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Social Needs for Career Counseling in Japan

Looking Back and Moving Forward:
What career practitioners, ought to do for the workforce of the future in Japan

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It is a great honor for us to be given this opportunity to present our concerns and tasks. Since Dr. Maze kindly sent me the invitation for this opportunity, three of us: Mr. Fujita, Mr. Tanabe and I, have seriously repeated a “dialogue” about what we ought to do for the career development of the future workforce as well as for our professional responsibility to Japan.

We hope that this occasion will be a great opportunity to share our concerns and to learn any realistic solutions from colleagues.

I. INTRODUCTION

We, as professionals working in the Asia Pacific region, have some common experiences implementing new professions, such as counselor and career practitioner for the workforce development of our own societies. Further, many of us have similar backgrounds in that we were educated in the field of career development by leaders in the U.S.A.

On the other hand, we should realize that we are not too similar. Rather, we have various cultures and histories, which have influenced the construction of our own values and lifestyles as well as concepts of career. In order to deal with issues of career development of the workforce of each nation, it is inevitably necessary to respect variety and uniqueness within each nation. We apply theories, research, practical methodologies, and systems which have been developed in other countries. We
respect pioneering leadership in this field by American professionals. Further, we recognize that simple imitation is not what American professionals recommend that we do. Rather, they have been suggesting that we learn their honest attitude toward the career profession. Therefore, as responsible trainers and educators of career practitioners, we sincerely discussed what we ought to do for the workforce of the future in Japan.

As professionals in the field of career development for the Japanese workforce, we confirm that we share the mission of NCDA, as the number people who are unable to find meaning in life and meaning in work increases in the midst the unpredictable, changing environment in Japan. The mission of NCDA is to facilitate “achievement of career and life goals by providing professional development, resources, standards, scientific research and advocacy.” Career Development Facilitators fit within the umbrella of NCDA with their own mission “to assist others in planning careers and obtaining meaningful work” (NCDA, 2012).

At the same time, we would like to share the chaotic reality of career practitioners in Japan with the audience of this conference. As expectations of career practitioners continue to increase in a rapidly changing environment, it becomes harder to respond to this mission and meet these expectations in Japan. In terms of this chaotic situation, we hypothesize that the most effective solution would be

1. To establish an authentic professional training system
2. To establish comprehensive graduate programs under counseling psychology and counselor education departments, which are independent of clinical psychology

We recognize that, after more than 10 years of effort, this plan seems to be almost unrealistic because it challenges the traditional system of higher education in Japan （Watanabe-Muraoka, 2007）.

In order to cope with our task realistically, we recognize the need to look back at our 60 year history of importing career professional training before moving forward to envision a new training system, so that we will be able to identify defects in our system of training career practitioners
II. THE REALITY OF CAREER PRACTITIONERS IN JAPAN

A. Current Political Attention on Career Practitioners

Amid changes in the industrial structure beginning at the end of the twentieth century and dramatic changes in the industrial and social environments in Japan, the national government has taken bold initiatives in Labor policies. At the end of the 20th century, CCE in the USA approved Japan to grant the Global Career Development Facilitators (GDDF) certificate and this certification was accepted and promoted by the Japan Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare as a valid practitioner certification. There are now 4500 certified GCDF in Japan.

Furthermore, in the past two to three years, the national government has taken bold initiatives in labor policies. These include setting targets to boost the percentage of women managers, legislating employment of the disabled, increasing the mandatory retirement age to 65, and mandating mental health check-ups for employees. In order to cope with this changing environment, a move to implement a National Career Consultant Certification is now underway.

B. Looking Back - The History of Career Professionals in Japan

From the 1950's until the present, Japanese leaders in the field of career (vocational) related professions have been spending most of their energy importing the newest up-to-date approaches, theories, terminologies, skills, programs, and related tools, mainly from America, without consideration of their applicability to Japanese society.

Unfortunately, we believe there are three major points that have been ignored, which we must learn to make our profession meaningful for the Japanese society.
1. The spirit, values or philosophy, and socio-cultural background which have founded and successively developed professionality of career services in the U.S.A

2. The 100-year history of this profession in the U.S.A. This profession grew from counseling psychology as a major specialty. Mainly counseling psychologists and other types of psychologists contributed to the development of the career counseling profession through research and theory built into America’s system for educating professional counselors.

3. The existence of professional associations in the U.S.A. which put great effort into taking leadership. The associations (mainly APA and ACA) have constantly focused on maintaining an excellent reputation for their own professions. I have great respect for the efforts of these professional associations. These associations have taken leadership to clarify their own identity and the characteristics of their own fields. They have defined for the public the characteristics which distinguish them from other related professions whenever they and their members confronted challenges from professions which shared theoretically similar roots. These associations also have responsibility for improving the educational system and defining accreditation of their own professional leaders and practitioners in order to achieve their social responsibility.

As a conclusion, it could be said that the current status of the career profession in the States is the result of counseling psychologists’ continuous dialogue and great effort to establish their professional identity. This dialogue contributed to the clarification of their reason for existence and identity as a specialty, and to achieve their ultimate goal which has never changed since its time of birth in the States. Unfortunately, no existing professional associations in Japan have made this effort to responsibly construct our own professional identity and cooperate with other professionals.

III. WHAT WE HAVE UNLEARNED, While Importing the Career Profession

In order to contribute to the career development of the current and future workforce in Japan, our unavoidable task is to review the history of our profession and to find answers to what we must cope with now. By looking back, we believe that we would be
able to find a new approach to our mission, in order not to repeat mistakes of the past.

At first, we tried to find what we have unlearned in the process of learning the new profession of career practitioner. We found at least two important issues which we have unlearned as follows:

A. What gave birth to the career profession? - The roots of our profession

In Japan, the training program for career practitioners mainly focuses on basic skills for constructing a relationship between counselor and client, and some theories as well as assessment tools. But students have little time to learn the roots and the fundamental values in the practice of career counseling.

However it is very important to understand that the career profession has its roots in a fundamental value (respect for social justice and human dignity) and an ideology (democracy). The career profession started from the desire to help new immigrants from countries outside the U.S.A. or people moving from farms to cities to find work. Unfortunately, our career practitioners have unlearned how this root influenced their practice and approaches. I think we should learn the basic value and ideology which gave birth to the career profession, in order to find our own identity, and uniqueness.

Our counterparts in America have repeatedly look back to their origin, as well as changing aspects of the profession, whenever they have been confronted by identity crisis as an independent, authentic, professional field.

We would like to quote sentences about roots of our profession, which has been minimized in Japan.

1. Dr. Martin Katz teaches as follows:
   “The vocational guidance movement was fathered by economics, mothered by ideologies, housed (at least part of the time) by education, and befriended by psychology. Its content retained traces of all these relationships. But of course none of these forces is static: as economics, political and social ideologies, education, and psychology changes, their influences changes; as vocational guidance has matured it has tended toward more purposeful control of its own destiny.” (Katz, M., 1973, p.89)
2. Dr. L. Tylor (1969) states that environmental changes experienced by American society at the end of 19 century gave birth to vocational counseling and counseling psychology. (“The Work of the Counselor”)

And currently,

3. Dr. Edward Herr’s expression that the “career profession has never been in a vacuum,” and Dr. Mark Savickas’ explanation that “career is constructed through interaction between person and environments” explain that the specialty of career practitioner has roots in the desire to help people living under drastically changing environments in planning careers and obtaining meaningful work.

Looking back at the history of the career profession, I must mention that our career practitioners have unlearned who are our father and mother (pursuance of democracy), and friends (knowing psychological view). It is a common belief in Japan that economy is the father to our profession. However, without a mother our profession would never have been born. I am sure that nobody denies that industrial development is an important element for advancing society; however at the same time we must recognize that economic growth also has some types of negative impact on people. Economy or industrial development inevitably creates various difficulties for human life. In order to pursue human dignity and equal opportunity in our future workforce, various forms of helping and new educational systems were introduced to change those negative effects to positive effects.

**B. The second unlearned issue is the lack of systematic professional counselor education in the career arena comparable to the American model**

We have unlearned how much the system of professional education has been significantly important to respond to social needs as well as development of professional personnel. The ongoing training system for certifying career practitioners in Japan is basically the translation of the program for Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) developed in America. Further, most of trainers operating this program in Japan are those who took some extra course work and/or practice at university or at the related associations after being certified. This arrangement of professional education systems in Japan is quite different than America. It could be said that most of career practitioners in Japan are at the novice level. Furthermore, there are very few competent practitioners who can offer supervision to foster novice
practitioners at a practical level. We would sincerely like to learn how other Asian countries have modified American models for career development of citizens, and educated career professionals for your own people.

IV. What We Must Consider in a Rapidly Changing Environment

The change in the environment surrounding the Japanese workforce signals a new direction for Japanese society.

A. Japanese Society is undergoing unprecedented social and economic change

1. Drastic demographic change:
Japan is already an aged society, since the data for Japan in 1999 showed that The population over 65 years old stood at 16.7%. The Japanese have the longest life-expectancy and average life-span in the world and the total fertility rate has been dropping rapidly during the past 50 years. In the year 2030, 28% of the population is expected to be over 65 years old. This figure indicates the rapid decrease of the productive population, which affects the mandatory retirement system in the industrial sector. A much more important issue for the young and middle aged population is that this changes the “meaning of work” which they may have expected at a young age. Super taught us the meaning of work using the model of the-career rainbow. According to Blustein (2006), “Super constructed a creative and far-reaching set of ideas out the notion of career” and embedded the role of work into a more coherent and expansive set of assumptions about human development. In the midst of unpredictably changing economics, every generation of Japanese must face the socially traditional meaning of career and continuously find one’s own “meaning of work” rather than the traditional notion of career.
1. Changing employment policies and labor cost policies due to changes in the business environment

2. Changed or reduced personnel training due to increased corporate competition and globalization

3. Both employers and employees are unprepared for the new law mandating employment of disabled workers
B. Increase in young people who cannot adapt to a diverse work environment and have low social adaptability (immature career development)

1. Increase in youth unprepared for transition from school to work
2. Increase in youth who have immature or low self-esteem at the transitional period
3. Increase in young workers unprepared for the reality shock at the entry stage to industrialized society and as a result quit jobs within a few months

C. Personal and social values as well as meaning of working do not change as quickly as expected in the changing environment

1. Increasing diversity in the industrial and business arenas, but no change in value-system managing people in general
2. The dominant traditional value system in general encourages people to get a good education, secure employment in a stable large corporation, and receive a high salary

V. CONCLUSION: We Need to Focus on Lifespan Career Development—Meaning of Working

A. Reviewing the purpose of our presentation,
This presentation underscores the need for specialists who can promote a workforce that will benefit Japanese society and provide career development support amid rapid changes in Japanese society and the workforce

To accomplish this, it is necessary to reexamine career development approaches which have been developed in the U.S.A., and offer specialized training for career practitioners who can support lifespan career development for the workforce of the future in Japan
B. How can employees respond to this changing environment without losing their identity?

1. Establishing own identity is becoming increasingly difficult in Japanese society, and we are moving in a direction in which people will find it hard to live unless they make the most of these changes and develop their own identity.

2. Precisely because we are living in changing times, we need career practitioners who can provide educational and developmental support that will actively promote career development.

C. The difficulty of finding “meaning in work”

1. Many employees work in companies without much hope of ever being promoted or receiving higher pay.

2. Career practitioners in Japan will have to help employees in finding own meaning of work in near future.

D. Supporting psychological and social maturity of each person amid a trend of delayed maturity

1. Society is growing more complex, but social values do not change easily and maturity is delayed.

2. Career specialists must equip themselves with greater competencies than ever before while continually reflecting on their philosophy and sharpening their insight.

E. Necessity for training specialized career practitioners to support lifespan career development

First it is necessary to train career practitioners who help others and society to develop as well as supervisors who can train career practitioners to become responsible specialists.
VI. CLOSING:

We would like to close our presentation by summarizing two major issues.

A. From “career” to “meaning of working” through the lifespan

Comparing the rapidly changing environment to the slow maturity of people in Japan, it is inevitably necessary for young and middle as well as aged populations to be helped to change their point of view from career to “meaning of work.” We recognized that Super taught us the meaning of work using the model of the career rainbow. “Super constructed a creative and far-reaching set of ideas out of the notion of career” and embedded the role of work into a more coherent and expansive set of assumptions about human development. In the midst of unpredictably changing economics, every generation of Japanese must face the socially traditional meaning of career and continuously find one’s own “meaning of working” rather than the traditional notion of career.

B. To move forward: The critical task is to create an authentic training program for increasing competent career practitioners

In consideration of environmental change and those impacts on every person in the Japanese workforce, it is clear that the critical task is to increase well-trained competent career practitioners. The critical problem is that the existing training program and its content no longer prepares the individual to meet society’s needs. Further, active practitioners have begun to seek supervisors. With these in mind, we have developed, from the viewpoint of social justice, an original supervisor training program for competent career practitioners. We could consult some American advisors and reviewed the NCDA model and a training program for the supervisor in the career arena. As a result, considering the lack of counseling psychologists and educators in career arena in Japan, and the novice level of ongoing training for the certified practitioner, we finally decided to develop a tentative original program for educating competent supervisors.

References
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