Chapter 10
The Postmodern Approach to Career Counseling for Contemporary Organizations

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ABSTRACT

The intensified globalization and diversity in contemporary workplaces, along with other social and economic changes, have escalated the need for reconsidering and changing traditional approaches to career counseling. The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it examines common career counseling practices adopted by organizations. Second, it introduces a nontraditional approach, postmodern approach, to career counseling and explores its effectiveness in meeting changing organizational needs in the globalized world. To achieve these objectives, the chapter begins with a brief overview of career counseling in organizations. Next, current workplace career counseling practices are examined. Following that, an alternative approach by introducing the postmodern approach to career counseling is proposed and the impact of the postmodern approach on the individual, organizational levels, and future trends are discussed. The chapter concludes with implications for career counseling practices and recommendations for future research. This chapter benefits both practitioners and researchers interested in career counseling.

INTRODUCTION

Career counseling, as part of employee career development services, is not new to organizations. However, what has prompted the need for reexamining organizations' current career counseling practices is the wide range of changes that have occurred in the modern society. A few examples of these changes include the globalized workforce, fast migration of labor, wide adoption of sophisticated technology, changing demand for workforce competencies, proliferation of achievable career options, and increasing focus on balancing personal and professional life. These

changes have presented unfamiliar challenges to both organizations and employees; and they make career counseling a more prominent issue of concern than ever before.

To start, let's first clarify a few core and related concepts used in this chapter: career, career counseling and career development. We define a career as an occupation or vocation that requires specific training or education to enable an individual to fulfill job responsibilities and make progress over his or her work lifespan. In terms of career counseling, while we acknowledge that there is no single universally accepted definition, and this concept has been constantly evolving in response to changing conditions in organizations and societies, we have developed a working definition of our own based on Herr's (1997) perception as follows:

… a continuum of intervention processes which range from facilitating self and occupational awareness, exploration of possibilities and the learning of career planning skills, to stress reduction or anger management, issues of indecisiveness, and work-adjustment issues that require a fusion of career and personal counseling. (p. 86)

Our working definition of career counseling is that it is an intervention process in which professional assistance is provided to assess an individual's personality, interests and skills in order to help him or her explore career options. We further define organizational career counseling as practices adopted by organizations to assist employees with exploration and decision making tasks related to career options, transitions, or progression.

With regards to career development, we consider it as a broad term, including career counseling. We share Super's (1957) and Cummings and Worley's (2005) conceptualizations of career development. Super (1957) described career development as "a lifelong, continuous process of developing and implementing a self-concept,

testing it against reality, with satisfaction to self and benefit to society" (p. 282). Cummings and Worley (2005) believed career development is a process that "helps individuals achieve their career objectives" (p. 418) and organizations play a crucial role in providing career development opportunities such as "skill training, performance feedback and coaching, planned job rotation, mentoring and continuing education" (p. 418). Informed by these definitions, we propose our definition of career development from the organization development perspective. That is, career development is a lifelong process of planning, implementing, managing and achieving goals related to one's career, learning, and life within and between organizations.

The objective of this chapter is twofold. First, it examines common career counseling practices adopted by organizations. Second, it introduces a nontraditional approach (the postmodern approach) to career counseling and explores its effectiveness in meeting the changing organizational needs in the globalized world. In this chapter, the postmodern approach to career counseling is defined as a collaborative process of intervention application in the current social context (Brott, 2001). By advocating this approach, we argue that postmodern career counseling would better serve employees' career needs, thus should be promoted and adopted by career counselors and human resource developers.

Through this research, we intend to address three questions:

1. What are the common practices of career counseling in organizations?
2. What is the postmodern approach to career counseling?
3. How can the postmodern approach be used to address emerging organizational demands for career counseling?

To address these questions, we adopted a literature review approach. We performed a thorough

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