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***Societal Contexts, Issues, Research Questions and Interventions in the Domain of Vocational Counselling***

***Jean Guichard***

***Abstract***

Vocational (or career development) issues are produced in societies having specific characteristics and they bear the mark of their societal origin. Two categories of factors play a significant role in their definition: (1) broad general societal phenomena such as collective beliefs and representations and (2) the concrete ways in which work and education (and training) are organised and employment distributed. In our societies, six major vocational issues have successively emerged during the last century. Each of them has given rise to theoretical constructions that model them in a certain way.

Vocational interventions (e.g. career counselling) have been developed within these different scientific approaches in relation to the (social, economical, etc.) ends and concrete goals they aim at. Three kinds of issues are typical of today's situation: they are about the capacity to develop and invest in one's own competencies, to cope with transitions and to anticipate one's own future. These issues find their meaning within the broader question addressed to each individual: how should I best direct my life? Those issues are quite difficult to deal with and most people need to be helped by skilled counsellors. They also have to develop their self-reflexivity and their competencies. Therefore the training of counsellors, and an offer of life long education and training to people, are major challenges for all developed economies.

***Zusammenfassung***

Berufliche oder Laufbahnentwicklungsthemen sind das Produkt von Gesellschaften mit bestimmten Merkmalen; geprägt durch ihren gesellschaftlichen Ursprung. Zwei Kategorien von Faktoren spielen für ihre Definition eine bedeutende Rolle: (1) allgemeine gesellschaftliche Phänomene wie kollektive Glaubenshaltungen und deren Äußerungen sowie (2) die konkreten Organisationsmuster von Arbeit und Bildung (Ausbildung) und die Verteilung von Beschäftigung. In unseren Gesellschaften sind im letzten Jahrhundert nacheinander sechs große berufliche Themen in Erscheinung getreten. Jedes von ihnen hat den Aufschwung bestimmter theoretischer Konstrukte ausgelöst, die diese in bestimmter Weise nachbilden.

Berufliche Interventionen (z. B. Laufbahnberatung) haben sich innerhalb dieser verschiedenen wissenschaftlichen Ansätze in Verbindung mit den (sozialen, ökonomischen) Zwecken und konkreten Zielsetzungen entwickelt, auf die sie ausgerichtet sind. Drei Arten von Themen sind typisch für die heutige Situation: die Fähigkeit seine eigenen Kompetenzen zu entwickeln und in sie zu investieren, Transitionen zu bewältigen und die eigene Zukunft zu antizipieren. Diese Themen erhalten ihre Bedeutung im Rahmen der umfassenderen Frage, vor die jedes Individuum gestellt ist: Wie sollte ich am besten mein Leben führen? Diese Themen sind nicht leicht zu bewältigen und die meisten Menschen benötigen die Hilfe von kompetenten Beratern. Denn sie müssen auch ihre Selbstreflexivität und ihre Kompetenzen entwickeln. Deshalb sind die Beraterausbildung und ein Angebot an lebensbegleitender Bildung und Ausbildung größere Herausforderungen für alle entwickelten Ökonomien.

### ***1 Introduction***

Vocational interventions (for example: career counselling, career education, employment counselling) aim at helping people find an answer to the problems they come across in the societies they live in. These interventions are defined in relation, on one hand, to societal vocational issues and their development as research question and, on the other, to the societal, human and personal ends they aim at. This point is developed in the first part of this paper. The second part outlines the major vocational issues that have successively emerged in our societies during the last century and the different research questions they have raised. As it will become evident, three kinds of vocational issues are currently prevailing in our societies.

Beyond their differences, these issues relate back to a same problem: How to design one's life? In the current context of very flexible working activities (and of an uncertain future) such a question is very difficult to tackle. To cope with it, individuals have to develop their own self-reflexivity. And as it will be shown in the conclusion, most of them need to be supported in this endeavour by qualified counsellors.

***2 Determination of Vocational Interventions***

Three major categories of factors play a role in the definition of vocational interventions: (1) general societal phenomena (as collective beliefs), (2) the concrete ways in which work and education are organised with the vocational issues these organisations determine and the scientific reconstruction of these issues and (3) the goals and ends these interventions pursue.

***2.1 General Society Phenomena***

The broader factors are general societal phenomena. These phenomena encompass collective beliefs and representations. They are also connected with the structure of the society and its degree of complexity, of integration and of relation with other societies. For example: our western industrialized societies are, to use the title of Norbert Elias' book: 'Gesellschaften der Individuen' (1987). This means that the individuals are seen as responsible for what they make of their lives. We are not in what Geert Hofstede (1991) calls 'collectivistic societies' where it is up to the group to think about what any individual has to do to ensure the future of the community. In our societies, each individual is required to take charge of himself / herself and his / her immediate family: s/he has to think of his/her own individual future.

Another feature of our societies is the centrality of work activities. We believe that a career, or at least an occupation, is the best route to self-achievement. As the philosopher Emmanuel Renault explains (2004: 119) 'work constitutes one of the vectors of value that we want to give to life'.

But, at the same time, our globalised societies are marked by what could be called a 'fading away of the familiar ethos of actions' (Giddens, 1991). In more traditional societies (like most European societies were in the middle of the last century), many behaviours, ways of seeing things, beliefs, collective representations, moral norms, identity traits, etc. go undiscussed: they just appeared obvious and constituted bearings for everyone in his/her everyday life. The development of information and communication technologies and industries as well as an important immigration of people from societies quite different from the western ones resulted in everyone's growing awareness of the particularities of his/her own culture and lifestyle.

In the meantime, a feeling of uncertainty about future is growing. Thus, a few years ago, Ulrich Beck edited a book the title of which was clear: 'Risikogesellschaft' (1986). Recently, in France, a psycho-social survey (Palmade ed., 2003) has showed that about 2/3 of a French panel think of the future of their

work as being uncertain. They also believe that this uncertainty will increase in the future and spread to other life domains (notably: family). Palmade's book is entitled « L'incertitude comme norme » ('Uncertainty as a norm').

In summary, in our today's societies, the individual is seen as responsible for his/her own life choices in a societal context where the future is seen as unpredictable and even possibly perilous. Among these choices, the vocational and employment ones nevertheless appear to be of major importance: work is considered as the major way to self-achievement.

### ***2.2 Vocational Issues and their Scientific Reconstruction***

The second category of factors that plays a significant role in the definition of these vocational and occupational issues consists in the concrete ways in which work and education (and training) are organised and employment distributed. For example, when vocational guidance became a recognised profession at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the major stake was about 'Choosing a vocation', to quote Frank Parsons' title (1909).

Indeed, at that time, the 'occupational work system' (to use Touraine's terminology, 1955) was dominant. This form of work organisation was close to craft industry. People had a trade or a profession: they were woodworker, lathe operator, bookkeeper, lawyer, etc. They possessed the knowledge, know-how, knacks, etc. required by their trade or profession. This capital of skills defined their qualification and was a major component of their identity. Its development necessitated a long training. In this context, the major question addressed to each individual was: How to find an occupation or a profession that fits me best and – first – that I'm able to learn?

As we'll see soon, the transformation of the work organisation during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the extension of schooling and the development of complex school systems, and more recently, the globalisation of employment resulted in a profound transformation of vocational issues.

Thus, it is in relation to these issues that vocational or employment counsellors can define their practice. Nevertheless the building of rigorous interventions requires them to refer to a body of knowledge about these issues. Such a body of knowledge permits them to precise the goals of their interventions in relation to their ends.

### ***2.3 Goals and Ends of Vocational Interventions***

The relations between knowledge, goals and ends are complex (Guichard, 2001). A goal can be defined as the concrete purpose of an intervention. This purpose may be more or less encompassing. A general goal of an intervention could be, for example, to support school dropouts in their transition to work. A more specific goal, encompassed in the previous one, could consist of helping them build some general competencies that are demanded by today's work environment (a certain way of behaving and of interacting with others, an ability to control one's own work, etc. Cf. the observations made by Beaud and Pialoux (2003), about the 'employability' of low qualified workers).

Ends could be defined as the human, ethical, social or economical meanings of such goals. For example: is the end of a particular intervention to adapt an individual to the current work organisation? Is it to help him/her in his/her own individual human development? Is it to try to promote a more equal society? Is it to contribute to the development of what the International Labour Organisation (ILO) calls 'decent jobs', an expression that refers to the idea of jobs that allow one to live a decent human life? According to the ILO, in 2001, there was a deficit of one billion 'decent jobs' throughout the world.

The issue of the relations between goals and ends in vocational or employment counselling is not simple, and indeed, very often ignored. The implicit end of many interventions is to adapt individuals to the current work organisation. But, as different authors have shown (for example: Sennett, 1998; Dejours, 2007) this organisation may be extremely harmful to the individual.

So, if work aims firstly at the production of goods, but at the same time, also contributes – in a major way – to the development of a certain kind of society and individual, it seems that this issue should be tackled again. Such considerations might lead to the definition of new goals for vocational interventions. Among them, in our current societal context, the following may emerge: helping individuals find activities that contribute to their self-fulfilment (Cf. Muirhead, 2004), helping them think about designing their own lives in the context of an equitable human society, helping them analyse the work conditions that “offer opportunities for autonomy, relatedness, and competence” (Blustein, 2006: 151), etc.

If, on the one hand, the goals of vocational or employment interventions are related to their ends, on the other, they are also related to the body of knowledge that contributes to their definition.

The development of such a body of knowledge has been made possible only by the transforming of societal vocational issues into scientific questions. For example, as already mentioned, a century ago, the core issue was to choose

one’s vocation. Founders in our field (Frank Parsons, Edouard Toulouse, Hugo Münsterberg and in a way, Eduard Spranger, etc.) turned this issue into a scientific question that can be formulated as follows: how to match best individuals and occupations? This question led to the development of a century of research where the core concepts were those of: aptitudes, personality traits, personality styles, etc. The most achieved model as regards this issue of matching was probably the ‘Theory of Work Adjustment’ of René V. Dawis and Lloyd H. Lofquist (1984).

**3 Vocational Issues and Research Questions during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Industrialized Countries**

**3.1 Matching Individuals and Occupations**

The following table sums up this societal vocational issue and research question in the work context that prevails at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Table 1**

Context	Vocational society issue addressed to the individual <i>Research question</i>	Some of the major notions & concepts
Occupational Work – System	How to find an occupation or a profession that fits me and first – that I’m able to learn?  <i>How to match individuals and occupations?</i>	Occupation, Profession, Aptitude, Personality traits & styles, etc.

**3.2 Matching Individuals and Working Sets**

Some years later, Henry Ford developed a work organisation, inspired by the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor (1911). In this work system, job vacancies no longer correspond to crafts or professions. Operators are trained on the spot and the issue of the necessary aptitudes for the training for an occupation loses

its meaning. Workers define their occupational identity in relation to the working set they feel they belong to (For example, as described by Willis 1977: ‘us, metal-men’). The matching process is then between an individual and a job setting or a working set. A vocational issue became more important: will the person adapt to the work conditions and to the co-workers of such and such a shop? Does s/he share some values, collective representations, interests, etc. with other members of the same work group?

The following table sums up this second societal problem and research question that arose during the first part of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It can be observed that it was precisely at the end of the 1920s, when this work system was much in vogue, that Edward Strong (1927) conceived a device in harmony with it. It aims at measuring the proximity of interests (in various non-occupational domains) shared by individuals doing any particular job. Today, John Holland’s questionnaires aim at answering the same question.

**Table 2**

Context	Vocational society issue addressed to the individual <i>Research question</i>	Some of the major notions & concepts
Taylorism – Fordism	How to find a job setting (a work collective) that fits me?  <i>How to match individuals and working sets?</i>	Job Interests, values, Collective representations

**3.3 Career Development**

With, first, automation and, then, computerisation, a new work system emerged. This ‘technical work system’ is characterised by work organisation in small teams, responsible for results (Dubar, 1996). Activities consist first in mastering the events within production situations. This mastery is collective: the work activities of each member are not strictly defined. Occupational qualification is seen as a set of differentiated competencies – a function – within a network of work.



In this context, workers must adapt and develop new “operational know-how” and also ‘new competencies’ e.g. the capacity to show initiative, to take responsibilities, to cooperate, to be rigorous, etc. They must adapt themselves to the other members of the collective. They must adapt to face production hazards. They must also adapt to fast technological evolutions.

In such a work context, the vocational issue is no longer only, as previously, to ‘choose a vocation’ or to “find a work setting”. It becomes that of a life-long career development (Super, 1980). Therefore, for each worker, this life-long vocational issue can be stated thus: “How to capitalise on my diverse experiences to adapt and define occupational (and personal) plans?”

The following research question was derived from this societal problem: What are the factors and processes of a life-long, life-span career adaptation and development? (see the table below). Some new concepts appeared: career development, career transitions, career decision-making, experiential learning, etc. Indeed, one of the major stakes became that of the recognition, development and transfer of competencies built during interactions in work collectives or during activities of any kind.

**Table 3**

Context	Vocational society issue addressed to the individual <i>Research question</i>	Some of the major notions & concepts
Technical Work-System	How to capitalise on my diverse experiences to adapt and define occupational (and personal) plans?  <i>What are the factors and processes of a life-long, life span career adaptation and development?</i>	Function, Work Network Career development Car. Decision-making Experiential Learning Competencies

### 3.4 Anticipating One's Own Future

Simultaneously with the setting up of this technical work system, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked in all western industrialised countries by a sharp increase in the number of young people staying on at school for a longer time than before. This created an obligation for school organisations to cater for students coming from much more heterogeneous cultural, social and economic backgrounds than before. This process resulted in the setting-up of complex school organisations and the definition of rules (e.g.: exams, tests, interviews, committees, tuition fees, etc.) for the distribution of students within these organisations.

The implementation of these complex school systems led to the apparition of a new vocational issue for young people: 'what course of study should I choose, given my academic performance and my personal and familial expectations with regard to my integration in the professional world (and the position in society it implies), in the future?'

This led to the construction of the following research question: What are the factors and processes of development of future intentions and prospects in youngsters? The book published by Eli Ginzberg, Sol Ginsburg, Sidney Axelrad and John Herma, in 1951, can be considered as a first exploration of this domain.

**Table 4**

Context	Vocational society issue addressed to the individual <i>Research question</i>	Some of the major notions & concepts
Generalisation of education. Complex School system	What course of study should and could I choose (...) with regard to my integration in the professional world (and the position in society it implies), in the future? <i>What are the factors and processes of development of future intentions and prospects in youngsters?</i>	Future perspective Future plans Educational choices

***3.5 Competencies Development and Investment***

The last two decades have been characterised by a globalisation of economy and work, leading to increased competition between and profound reorganisation within companies.

Two big types of changes were observed. The first consisted in externalising some productions. The second consisted in a major reorganisation of work. This reorganisation has two aspects: first, a differentiation within enterprises between peripheral and core workers and, second, a 'boundaryless' work system that seems to have a major impact on working life.

Consequently, many companies are now organised around a steady 'core' of employees supplemented by an adjustable number of 'peripheral workers'. The first ones are qualified and polyvalent employees who guarantee the company's durability and allow its adjustment in case of a crisis. The second ones are unskilled operators. They are recruited with a fixed-term work contract when conjuncture is good and dismissed when it deteriorates.

This distinction occurred in a context where boundaryless work organisation developed (Ashkenas, Ulrich, Jick & Kerr, 1995). The core idea of such work organisation is to "break through the boundaries that block success" of a company. This means, for example, that boundaries between functions (e.g.: engineering, marketing and accounting) tend to blur. As regards the production process, many decisions are made 'on the spot' at the workplace, and members operate more informally than in more bureaucratic organisations. This form of organisation implies that employees become extremely adaptable as regards their work activities. The concepts of defined work functions and of durable work teams tend to give way to those of flexible work teams gathered for the duration of a specific project during which each employee has to prove his/her own capabilities as regards this particular common goal.

With this new form of work organisation, some of the major psychological dimensions of the employment contract have also changed. Previously (for example: in the technical work system), employers were seen as having a moral obligation to offer employees a long-term career development ("a career plan") within the structure. In the new form of organisation, the employer's obligation is limited to supporting the employee's competencies development.

As regards individual careers, two new concepts appeared: those of 'protean career' (Hall, 1976) and of 'boundaryless career' (DeFillipi & Arthur, 1994). Fundamentally, they refer to the idea that career development depends on the individual and not on the organisation. A metaphor is sometimes used to describe the boundaryless employee: that of an investor possessing a capital of competencies. S/he has to find a good investment (that is the job that can yield

him/her good profit in the current context). In case of such a good investment, the reward is both in terms of dividends (a good income) and of capital (a competencies growth).

This issue can be considered as the central vocational issue facing the core employees in such a boundaryless work organisation. As regards counselling practices, the concepts of competencies development, elicitation and transfer become central. The core research question derived from this vocational issue can be phrased thus: What are the factors and processes implied in the development, the taking stock and transfer of competencies? (See table below).

**Table 5**

Context	Vocational society issue addressed to the individual <i>Research question</i>	Some of the major notions & concepts
Globalisation Boundaryless-Organisation Core employees	How to make the best investment of my competencies to adapt and develop new competencies?  <i>What are the factors and processes implied in the development, the taking stock and transfer of competencies?</i>	Flexible work & team Career adaptability Competencies development, elicitation and transfer

### ***3.6 Coping with Transitions***

Most labour-market specialists (e.g. Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Edwards, Reich & Gordon, 1975) observed that core and peripheral employees don't belong to the same segment of the labour-market: Job mobility between these two segments is restricted.

This has an important consequence as regards the occupational pathway of peripheral workers: it is difficult for them to become "core employees". Their various and heterogeneous occupational experiences (and periods of unemployment) don't really form any continuity. Their work life was qualified as 'vocational chaos' by Danielle Riverin-Simard (1996).

This chaos is not only of a vocational nature. Many authors have indeed shown that job uncertainty tends to go together with an increased precariousness in the other life spheres (personal, couple or family, friends, community, etc. (see: Paugam, 2000; Palmade, 2003; Cingolani, 2005; Le Blanc, 2007). Thus, peripheral workers appear to be confronted with a much broader issue than a strictly occupational one. For each peripheral worker, the very first issue appears to be: ‘how to cope with the multiple transitions I face during the course of my life?’

As regards research, the concept of psychosocial transitions was developed by Colin Murray Parkes in 1971. The major research question developed in connection with this vocational and personal issue was then the following: What are the factors and processes at stake in psycho-social transitions? (See table below).

**Table 6**

Context	Vocational society issue addressed to the individual <i>Research question</i>	Some of the major notions & concepts
Globalisation Boundaryless- Organisation Peripheral Workers	How to cope with the multiple transitions I face during the course of my life?  <i>What are the factors and processes at stake in psycho-social transitions?</i>	Flexible employment Job uncertainty Precarious life Psychosocial transitions

***4 Conclusion: Counselling Individuals to help them Design their Lives in a More Human Society***

At the end of this rapid survey, some conclusions may be drawn in relation to vocational interventions.

Let's recall first that, in our industrialised societies, vocational issues are addressed to the individuals: one considers that it is up to each individual to personally cope with these issues. Individuals are nevertheless seen as able to be helped in such a reflection (particularly by a counsellor).

These issues differ notably according to the different types of work (or school) organisation in which individuals interact. The issue can be that of choosing either (1) an occupation (or a profession) or (2) a certain working set. The issue may also be that of the individual's (3) career development or of (4) his/her ability to develop and invest his/her different competencies. For the less qualified or precarious employees, the major stake is often to find out (5) how to cope with the frequent transitions that impact their lives. Finally, for the youngsters (high-school or college students, school dropouts, etc.), the major issue is (6) to anticipate their school, occupational, social and personal futures and to embark on activities in accordance with these anticipations.

These different issues led to the construction of research questions that permitted the development of knowledge about the involved factors and processes. These scientific questions are constructions that correspond to a certain interpretation of the vocational issues they stem from. Concepts and observations produced this way (for example: about the processes relating to the development and transfer of competencies, about the formation of future intentions in adolescents, etc.) enable a setting-up of more rigorous vocational interventions.

However, these interventions can only be precisely designed to meet some economical, social, personal or ethical ends that often remain implicit. For example, career education programs in schools may differ according to their ends. Very often, they aim at preparing youngsters to cope with their future occupational transitions. But, alternatively, their end could be to help youngsters think about the conditions relating to the creation of work activities permitting a human development in a more equitable society.

Three kinds of vocational issues are characteristic of today's situation: they are about the capacity to develop and invest in one's own competencies, to cope with transitions and to anticipate one's own future. These major issues have some points in common. Four of them are worth to be emphasised.

#### ***4.1 A Core Issue: Designing one's Life***

The first one is that these work-related issues point to a much encompassing one: when an individual reflects upon any working issue, s/he has necessarily to think of its articulation with his/her other life spheres. For example, the question of investing one's competencies in a particular work activity inevitably leads the individual to the meaning of such an investment in the broader context of his/her life (family, personal and social life) (Baubion-Broye ed., 1998). Therefore, it can be stressed that, in our current society context, vocational issues are never simple questions of work, employment or career. They always

point to a major question addressed to the individual: that of designing his/her life (Guichard, 2004; Guichard, 2005; Savickas, Nota, Rossier, et al., 2009).

#### ***4.2 Counselling: A Dominant Form of Vocational Intervention***

These vocational issues have a second common point: they call for the individual to reflect profoundly on her/himself. First s/he has to understand the problem s/he faces according to their various aspects. S/he needs then to develop his/her own reflection on her/himself and the different contexts where s/he interacts. This is probably the reason why a particular kind of vocational intervention currently tends to prevail: the dialogical counselling interaction (Guichard, 2008; Guichard & Dumora, 2008). This practice is indeed considered as the most efficient one at helping individuals carry out such an understanding and reflection. Therefore it is not surprising that an extraordinary growth in counselling or coaching practices is currently being observed in our societies. It can also be noted that these practices are more and more often delivered by private companies.

#### ***4.3 Career or Identity Capital***

It can also be observed that individuals greatly differ regarding their ability to face the working or personal issues they come across (to analyse them, to develop coping resources and strategies, etc.). Notions like ‘career capital’ (Bender, Cadin & de Saint Giniez, 2003) or ‘identity capital’ (Côté, 1996) have been proposed to account for these differences. These capitals appear to be connected to the different kinds of capitals described by Pierre Bourdieu: the economic, cultural and social ones (Cf. Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Thus, individuals lacking resources or those in precarious conditions seem to be poorly equipped to face the current societal demand to lead one’s own life thoughtfully. At the same time, the development of commercial services in this domain makes these people’s access to them even more unlikely. Such a phenomenon increases social inequalities.

#### ***4.4 The Issue of Decent Human Work***

A last point should also be mentioned. It is about today’s working activity: working conditions in boundaryless organisations appear to be particularly dif-

difficult. For example, the sociologist Richard Sennett observed – in: ‘The Corrosion of Character. The personal consequence of work in the new capitalism’ (1998) – that in almost every factory the metaphor of a team is used. But, in many cases, it seems to be a fiction: the pressure from other team members is actually used to make each individual member work quicker and harder. The work psychologist, Christophe Dejours (2007), pointed out that, in such work contexts, solidarity among co-workers seems to have evaporated, with each and every one being seen as a potential dangerous rival. A recent study in Renault car factories (Brafman, 2007) has shown that many employees worry about the possibility of not being able to cope with their work and hide their anxieties from their colleagues. Another study, published in the French mutual health schemes journal “Santé et Travail” (Rossard, Merlin, Dessors et al., 2001) reported that many employees were only able to accomplish their duties by alternating doses of stimulants and tranquilisers. Related to this, a new phenomenon began to develop about 5 years ago: employees committing suicide in their workplace. All these observations and analyses indicate that the issue of “decent work” is gradually becoming a major concern in the domain of employment. Shouldn’t it be placed at the core of vocational counselling interventions?

At the end of these considerations, two major points emerge. The first one is that, in the contemporary world, any individual needs to possess and develop a capital of competencies that allow him/her to enter and adapt in extremely flexible working contexts. These competencies may, of course, be constructed on the occasion of work, leisure, or personal (etc.) activities. But they may also be developed in a more systematic manner when life long education possibilities are given to people. This is probably one of the major challenges for the economies of wealthy countries: Will they be able to offer to all of their working forces the necessary resources to allow them optimize their respective capitals of competencies? And will they in this manner be able to reduce the social inequalities between those endowed – by social inheritance or because of their initial education – of an important career capital and those who are in varying degrees deprived of such a capital?

The second major conclusion is that in our industrialised, globalized and multicultural societies, individuals have to adopt a reflexive attitude about their diverse experiences. They have to find an answer to the question of what to make of their life. However, in our contemporary societies, this question is much more difficult to deal with than in more traditional ones that offer many precise points of reference. This is why individuals very often need to be helped in their reflection. It is such a support that is expected from today’s counsellors. Their role consists in helping people analyze their experiences in the different contexts of life (for example: to elicit the competencies or the relationships that



they have develop in each of them), discover the life domains that really matter to them, formulate some anticipations that seem essential to them, define some activities to get involved in so as to maximize their odds to achieve their goal, etc. (Guichard, 2008).

Such a counselling process is expensive: it takes time (different counselling sessions distributed over a certain period) and it supposes the involvement of skilled counsellors. It is certainly this cost factor that leads some states not to develop – or even to reduce – the offer of community services in this domain. One must nevertheless wonder whether such short-term savings will not lead to much higher costs in the long term: either of economical nature, such as a decrease in productivity, or of social or political nature, as suggested by the rise of the religious and political fundamentalism in people – often of modest conditions – who don't succeed in finding a meaning to their chaotic working life and precarious existence.

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