

Practitioner Framework for Supporting Adults Through Career Transitions in Volatile Labor Markets

Le Tuan Anh

Abstract

Volatile labor markets have made career transitions increasingly common among adults worldwide. In Vietnam, economic slowdown, automation, and organizational restructuring have displaced numerous workers since 2023, creating substantial challenges for career development practitioners. While established career theories explain career adaptability and career formation, practitioners often require practical approaches that address clients' immediate psychological, financial, and identity-related concerns. Based on over a decade of professional experience in career counseling and workforce development in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, this paper proposes a practitioner framework comprising 10 principles for supporting adults through career transitions. The framework integrates established career development theories with practical counseling strategies that promote resilience, labor market literacy, and sustainable decision-making. Rather than prescribing specific career choices, the framework emphasizes helping clients develop adaptive capabilities to navigate ongoing labor market uncertainty. Overall, this paper offers a practice-informed perspective that complements existing career development literature and may be useful for counselors working with adults undergoing involuntary career transitions.

Introduction

Career transitions have become increasingly common in contemporary working life. Technological disruption, automation, economic uncertainty, and organizational restructuring have transformed employment patterns, making stable lifelong careers less attainable than in previous decades (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2025). Under these circumstances, career development professionals are increasingly expected to help individuals navigate repeated career transitions rather

than preparing them for a single career choice.

Vietnam reflects these global trends. Since 2023, over 1.3 million workers, particularly those in export-oriented industries, have been affected by layoffs, reduced working hours, or income loss, while labor market recovery remains uneven despite gradual economic improvement. These changes have increased the demand for career counseling among experienced professionals undergoing involuntary career transitions.

Existing theories and concepts, such as Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2013),

career adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), and the Psychology of Working Theory (Blustein, 2006), provide strong conceptual foundations. However, practitioners frequently require practical frameworks that translate theory into day-to-day counseling interventions. This paper proposes a practitioner-oriented framework based on 10 principles developed through career counseling practice with adults in Vietnam.

Practitioner Framework for Adult Career Transitions

The proposed framework integrates established career development theories with practical counseling strategies.

First, practitioners should prioritize stability over strategy. Adults experiencing job loss often face financial insecurity and emotional distress, which can reduce their capacity for long-term career planning. Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory suggests that successful adaptation depends partly on available resources and support systems. Helping clients achieve temporary financial and psychological stability creates a stronger foundation for subsequent career exploration.

Second, career transition should be reframed as portfolio evolution rather than a complete restart. Many clients perceive career change as abandoning previous experience. In contrast, Career Construction Theory views careers as evolving life stories in which previous experiences remain valuable resources for future adaptation (Savickas, 2013). Identifying transferable skills enables clients to reposition existing competencies instead of discarding them.

Third, practitioners should encourage micro-experimentation. Rather than making irreversible career decisions, clients can explore possible directions through short-term projects, freelance work, volunteering, or targeted skill development. Ibarra (2003)

argues that professional identities develop through experimentation rather than reflection alone, making small-scale experiences valuable mechanisms for career discovery.

Fourth, counselors should explicitly address identity reconstruction. Job loss frequently represents the loss of professional identity, daily routines, and a sense of social belonging rather than employment alone (Blustein, 2006). Creating opportunities for clients to reconstruct their professional identity is an essential component of effective career counseling.

Fifth, practitioners should develop clients' labor market literacy. Self-awareness alone is insufficient if individuals cannot interpret labor market signals. Clients benefit from understanding hiring trends, emerging occupations, entry barriers, and the difference between short-lived market enthusiasm and sustainable demand.

Sixth, counselors should develop clients' decision-making capability instead of providing answers. Effective career counseling empowers clients to make future decisions independently rather than continually relying on professional advice. This approach strengthens career adaptability, defined as a set of psychosocial resources for managing career transitions (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Seventh, practitioners should normalize nonlinear career pathways. Contemporary careers increasingly involve lateral moves, temporary setbacks, and portfolio careers rather than predictable upward progression (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Recognizing these patterns alleviates the anxiety associated with unconventional career decisions.

Eighth, counseling should remain action-oriented. Every session should conclude with specific, observable actions, such as

conducting informational interviews, completing portfolio projects, or expanding professional networks. Small accomplishments build confidence while providing evidence to inform future career decisions.

Ninth, career planning should acknowledge life constraints. Adult clients often balance family responsibilities, financial obligations, and health considerations within limited time. Sustainable career planning therefore requires realistic rather than idealized solutions.

Finally, career practitioners should serve as thinking partners rather than problem solvers. Coaching approaches emphasize facilitating reflective thinking through questioning rather than prescribing solutions (Whitmore, 2017). Helping clients develop their own reasoning skills supports long-term career resilience.

Discussion and Implications

The proposed framework complements established career theories by emphasizing practical interventions for adults experiencing involuntary career transitions. Rather than focusing exclusively on occupational choice, the framework addresses psychological adaptation, identity reconstruction, labor market literacy, and behavioral experimentation.

Although developed based on professional practice in Vietnam, these principles align closely with international research emphasizing adaptability, lifelong learning, and career resilience (OECD, 2024; WEF, 2025). Future research may use empirical evaluation methods to examine the effectiveness of this framework across different labor markets and client populations.

Conclusion

As labor markets become increasingly volatile, career counseling must move beyond helping clients identify suitable occupations toward supporting ongoing adaptation. The practitioner framework presented in this paper integrates established career development theories with practical counseling strategies designed for adults facing career uncertainty. By emphasizing stability, experimentation, labor market literacy, identity reconstruction, and sustainable decision-making, career practitioners can prepare clients not merely to survive career transitions but to build resilient and adaptive careers.

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