career coaching and life design prevention. Thoughts and stimuli for working with those who experience more difficulties or are vulnerable – for example, the unemployed, people with disabilities, people with low economic resources – are provided. Particular attention is given to prevention activities, to interventions in different cultural contexts, and to the skills advocated for practitioners. This section is titled “Life Design Interventions and Activities.”

Developing the life design paradigm, Jérôme Rossier in the first chapter underscores the need for career interventions to be available throughout life, to be holistic, taking into account different roles and identities, and to be attentive to contextual factors. These interventions should increase adaptability, narratability, activity, and intentionality. The author emphasizes that interventions aimed at increasing career adaptability contribute to the development of the life design competencies. After describing the evolution of the concept of adaptability and the role of this construct in the current research, he then focuses on interventions that enhance it.

In the second chapter, Raoul Van Esbroeck and Marie-Thérèse Augustijnen underscore the fact that translating the life design paradigm into adequate career intervention models and methods requires major changes in the intervention approach. In view of the increased attention to coaching in the managerial context, they state that coaching should be considered as a fourth type of career intervention. They specify therefore that in the life design approach, coaching is to be considered as a separate type of intervention that fits between education and counseling, and describe a case study as an example of a life design coaching intervention.

In the third chapter, Laura Nota, Maria Cristina Ginevra, and Sara Santilli underline why the bond between life design and prevention is an optimal one, in particular when regarding goals to pursue, characteristics of interventions, and individuals to be helped. Both environment-centered and person-centered prevention efforts are considered, providing examples of what can be done in the family, with parents, and with those who are constructing their future – the children. Conclusions include a series of competences that life design counselors interested in prevention should have.

Annelies E. M. van Vianen, Jessie Koen, and Ute-Christine Klehe initiate the fourth chapter of Part IV by reminding us that uncertainty and identity threats are components of the distress that people encounter during unemployment. Building upon the life design approach and conservation of resources theory, they propose that several key resources are necessary to cope with unemployment and new-economy careers. These resources involve people’s preparation by means of building mental models of careers and self. In the final part of this chapter, they discuss possible ways in which counselors can help clients to develop these key resources.

In the first part of the fifth chapter, Lea Ferrari, Teresa Maria Sgaramella, and Salvatore Soresi present innovative trends underlying the current cultural-scientific debate on disability. In particular, their relevance to realization and work inclusion of individuals with impairments are addressed. Subsequently, the role played by some important and positive constructs, such as identity, time perspective, hope, and optimism, which are essential to life design, are discussed. Finally, competences and attitudes that should characterize life design counselors, especially those who work with people with disabilities, are examined.

In the sixth chapter, Jacobus G. Maree shows how the theory of life design can be applied in real-life contexts to help disadvantaged people from an impoverished rural village design successful lives. After discussing the impact of poverty in a developing country, he explains why it is useful to interpret impoverished contexts from a life design perspective. This is followed by some thoughts on possible ways of interpreting and applying the principle of active mastery of what has been passively suffered. He then reports a case study that demonstrates how life design can be applied, concluding with specific recommendations.

In the seventh chapter, Hsiu-Lan Shelley Tien considers the life design approach from a multicultural perspective. Western versus Eastern, traditional versus modern/postmodern, and masculine versus feminine are the primary dimensions discussed. She also presents cultural differences and similarities in the global world. Attention is given to the relationship between career and life competences and other important variables such as personality, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction in Eastern cultures. Based on her work, she also proposes some suggestions for career and life design competence counselor training in Eastern cultures.

Lastly, Peter McIlveen analyzes the competences required to perform life design counseling and what constitutes the core processes of construction, deconstruction, reconstruction, and co-construction of clients' stories toward action. Extending beyond the fundamental competences of career development practice, the enhanced competences of life design counseling are overviewed – namely, the ethic of critical reflexivity and dialogical interpretation. In summary, this chapter articulates conceptual and radical research dimensions of the agenda set by the Life Design International Research Group.

The book highlights how the life design approach has stimulated conceptual arguments and research studies in line with the times we currently live in, thus involving a growing community of researchers in making it more meaningful and putting into practice what was proposed in 2009.

At the same time, it has captured the need to provide answers to the discomforts experienced today by many individuals and to abandon the wait-and-see approach that has typically characterized our research context. This, besides a revision of procedures adopted in career counseling activities, has consequently stimulated new ideas for intervention activities.

Consider as examples coaching or career education proposals – which we might refer to as life design career education to better differentiate it from traditional views – or prevention, or even the relevance given to the willingness of helping the largest number of individuals. It clearly and powerfully emerges that scholars who refer to life design are emphasizing the need for thinking, studying, and considering the issues of those who are experiencing the greatest needs, those who suffer most of all from the negative outcomes of the times we are currently passing through.

In addition, it clearly turns out that this perspective strongly emphasizes the need for adopting new modalities when facing difficult situations and current challenges. Diverse, high-quality, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary interventions are needed, in which not only people's work life but also other, contiguous domains are taken into account. These interventions should therefore care for both individuals and their living contexts.

In reading the chapters, it will be found that the life design approach, besides fostering the development of new ideas, takes itself inspiration from the concepts it suggests. The approach can be seen as *a corpus of thoughts*, characterized by constantly taking shape, dynamic, careful of context and regarding what happens within it, waiting for researchers and life design counselors to give value to it all.

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Part II

The Life Design Paradigm

Chapter 2

From Vocational Guidance and Career Counseling to Life Design Dialogues

Jean Guichard

Institut National d'Etude du Travail et d'Orientation Professionnelle (INETOP),
Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM), Paris, France
UNESCO Chair of Lifelong Guidance and Counselling, University of Wroclaw, Poland

Introduction

As a result of economic and cultural globalizations, Western societies have undergone some major transformations during the last 3 decades. Terms such as *postmodern*, *late-modern*, or *liquid* were coined to describe these changes. Within these societies, the dominant form of work organization also changed: Work and employment became very flexible. Subsequently, the career development issues that people needed to face were modified to such an extent that it could be said that a new paradigm emerged in this domain. The concepts that had formed, for almost a century, the core of vocational guidance and career counseling (centering on the relationships between individuals and work activities) were replaced by a model that concentrated on the individuals themselves, considered as governors of their own work pathways and, more generally, of their lives.

This chapter first recalls the three kinds of factors that played a role in the construction and evolution of the first paradigm – namely (1) a certain organization of work within societies having some specific characteristics, (2) ideological debates about the ultimate end or purpose of the interventions that could be offered to help individuals make their vocational choices, and (3) a domination of some scientific models that led to a consideration of human behavior in a certain way. The following section describes the major characteristics of the paradigm that had begun to emerge in the 1970s, and tries to understand the reasons for its being constituted as it was. The third section intends to answer the following question: Which kinds of interventions are suggested by this paradigm so as to help individuals living in “liquid modernity” face their life and career design issues? As will be shown, two major types of help may be distinguished. But will they suffice to contribute to the resolution of some acute crises with which our world is confronted (as e.g., a deficit of decent work, global warming, etc.)? Shouldn't we try to give an answer to a quite pressing issue? How to help people combine the care of themselves – and

the governance of their lives and career – with the care for distant others and for the “permanence of a genuine human life” (Jonas, 1984, p. 11)?

Construction and Evolution of the Matching Paradigm

Vocational guidance came into existence in Western societies at the end of the 19th century as a consequence of new problems that people had to face: How to find an occupation they could succeed in? This issue appeared at that time and place because of changes in technology (Industrial Revolution) and social transformations (rural depopulation, immigration, etc.), and because these societies were focused on the individual (Elias, 1991), where work was seen as a major occasion to achieve something in life (Schlanger, 2010). In such a context, the “choosing an occupation” issue was seen as a task that should be completed by the individuals themselves, but at the same time as a quite complex one for which they might be helped (Parsons, 1909).

This gave birth to the first paradigm in the domain of career counseling, which may be referred to, in a general way, as the matching of individuals and work. Three different kinds of factors played a major role in the construction of this paradigm. The first one was the Industrial Revolution and the kind of work organization that prevailed then. Alain Touraine (1955) and Claude Dubar (1998) named this the “professional system of work.” In such an organization, workers had stable occupational or professional identities made up of specific knowledge, know-how, skills, etc. These identities were also made of shared values and beliefs and of collective representations, and so on – corresponding to their particular trades. Therefore the first paradigm was initially conceived as a matching of individuals and occupations or professions.

The second category of factors that played a role in this paradigm’s elaboration was an economic, societal, and political dispute about the purpose (or the *end*, to use a more philosophical term) of vocational guidance’s interventions (Gysbers, 2010; Huteau, 2002, 2009). Was the ultimate goal of these interventions to reproduce the society as it was (children having an equivalent position in the social structure to that of their parents, and men continuing to do “masculine activities” and women, “feminine ones”)? Or was it to develop an overhauled society which would be both wealthier (because all would have a job corresponding to their capabilities) and fairer (because jobs wouldn’t be distributed any longer in relation to the individual’s ethnic or social origins and gender)? This second conception – endorsed notably by Alfred Binet (1907), Edouard Toulouse (1913), and Edouard Claparède (1922) – was close to the views of the American Progressive Movement formed around 1900 by scholars such as John Dewey, Felix Adler, Edward L. Thorndike, and G. Stanley Hall. As Willis Rudy (1965, p. 11) wrote: These people’s hope was “that American education could be made more socially responsive, more helpful in the meaningful reconstruction of the modern social order, more recognizant of the needs of the individual child, more solidly based on an objectively established science of learning” (quoted by Gysbers, 2010, p. 6).

This ideological dispute about the purposes of vocational guidance was entangled with another about the possible role of scientific knowledge in that guidance. The conservative advocates (e.g., in France, Fernand Mauvezin, 1922; see Huteau, 2009) asserted that counselors should only rely on common sense observations (such as “you need physical strength to have this occupation,” “you don’t see women doing this kind of job,” etc.). In contrast,