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# **Employability guidance & life design counselling: Objectives, ends and foundations of career and life design interventions**

In modern societies, the goal of career and life design interventions is to help each individual respond to the following generic issue: “By what kind of active life might I give meaning and a perspective to my existence?”. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this question has been frequently translated into the language of dominant systems of work organization and exchange (for example, “What occupations or professions would be right for me?”). Career and life design interventions were thus transformed into employability guidance, whose determined objective was an inclusion into the current world of work (in line with the final purpose of sustained economic growth). This guidance used methodologies that varied depending on the role (sometimes zero) played by scientific knowledge in their design. In the context of global crises of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century affecting our ecosystem, a doubt has gradually emerged about the durability of the currently dominant forms of work organization and exchange. As a result, life design interventions geared towards helping people respond to the generic issue of counselling (not to its various translations) have begun to develop. Nevertheless, one can wonder to what extent they can contribute to the achievement of the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015, entitled: “Transforming our world”.

**Keywords:** lifelong guidance and counselling, employability, life designing, ecosystem, decent work

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the world experienced the development of industrial societies, a group of professionals offering vocational guidance started to emerge. Since then, the scope of these interventions has greatly expanded, notably also with the birth of school guidance and academic

streaming in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these interventions' purpose has widened. There emerged new projects of counselling interventions which were based on different paradigms. Some of them, the *Life Design Interventions* (Savickas et al., 2009; Guichard et al., 2017) have become methods of supporting individuals in the process of their self-construction. Nowadays, many public and private institutions offer help to individuals living in late-modern societies (Giddens, 1991) trying to give their active lives direction and meaning. For this purpose, these institutions offer a variety of counselling and educational tools. However, there are some pending questions, such as: "What are the political, economic, social or moral final purposes of such interventions? What types of human societies do they try to develop? Is it not essential to draw distinctions between these interventions, as regards their ends and their scientific foundations?"

To address these issues, this article begins with a review of the generic career and life direction issue, which needs to be dealt with by individuals in late-modern societies: a question about the meaning of the individuals' active lives or working lives. In the following section the article addresses the notion of "working life." It highlights the fact that "working life" or "active life" do not refer solely to paid work in currently prevailing forms of work organisation. In other words: work cannot be reduced to employment. Next, we distinguish between the objectives of an intervention (its goals) and its final purpose (its "end" – to use a philosophical concept – i.e. the meaning an objective takes in a broader context of understanding). Such a distinction reveals that it is the end (the final purpose, which often remains implicit) of an intervention that lends a specific determination to its objective. This means that an intervention only deals with certain specific issues in some specific ways (for example: work inclusion at any cost) and disregards others (e.g. constructing decent working lives that contribute to sustainable economic and social development). Consequently (and fourthly), the application of these concepts of ends (or "final purposes") and "determined goals" in an analysis of currently available career counselling interventions demonstrates that most of them are not aimed at helping people deal with the generic issue of their lives' direction, but rather focus on derived issues, resulting from equating working with employment. These rewordings of the generic issue implicitly assign a determined objective to these interventions: that of including counselees within today's world of work. Thus, the interventions become employability guidance. This makes a fundamental difference in comparison with *life design interventions*, introduced in the following section, which are aimed at helping individuals express their responses to the generic issue of life's direction in late-modern societies ("By what kind of active life might I give a meaning and a perspective to my existence?"). However, this distinction is not the only one that exists between interventions for active lives' construction. They are also distinguished as follows: some have been designed with an explicit

reference to knowledge in the human and social sciences, while others are based on the common sense of practitioners. The last part of this article highlights the benefits of the former. Our considerations end with a question: “Which interventions for active lives’ construction may help people navigate a world which badly needs - according to the resolution unanimously adopted by the 2015 UN General Assembly – to be ‘transformed’?”.

### **1. The generic issue of life direction in modern societies: “By what kind of active life might I give meaning and a perspective to my existence?”**

The life direction issues that individuals or groups face are derived from the way the society in which they live is organized. This means, for instance, that in so-called “traditional” societies, where belonging to a community is of utmost importance, it is the collectivity that defines what everyone must do to contribute to the common good of the group. Such situations were described in detail by Geert Hofstede (1991). The economically dominant societies in today’s world are based on a different organizational principle that Adam Smith summarized in his concept of the “invisible hand” (1776). According to this liberal postulate, the efforts of individuals pursuing their own interests are more beneficial to the common good than if their actions were explicitly aimed at promoting it. This principle is the economic foundation of the so-called “modern” societies, or, to use Norbert Elias (1991) terms, “societies of individuals”. According to such a principle, it is expected that everybody will direct their lives and, accordingly, believe that to succeed in life is to fulfil oneself as an individual: it is developing one’s potential that matters to self. As a result, autonomous individuals are held responsible for what they do with their life.

Certainly, the humanities and social sciences highlight various factors and processes determining the condition of each individual. However, in contemporary western societies, this responsibility has been conceived of, as Jean-Paul Sartre (Audry, 1966, p. 63) defined it, as the ability to seize one’s life’s conditions for determining one’s behaviour and life trajectory. Over the last few decades, this responsibility has become even bigger, because factors such as multitude of information, the development of communication technologies and an increasing amount of economic and cultural exchange systems, modern societies on a global scale have been undergoing rapid and permanent transformations. Institutions, social representations and collective beliefs no longer have the time to solidify. Moreover, they no longer provide individuals with stable frames of reference that could give them anchorage for defining long-term life projects. This is what Zygmunt Bauman (2000) called the “liquid modernity” in which everyone must constantly redefine their strategies by thinking in terms of costs

and benefits in the context of a generalized uncertainty (Bauman, 2000, 2007; Beck, 1992; Ehrenberg, 1995; Blanc, 2007; Palmade, 2003).

The reflection carried out by modern uncertain individuals concerns the future active lives they wish to lead. Indeed, as pointed out by Hanna Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1958), whereas in former philosophical and religious traditions contemplative life was generally regarded as a mode of existence superior to active life, in modern societies the opposite is true, i.e. active life is valued. This valuation is based on the observation that human activity is an essential factor in the construction of the world and of oneself. This is what Bergson's (1907) *homo faber* means. A person of modern societies, therefore, can no longer conceive of the ideal of self-achievement in terms of salvation or balance and stability (Schlanger, 1997, p. 11). For such individual, to wonder about what gives their life meaning, is to ask what activities would enable them to become what they anticipate to be, thus contributing to the construction of the human world. The fundamental (principal or generic) issue of life's direction for modern societies' individuals can therefore be summarized in the following way: "By what kind of active life might I give meaning and a perspective to my existence?"

## 2. Work activity, self-, and world-construction

This generic issue, however, is not synonymous with another one, namely: "By which trade, professional function, or career, can I give meaning and a perspective to my existence?" Certainly, "active life" refers to work-related activities. However, the concept of work, in its broadest sense, covers a category of phenomena far more diverse than those of trades, professional functions, or careers (Gorz, 1988; Flichy, 2017).

The term "active life" or "working life" has a very broad meaning encompassing the three dimensions differentiated by Arendt (labour, work and action) (Gorz, 1988, chap. three). Based on scientific literature on work (including such a variety of topics as history, sociology, psychology, ergonomics, economics, political science, management science, etc., and particularly the work of Gorz, 1988; Clot, 1999; Dejours, 2009; Dubar, 1998; Lallement, 2007; Linhart, 2015; Méda, 2007; Meda, Vendramin, 2013; Rolo, 2015; Flichy, 2017; etc.), the following definition of this concept may be proposed: work is an activity that every human being must perform in order to produce something (goods, services, etc.) that (1) is indirectly or directly necessary to satisfy one or more human needs (need being understood in the broadest sense of the word, as outlined by Abraham Maslow (1954), including the desires for self-actualization and self-fulfilment, especially through work) and (2) is potentially exchangeable with other similar "products" produced under similar conditions.

The major characteristic of the work activity is that it generates, in addition to the goods or services it is explicitly intended to produce, production techniques (technologies), modes of work organization, as well as exchange systems. Work and its products, when being developed, profoundly transform human subjectivity and the world. This is what Henri Bergson meant when he referred to the human species as *homo faber*.

Work performs a vital role in the self-construction of every worker. First, the work activity raises the level of general and practical knowledge (know-how). Moreover, work usually involves a varied set of relationships: cooperation, competition, support, domination, tutoring, etc. Finally, the exchange of work products implies the inscription of this activity in a certain system of exchanges. Due to these characteristics, individuals build themselves, get transformed, construct their selves in some particular ways through their working activities. When their professional activity (or its products) is recognized by others, the individuals come to perceive themselves as bearers of certain talents. They are also likely to be perceived by others as being “capable of...”. As a result, work activity is the object of expectations of self-realization. Individuals perceive some specific active lives as means of becoming “someone” they expect to be. However, the impact of work on self-construction is not always positive. Some forms of work organization (for example, those where the individuals feel overwhelmed by their workload or by incessant technical innovations, or where they are constantly competing with their colleagues to reach ever-increasing production goals, as well as those where they are forced to perform activities contrary to their ethical beliefs, etc.) can lead workers to develop feelings of helplessness, depression, or professional burn-out (Dejours, 2000; Rolo, 2015).

In work, production and exchange are intrinsically linked. The monetary system of work exchange for money – and money for work – has been in place for centuries. We thus tend to cognitively assimilate “work” with “paid work”. This is explained by the fact that the attribute of “producing a monetary income” is a major constituent of our cognitive representation of the concept of “work”. Therefore, “paid work” is, in our view, the cognitive prototype of the concept of “work” (Rosch, 1973, 1978; Salamaso, Pombeni, 1986). However, this cognitive functioning does not mean that exchange of work should always necessarily happen on a monetary basis. The exchange can be informal, as is the case for the person who, in a couple, is primarily concerned with children’s upbringing and household chores without being officially “paid” for doing so. Work can also be exchanged for recognition, as is the case for those creators of works of art who are recognized as artists in their communities, even though they may be unable to sell their products. Work can also be exchanged within the gift-based systems of traditional societies or in local exchange systems that are developing in some contemporary societies. There are certainly many other work exchange systems which could be mentioned here. As can be seen, not only does “work” refer to

employment, but it also includes crafts, self-employment, local systems of commerce, domestic activities, DIY, gardening, etc.

As a result of the combination of these defining characteristics of the work activity, the generic life direction issue, which is being addressed by individuals in modern societies, is: “By what kind of active life might I give meaning and a perspective to my existence?”. This question is much more complex than the one concerning occupations, functions or professional paths in which an individual can engage. It is not only related to the nature of the activities, in which it is possible to fulfil oneself, but it also relates to the specific methods of carrying out these activities (in what form of work organization can they be performed?). Moreover, it is related to the trading systems in which these activities and their products could be exchanged.

On the other hand, work contributes, to a very large extent, to the construction of the world into which every human being is embedded at birth. This world, being the product of the history of technologies, forms of organization, and economic systems of work- and product exchange, is made of objects, techniques, forms of work organization, interpersonal relations and economic exchange, education and training systems, etc.

The system of monetary exchange for work played a vital role in the technological and organizational transformations which, in order to increase productivity, produced the present state of the world of work and, more generally, of the world. Money, which stands for crystallized work, has the property of being easily accumulated. This accumulation allowed the creation of enormous industries, along with considerable transformations of the work organization, and, recently, with the development of new communication tools and globalization of many types of exchange. In the last decades, the accumulation itself gave rise to the formation of an enormous financial capitalism (including “venture funds”) (Marazzi, 2010; Hudson, 2012), which – as they seek significant and quick profits – have a considerable impact on the organization of work and its exchange systems (thus on the working conditions), as well as on the nature of its products.

### **3. Ends and objectives of life-design interventions**

Current state of the world appears to everyone as “normal”. However, this “normal world” is also increasingly perceived as posing major risks to humanity as a whole (Beck, 1992). These appear to be linked with such dangerous phenomena as the over-exploitation of natural resources by the world population that grew considerably during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a population that also demonstrates considerable inequalities in terms of wealth and poverty. In this context, numerous groups in this population have come to wonder whether it was appropriate

for everyone to contribute, by their active lives, to the development of this “normal course” of the world, or if they should engage in its transformation instead. It is the latter conclusion that the United Nations has achieved by unanimously adopting in 2015 the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development entitled: “Transforming Our World” (UN, 2015). The programme is briefly introduced in the third article of this special issue.

The emergence of such doubts about the durability of the contemporary world of work leads to certain consequences for the career and life design interventions: What should be their current role? Should they simply contribute to the better functioning of today’s world by facilitating people’s integration into current work organizations? Or, rather, should they help them design active lives that contribute to building a ‘better’ world: a world more respectful of ecosystems, less unequal, a world that does not impose brutal working conditions?” Such questions concern the final purpose of career and life design interventions.

However, the attribution of a certain final purpose (of an “end”) to an intervention does not only result in determining its very objective, but also in stating its methodology. This fundamental dialectics between “ends” and “objectives” is a complex phenomenon. In order to understand it, we must make a clear distinction between these two concepts (Guichard, 1997, 2001, 2002a, b, c, d, 2016a, 2017a, b). The general objective of career and life design intervention is to help individuals or groups to cope with the (individual or community) career and life design issues, which they encounter in their social world. In the societies of individuals, this general objective is to help each person (during an individual- or a group reflection) to find the answers to the fundamental issues they ask themselves about as to the direction of their active life.

The “end” (or final purpose) of such an intervention refers to the meaning of its general objective within a broader context of interpretation, such as philosophy, politics, religion, economics, social theory, etc. For instance, as already mentioned, wondering whether an intervention for active lives’ design should focus solely on fostering economic growth by increasing work productivity, or if it should instead include some considerations about the contribution of active lives to fair and sustainable economic development is precisely wondering about such intervention’s end. According to its (either explicit or implicit) end, any intervention aims at attaining certain political and economic goals, which determine, in a certain way, its general objective.

The determined objective of an intervention refers to the transformations of representations and behaviours that it intends to induce in the counselees, in accordance with the meaning given by its (explicit or implicit) end to its general objective. The intervention’s methodology is, therefore, designed to achieve this determined objective. For instance, such an objective may consist in developing a person’s employability by helping him/her to take stock of



the competencies he/she has constructed throughout his/her active life. Or, the determined objective may be to help this person build meaningful future prospects by means of narrating various experiences that have significantly affected his/her life.

Thus, it is in accordance with the intervention's methodology (as a function of its determined objective) that counselees should find answers to the issues they may (or not) raise on the occasion of such an intervention. For example, a high school student may tell a counsellor whom she is meeting for the first time that she wishes to know what she would like to do in the future. The counsellor can immediately respond: "Answer this computer's questions and you will know your areas of interest". Such an immediate response does not give this young person the opportunity to express some key issues that may be the basis of her very first question. For instance: "By means of what kind of active life do I want to fulfil myself?". If such a reflection does not occur during subsequent meetings, the determined objective of this intervention will be only to help the high school student find the type of higher education that is likely to correspond with what the software lists as her "interests".

The question of the relationship between "ends" (final purposes) and "objectives" is perhaps less obvious to us than it was to vocational guidance counsellors at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as it seems to have been largely forgotten, whereas it sparked considerable debate when vocational guidance began to develop both in the USA (Gysbers, 2010) and in Europe, and in particular in France (Huteau, 2002a, 2002b, 2009; Lautrey, 1979). The topic that were then discussed included questions such as "Is vocational guidance intended to contribute to economic growth in the current societal, social and organizational frameworks by limiting itself to providing companies the workforce best suited to their needs? Or, on the contrary, is its purpose rather to contribute to the development of more just societies and new forms of work organization enabling each worker to fulfil themselves as a human being?". In other words: shouldn't the final purpose of vocational guidance consist in reforming current systems of work organization and exchange in order to optimize personal development of each individual? The debate thus juxtaposed ends that were politically, economically and socially conservative with the ones that could be described as reformist or progressive.

Additionally, these debates indicated that certain ends of an intervention determine its objectives, i.e. they lead to both specification of its general objective and to construction of a certain methodology aimed at reaching it. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the objectives determined by the conservative ends were altogether to help women find their feminine vocation and men to discover their masculine one, to support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in accepting minor social and occupational positions and to

enable those from privileged backgrounds to reach dominant positions to which they were, allegedly, socially predestined. In turn, the objectives determined by the reformist or progressive ends were to identify talents of each individual so as to allow everyone to access professional and social positions corresponding to their talents. By these means individuals would contribute to the optimal economic development of a more equitable society.

Vocational guidance interventions were designed to address one of these two categories of determined objectives. For example, Fernand Mauvezin, the author of a manual for vocational guidance counsellors, *La Rose des Métiers* [Compass of trades] (Mauvezin, 1922) argued in favour of the conservative end. As a result, he conceived vocational guidance interventions that explicitly aimed at reproducing social and gender inequalities. Thus, he offered the example of a dialogue that a vocational guidance counsellor could have with a young man from a lower-class background who, being brilliant at school, could dream of entering secondary and higher education:

We told him: 'Let's assume you succeeded. You'll be a high-school teacher, or even a college professor. Your father and your mother will still be crude peasants of your childhood. It is likely that your brothers and sisters will be servants. Despite all your care for them, they won't probably forget that you were given everything when they got nothing. You will get married. As a tenured professor, you will probably marry an educated and rich girl. Won't you have a feeling of uneasiness when you show her your birthplace and introduce her to your father, your mother, and all your other family's members of so humble condition? If you have a child, your wife won't probably let him play with his peasant cousins, whose rude manners would damage his beautiful clothes and teach him bad habits (Mauvezin, quoted by Michel Huteau, 2009).

In 1925, Louise Mauvezin, a daughter of Fernand, published *Rose des activités féminines pour l'orientation professionnelle des jeunes filles vers les métiers ménagers et hôteliers, les métiers manuels et commerciaux, les carrières administratives, les carrières de l'enseignement, les professions libérales et sociales* (*Compass of women's activities for the vocational guidance of young girls towards domestic and hotel trades, manual and commercial trades, administrative and education careers, liberal and social professions*). She was the Secretary General of the International Congress for the Vocational Guidance of Women, which was held from the 23<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1926 in Bordeaux and gathered about 300 participants (*Congrès international d'orientation professionnelle féminine*, 1926). Mary Louise Roberts (1994) analysed the writings of Louise Mauvezin and her contributions to the 1926 Congress. Her analyses indicate that the only activities suitable for women, according to Louise and her father, were those that most closely resemble housewife chores (laundresses, seamstresses, milliners, embroiderers, maids). In the Congress Proceedings, Louise Mauvezin stated (p. 19) that "the destiny of the majority of women is to become wives and mothers. Duties as a family mother and professional responsibilities are almost

always incompatible” (cited by Roberts, p. 191). One of conference’s sessions concluded that women should never become doctors as this would make their family life impossible (Roberts, 1994, p. 192). It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the Swiss delegation observed in the minutes:

The atmosphere was so moderate that in our opinion, it came close to anti-feminism. For example, the congress adopted recommendations that directly contradicted feminist’s claims on the right to work of married women. For example, the following ones:

“that women without children, and even more so men, agree to make the necessary effort to allow the progressive elimination of salaried work of mothers”.

“that in all countries, religious, social, family and professional groups, and all those who may have an influence on public opinion, undertake an active campaign of propaganda by pen and word, to make these ideas penetrate the world and mind of the mass and thus arrive at the progressive suppression of salaried work of mothers” (*Le Mouvement Féministe*, 1926).

Proponents of the reformist or progressive point of view, for their part, relied on psychotechnics to design vocational guidance interventions aimed at promoting equality between men and women (and, first of all, women’s access to education), and at fostering upward social mobility. For them, the systematic use of scientifically developed aptitude tests was the prerequisite for the development of a just society, i.e. a society where everyone would have access to the social and professional position corresponding to their aptitudes (Binet, Simon, 1907, in particular p. 83).

Nowadays, no debate is explicitly addressing the ends of interventions for career and life design. However, as the subsequent paragraph will demonstrate, almost all of them have the same final purpose, which make them interventions of employability guidance and not of active life design.

#### **4. Employability Guidance**

In the absence of a societal debate on the ends of career and life design interventions, and of an explicit definition of their final purposes, it is the institutions financing the interventions that assign them some de facto ends. Such ends are always based on implicit considerations of the economic policy. Basically, the aim is to foster optimal economic growth. This “implicit end” gives rise to the definition of determined objectives that vary depending on the institution. The determined objective may be to reduce unemployment, to lead the elderly to prolong their professional activities, to promote professional and social inclusion of certain categories of young people, to distribute the pupils and students in various educational paths and institutions, to prevent school failure, etc.

The process leading to the attribution of the implicit end of fostering the optimal growth of today’s economy to career and life design interventions is that

of translation. The generic issue of the active life's direction in liquid modernity (namely, "By what kind of active life might I give meaning and perspective to my existence?") is expressed in the language of work organization and exchange system characterizing current dominant economy. The rewording of this general issue converts it into a question of inclusion within the world of professional functions and exchanges at any given moment. Within such a framework, the determined objective of interventions offered to clients is to help them find their response to the life's direction issue as it is translated into the dominant language of work organization and exchanges. For example, in the context of the mode of work organization prevalent at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (which Alain Touraine (1955) and Claude Dubar (1996) named the "professional system of work"), these interventions were aimed at helping people find their answer to the following rewording of the generic active life's direction issue: "What occupations or professions would be right for me?"

Since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, considerable technological developments led to the design of new forms of work organization. Each of these systems of work, typical of a moment in these technological developments, gave rise to a specific translation of the generic active life's direction issue into the language of employability that was peculiar to it. The history of career counseling interventions implemented since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is fundamentally that of the succession of these different rewordings. Additionally, the generalisation and the prolongation of schooling, which occurred mainly during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, created some related but slightly different issues. The extraordinary development of this mode of youth education has, indeed, given rise to issues related to (1) the distribution of pupils into school organizations that were becoming bigger and more complex, and (2) these young people's transitions into adulthood: two issues that are often reduced to that of their future professional inclusion.

#### **4.1 Six reworded versions of the generic life direction issue**

As has already been mentioned, the form of work organisation, which was predominant at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, was the "professional system of work" (Touraine, 1955; Dubar, 1996). The production method, which required the workers to have "dexterity" and "craft", resembled then the craft industry. Workers held a capital of knowledge and skills that referred to their very being; they "were" mechanics, carpenters, lawyers or doctors. Profession was one of the major aspects of their individual identity; individuals were the holders of their qualifications which belonged to them. Therefore, when changing a workplace, they did not lose these qualifications. The acquisition of professional qualification required systematic learning, usually long and therefore expensive

(both for the individual, and for the society). Therefore, it was important to avoid failures and to determine, once and for all, the professional work that the individual could perform throughout their life. In this context, the generic issue of active life's direction was reworded in the following way: "What occupations or professions would be right for me? What should I learn in order to succeed?"

The notions of occupation and profession, as well as the concept of qualification, were challenged in many areas of production by two inventions by Henry Ford, inspired by Frederick Winslow Taylor (1911): the assembly and the production line. In this "scientific organization" of work, which is depicted in Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times*, most of the production workers no longer own a trade. Instead, they are operators on a workstation. The qualification is no longer attached to the worker, but applied to the workstation; technical specifications of the machines lead to the definition of the qualification of any job (is it tough, is it complex?) (Dubar, 1996, p. 182). The training is done quickly while performing the job (Dubar, 1998, p. 166); the workers, therefore, can no longer identify themselves with trades or professions. If they change jobs, their qualification is brought into question. As a result, professional identity is based primarily on the identification with a work group, which is a true "working community," with its language, modes of operation, norms and informal rules (Willis, 1977). Any candidate for a job must, therefore, consider whether they will be able to integrate into a particular work group: do they feel close to their future colleagues in terms of worldview, attitudes, tastes, interests, etc.? In relation to this Taylorist model of work organization, the generic issue of active life's direction was reworded as follows: "What work collectives or work settings would be right for me?"<sup>1</sup>

Since the 1960s, important technological developments (including automation and computerization of production) produced important changes and rapid transformation in work organization. A new work system emerged; it was named, by Alain Touraine (1955) and Claude Dubar (1996), "the technical work system". It was characterized by a broader scope of tasks, versatility and a requirement of high-quality products. In this kind of work organization, the occupational activity consists in controlling the events within productive situations organized in the form of networks. In such networks, everyone's work activity is "a function" of the activity of others. These functions are therefore much less stable than occupations, professions, or workstations. They evolve according to

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<sup>1</sup> It is therefore not anecdotal that the „Vocational Interest Blank” was published in 1927. In this questionnaire, Edward K. Strong defines the interests by means of answers „likes, indifferent, dislikes” to items describing various activities in the extra-professional field, such as „climbing mountains” or „examining an exceptional collection of laces”. Moreover, he describes typical inclinations in these matters distinguishing 39 groups of professionals. Thus, in accordance with the Taylorist mode of work organization, interest in a job is defined as an inclination towards a variety of activities which is common for people who perform such jobs.

technological progress and changes in work networks. In this context of more interactive and labile work, the notions of competency and learning become central (Tarondeau, 2002). The worker is perceived as an agent who, through their work activity, enriches the range of their skills and, as a result, becomes capable of performing more and more complex professional functions, the series of which is integrated into development of their professional career. This situation gave rise to the following rewording of the generic issue of active life's direction: "Given the variety of my skills, developed during my various professional functions and my extra-professional activities, what direction could I give to my professional career?"

The idea of developing a lifelong career was seriously undermined by the globalization of work and employment, which escalated in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Driven by the development of financial capitalism, primarily concerned with large and rapid profits (Marazzi, 2010; Hudson, 2012), and made possible by the development of transport (including container ships), information technologies and communication, globalisation resulted in increased competition among companies. The companies adapted by making two major types of changes. First, production sites have been relocated to low-cost countries where labour law is embryonic (or not enforced), and some kinds of production have been outsourced to subcontractors (sometimes in the same countries). Wage contracts (within companies) have been replaced by commercial contracts with subcontractors, some of whom are in a relationship of total dependence with the sole company they have the contractual right to supply. Moreover, many company mergers and acquisitions took place. The second type of change concerned major reorganization of work; it was based on the idea that organization of production had to be extremely flexible in order to be able to immediately adapt to market demands. In this context, companies are considered to have no duty with regard to the career of their employees; the employees are the only ones responsible for managing their career paths. Work is organized mainly in the form of successive missions or projects. It is carried out by teams created just for the duration of the project. These teams include two main types of employees: core and peripheral.

Core employees are versatile. They are the repository of the company's know-how and, as such, they guarantee its durability and allow its adjustment in case of crisis. For them, the risk of being made redundant is limited. However, their professional life is made up of a series of assignments that do not generally result in building a professional career. As a result, these core employees have no reason to consider having duties to a company that does not monitor progress in their careers. Each of them asks a recurrent question: "Should I continue to invest my skills in this series of missions within the company that is currently paying me or not? What is the potential risk/reward ratio of this particular investment of my competencies?" These questions, typical of what some authors

have called the “boundaryless career” (Arthur, Rousseau, 1996) or the “protean career” (Hall, 2004), are the rewording of the generic active-life’s direction issue for workers whose qualifications are recognized by globalized companies with highly flexible forms of production organization.

Teams of core employees may be supplemented, when the economic situation requires it, by workers hired for a limited time and trained quickly to perform certain tasks. These employees, sometimes referred to as peripheral, are found in the secondary segment of the labour market. According to the theorists of labour market segmentation (Reich, Gordon, Edwards, 1973; Doeringer, Piore, 1985), there are two main segments in this market: primary and secondary. There is very limited mobility between them; peripheral employees are likely to remain in the secondary segment for many years and perhaps for the duration of their working lives. This means that their working life is made up of a succession of shorter or longer periods of various salaried jobs, part-time work, odd jobs, “uberised” activities, self-employment, training, unemployment, etc. Such a precarious work situation is strongly correlated with difficulties in other areas of life: divorces, health problems, social problems, home changes, etc. (Blanc, 2007). All of these phenomena are typical of a social group that Guy Standing (2011) has named “the precariat”. For the people living in the situation of generalized precariousness, the generic issue of active-life’s direction is thus reworded as follows: “How can I cope with various transitions (especially job transitions) that impinge on my professional and personal life?”.

In parallel with these transformations of working systems, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also characterized, in all rich countries, by the development of schooling: such a concomitance might probably be explained by a reciprocal causal relation between these two phenomena. School is at present the institution specialized in transmitting to younger generations the knowledge, values and attitudes required to ensure the sustainability of society. This organization gradually accommodated all young people during the 20<sup>th</sup> century for a longer and longer period. However, the present educational provision is a mode of socialization and education very different from those that preceded it (as pointed out by Norbert Elias, 1991). It is an indirect preparation for adult life that provides training through the mediation of specialized professionals: educators, teachers and professors. This characteristic fundamentally differentiates school from previous modes of training and education, based on a direct contact between the youth and adults. For example, an apprentice worked in their master craftsman’s company. Such training was, at the same time, a transfer of knowledge, techniques, skills, and general socialization of a young person. An apprentice learned their profession, the rules of interaction and different ways of seeing, proper to people of their trade. Through this long-term professional contact, the young person was osmotically shaping their professional and social identity. They adopted a system of values, attitudes and certain

beliefs about the professional community which they were gradually joining. (In Christian countries, this professional community was embodied by the figure of the community's Patron Saint, whose day of celebration gave rise to public demonstrations by community members). School does not aim to build such community identities. Its intention is to train individuals and turn them into citizens of *societies of individuals*. In case of general education, schooling only leads students to catch a fleeting glimpse of social and professional assignments, to which they seem more or less destined depending on their academic success. In vocational or technical training, their career horizon seems to be more circumscribed, although there is usually no strict link between the training received and subsequent professional activities. Therefore, in school, there arises the question of a transition from student status to that of an adult engaged in an active social and professional life.

This school growth resulted from the development of extended, universal education accessible to girls and to young people of modest social background. To accommodate this socially diverse population, the school has differentiated itself. This differentiation gave rise to problems relating, on the one hand, to the organization of the school system and, on the other hand, to the distribution of pupils. The answers to these issues differed from country to country (in particular, according to the compromise made between two objectives: either to give the best possible qualification to the largest possible number of young people, or to select and train small elite at the highest level). Given these differences, the issues of the distribution of students differ from one school organization to another, as they depend on the adopted solutions. In France, for example, the fundamental questions concern the "choice" of a school path and of an educational establishment (these being of unequal values in terms of the future social positioning that they can lead to). In Germany, the primary question concerns the type of institution: the entry to the gymnasium presages the pursuit of long-term higher education, while other forms of education suggest a fate of apprentice. Nevertheless, apart from these differences, it seems that in all the school systems of the industrialized countries, the issue of school distribution of students is perceived in the same way by young people and their families, i.e. as that of their future professional and social inclusion, at a given point, in the social space of professions and positions. In the context of school organization of the *liquid societies of individuals*, the active life's direction generic issue is thus reworded in the following way: "In what kind of education (school establishment, school path, sector, major, discipline, option...) should I get involved, considering (1) the architecture and procedures (explicit and implicit) of students' distribution in the school organization I am in, (2) my school results and (3) my personal (and family) expectations for future social and professional inclusion?"



Table 1 (below) summarizes these different kinds of rewording of the active life’s direction generic issue, by highlighting major notions and concepts of each of them.

Table 1. The main rewordings of the generic issue of the active life’s direction in liquid societies (“By what kind of active life might I give meaning and perspective to my existence?”) in relation to different modes of work and training organization prevailing in these societies during the 20<sup>th</sup> (and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>) century.

Organizational contexts	Rewordings of the Generic Question of Counselling (by what kind of active life might I give meaning and perspective to my existence?)	Major notions and concepts
Professional system of work	What occupations or professions would be right for me?	Occupation, Profession
Taylorism – Fordism	What work collectives or work settings would be right for me?	Workstation, Operator Work collective
Technical system of work	How can I give a proper direction to my professional career?	Stable working network Professional function Career plan
Flexible work organization: core employees	In what professional assignments can my skills be best invested and developed?	Professional assignment Flexible work Boundaryless career
Flexible work organization: peripheral employees	How to cope with the various transitions that impinge on my professional and personal life?	Flexible employment Precariat
School Organization	In what kind of education should I get involved?	School selection School counselling School results

The vast majority of life and career design interventions designed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century had, and still have, the determined objective of helping people to find their answer to one or other of these rewordings. As a result, their determined objective is to help people to enter the current world of jobs, occupational functions (and education or training paths). In recent decades, in the light of these developments, most of the interventions have been specifically aimed at helping counselees answer one or the other of the last four rewordings: “How can I give a proper direction to my professional career? In what professional assignments can my skills be best invested and developed? How to cope with the various transitions that impinge on my professional and personal life?”

In what kind of education should I get involved?”. Nevertheless, older rewordings of the active life’s direction generic issue (“What occupations or professions would be right for me? What work collectives or work settings would be right for me?”) have not become obsolete as, in fact, there are still trades within some professional work system and many jobs within taylorist organisations (or neo-taylorist ones, such as the Toyota production U line; Shimizu, 1999) and also, some more traditional ways of working.

## **4.2 Interventions guiding counselees’ reflection according to the standards of professional inclusion**

It is by focusing on these rewordings that the most common interventions for career and life design intend to help people fit into today’s world of work. To do so, they guide the counselees thinking according to the standards allowing their inclusion in this world. To use contemporary vocabulary, one can say that they focus the counselees’ reflexion on the criteria of their employability: criteria that are a function of the currently dominant organization of work. This type of guidance aims at leading counselees to construct an adaptable self-concept in conformity with the dominant standards of employability. They intend to get them prepared for finding (in the case of, for example, career education for youths) or to actually find (in the case of interviews or other activities for adults) answers to three interrelated questions: first, “What kinds of professional functions can satisfy my personal expectations, especially in terms of interests and values?”, second, “What skills are required to perform such professional functions? Do I actually master them? Can I develop them?”, third “What resources can I rely on to develop these skills and bring together the assets needed to carry out such activities? If these resources are insufficient, what compromise can I make?”.

There exist, however, certain differences between the various employability guidance interventions. These are related, in the first place, to the characteristics of the institutions that offer them. In fact, each institution is generally aimed at a relatively well-defined group of clients (jobseekers, students, welfare recipients, people seeking to redirect their careers, etc.) and, as a consequence, the determined objectives of their interventions depend on the rewording of the active life’s direction generic issue, intended for their clientele. This means that one institution can offer to help clients to take stock of their skills in order to consider the best investment they could make in the world of work, while another may aim to help high school students determine the most suitable training for their future professional activity.

The intervention depends, secondly, on the professional culture of the institution. This consists in, for example, systematic or preferential use of certain

methods. For instance, a high school student may express from the outset the following statement: “I do not know in what kind of higher education I should get involved”. In such a case the usual practice of an institution may be to start by simple conversation aimed at helping him or her to elaborate on this issue. Couldn't this question of education choice be anchored in more fundamental concerns? The professional culture of another institution, however, may consist in the almost immediate use of a computerized questionnaire categorizing the answers of this high school student according to the typology structuring the questionnaire. One important difference (discussed in this paper's last part) between professional cultures of the institutions is that some of them implement interventions that refer to knowledge based on humanities and social sciences, while others use interventions mainly based on counsellors' common sense.

Third, the intervention proposed to the counselee depends on the mindset adopted by the counsellor in relation to the professional culture of his/her institution. Such a mindset is based on what this counsellor considers to be the final purpose of his/her work in relation to the ends that are set by the institution funding the intervention, and on the freedom which the counsellor has (or does not have) to choose a certain methodology.

The intervention that is actually implemented ultimately depends on the concern that the intervention method allows the counselee to express to the counsellor that they meet, and the way this counsellor handles this issue.

The observation of some counselling interviews, as held in some institutions, shows that some counsees come to express concerns that are closer to the generic issue of the active life's direction than to the specific rewording on which this institution's interventions are based. This sometimes happens during some “bilans de compétences” [competencies' elicitation interventions] intended for people in precarious situations (Roquefort, 2012). These relatively long interventions consist in an analysis of the counselee's professional and personal competencies, as well as their motivation, aimed to enable them to define a realistic professional (or training) plan adapted to the demands of the labour market. However, during these interventions, some people recurrently express questions, such as “Is it the definition of a professional inclusion plan, based on my skills, which matters to me? Can my life be summed up in this way? What could make my life meaningful?” These are precisely the questions which the *life design interventions* (presented in the subsequent section) focus on. An observation of the progress during such particular “bilans de compétences” reveals that they are, in fact, a compromise between imperatives that are determined by the standards underlying their methodology (namely: development of the counselee's employability) and a counselee's reaffirmed request for life design counseling (i.e. an assistance in building a meaningful active life).

However, such compromises are rather the exception than the rule. Most employability guidance interventions either ignore the generic issue of the active

life's direction asked by the individuals of liquid societies or, when they approach it, implement a methodology that translates it into a question of inclusion into the current world of employment: "How can I give a proper direction to my professional career? How to best invest my competencies?". Differently, life design interventions, which include the *life design dialogues* presented in the next part of the article, aim to help counsees find their answer to this generic issue.

## 5. Life Design interventions

The determined objective of life design interventions is not to include people within the current world of employment and professional functions. Instead, it is to help the uncertain individuals of the liquid societies – as well as those from other societies or social groups that are made subjectively similar by the personal and collective consequences (such as immigration) of the economic, social and cultural globalization, and of the current global crises – to construct future perspectives and to define life standards allowing them to give their existence meaning and direction (Savickas et al., 2009). These interventions, however, do not exclude the possibility of people responding to the issue of a meaningful active life in terms of jobs, professional functions, or career plans in a current company or organization. But these interventions do not presuppose such answers. They do not take for granted the work organizations and work exchange systems that dominate the world today. They consider that other systems of work and exchange are possible and that some people will undoubtedly be able to construct a meaningful active life within these other systems. In short, life design interventions do not lead to counsees' thinking according to the current standards of employability (although these standards are not ignored and may be taken into account by a counselee during a life design intervention). They aim to help people express their own norms and standards, on the basis of which they can construct a meaningful active life.

Common methodology for these interventions is to offer counsees a situation in which they can "deliberate" with themselves ("tenir conseil avec eux-mêmes" to quote the title of Alexandre Lhotellier's book, 2001, which means that they self-counsel through a personal deliberation) thanks to the supporting interview with a counsellor. However, the form of these interviews differs according to the intervention method and its theoretical references (Guichard, 2016b). For example, Mark Savickas's (2011, 2013) career construction interviews (career in its first sense: the course of life) are more directive than life design dialogues (presented in the next article). Mark Savickas – who refers to the works of Alfred Adler (1931, 1956) – posits that certain themes, anchored in early experiences, structure a person's life. Career construction interviews are intended to help counsees transform their core "preoccupations" into "occupations" (Savickas 2011). For this purpose, the counsellor asks some predefined

questions on specific points, such as to tell the story of films or readings that have marked the counselee, to narrate their first childhood memories, etc. Then, the counsellor makes a synthesis of these different narrations, which connect them according to some leading themes: a synthesis, which is eventually discussed with the counselee.

The life design dialogues refer to a synthesis of work in humanities and social sciences (Guichard, 2004, 2005) which emphasizes the plurality of life experiences of a person and their subjective activity of looking for coherence and unity, by means of a construction of some future expectations of self-achievement that would make their current life meaningful. Consequently, the process of these dialogues is more open than that of career construction interviews. It consists in helping the client to identify the main experiences, activities and anticipations (past ones, present ones and, possibly, the ones expected or feared in the future) they find important and to narrate them during a dialogue with the counsellor. This narration allows the counselee to make comparisons between some of these events, in particular in relation to the affects and emotions they experience while telling the stories. The narrator thus gradually constructs meaningful links between some of them, constituting a direction opened both towards and from a certain future perspective: a future expectation that has to be realized through an active life (which does not necessarily correspond to an inclusion or a career into the current labour market).

In other words, the life design dialogues place more emphasis on the future and the resilience of the individual than career construction interviews, which focus more on the “marmoreal bedrock” of early experiences, on which basis a relatively stable sense of life is anchored. This difference determines the methodology of each of these interventions: in life design dialogues, the client is more active than in career construction interviews. In the *dialogues*, they gradually construct a narrative while discovering certain coherence between the life experiences they consider. In career construction interviews, the counselee discusses a synthesis – made by the counsellor – that highlights the fundamental themes that the latter had identified by bringing together the expressive forms used by the client to answer the questions posed to them.

Beyond these differences, these two interventions’ methods of life design share two common characteristics. On the one hand, they offer to help the individual answer the generic issue of the active life’s direction: “By what kind of active life might I give a meaning and a perspective to my existence?”. On the other hand, both of them have been constructed with explicit reference to the knowledge in the human and social sciences.

## **6. Ethical argumentation and scientific explanation: the role of knowledge in the conception of life and career design interventions**

As has already been mentioned, in the field of life and career design interventions (whether it is employability guidance or life design counselling) some interventions have been designed with explicit reference to knowledge in the human and social sciences, while others were based only on a few “common sense” considerations. How are such differences possible? What role can knowledge play in these interventions’ designing? Do interventions referring to scientific knowledge have advantages over others? For answering these questions, from the outset, a clear distinction must be drawn between the logic underlying two categories of discourse: those of scientific and those of ethical nature. That is, using the terminology of Immanuel Kant, to differentiate between discourses that are related either to pure or to practical reason.

### **6.1 Scientific discourse and ethical discourse: life and career design interventions are technologies related to an ethics of a “good” life**

Scientific discourse aims at describing processes and factors that determine phenomena. Ethical discourses aim at defining principles on the basis of which one can direct their conduct and take (or evaluate) decisions which have an impact on their life or on the lives of other living (close or distant) beings. Active life designing falls into the category of ethical discourse. For a person, to orient themselves in life is to give direction to their existence in accordance with, on the one hand, all that determines the current situation, and, on the other hand, the norms relating to a successful life, as this person defines them. This means, therefore, that in the process of setting a direction to their life, one does not appeal to scientific rationality. Admittedly, one who questions the direction of their active life has better not ignore certain observations made by scientific research. For example, research conducted to answer the following question: what are the factors and processes that explain the success of some individuals in certain professional functions? A person wondering about their active life’s direction can therefore say that “It has been shown that those whose abilities are similar to mine successfully handle this kind of job”. This observation, however, is only one of the elements that this person must consider when thinking about their active life, as earlier in the process they will need to ask themselves, for instance, whether it is the professional success that is fundamentally important in their current situation.

Thus, in career and life design interventions, the situation is similar to that of medicine. Medical science can indeed describe the factors and processes that

determine a specific pathology (for example, it may prove that excessive consumption of alcohol may lead to destruction of the liver by cirrhosis or cancer). However, these descriptions of factors and processes can only lead to decision-making based on ethical considerations about what a good life is. Therefore, the drinker can only decide to stop drinking or to start a rehab programme after finding the answer to questions such as: “Do I prefer to live longer without the pleasures of alcohol or shorter without renouncing such pleasures?”.

## **6.2 Different places of knowledge in the development of counselling interventions**

The aforementioned essential difference between scientific and ethical logic does not mean that career and life design interventions should be developed without reference to scientific knowledge. On the contrary, as presented below, the interventions constructed with explicit reference to knowledge in the human and social sciences offer the most guarantees as to their procedure and the achievement of the determined objectives. Some interventions are indeed designed with reference to particularly rigorous scientific studies. This is the case, for example, of the employability guidance based on the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA). On the other hand, other forms of guidance, such as “le bilan de compétences” [competencies’ elicitation intervention] in France, rely only on vague notions. Most career and life design interventions fall in between these two extremes, finding themselves either closer to the first, or to the second pole.

### **– An example of employability guidance developed from scientific research: the TWA model**

To construct their employability guidance intervention, Rene Dawis and Lloyd Lofquist (1984), the authors of the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA), started from rewording of the generic issue of the active life’s direction, which prevailed at the beginning of the century (see Table 1), namely “What occupations or professions would be right for me?”. This is not a question of scientific research since it concerns the individual life and thus mobilizes ethical considerations. Therefore, as such, it could not give rise to scientific research. Nevertheless, research questions could be built within the framework determined by this ethical question. Dawis and Lofquist worked on such a construction by formulating the following research question: What are the factors and processes that explain the success of certain individuals in certain trades or professions?

On the basis of this question, they developed a research agenda extending that of Donald G. Paterson (1892–1961). This programme allowed them to construct a theory – that is, a general model proposing, on the one hand, a set of

hypotheses relating to the factors and processes facilitating professional success and describing, on the other hand, hypothetical links between scientific concepts. It means that they studied the possible relations between notions that were rigorously defined according to the meaning they took with respect to each other, within the framework of their theoretical model. These hypothetical links, formalized in this way, have the essential characteristic of being able to be experimentally validated.

In the case of the TWA, the basic scientific concepts were those of personality (assuming that each individual possesses stable traits that characterize their way of being in the world, such as aptitudes, values, interests, styles, etc.), aptitude, value, personality style and work environment adjustment style. The empirical research of Dawis and Lofquist enabled them to examine their fundamental hypotheses. They proved that the people who best fit and succeed in an occupation or profession are those who possess the aptitudes required to perform the corresponding professional activities, those who satisfy their values while performing the given occupation or profession, and those having the personality style, and work adjustment style, compatible with the dominant styles in their work settings.

Based on their empirical observations, Dawis and Lofquist proposed a methodology of employability guidance consisting in testing the counselee's (1) aptitudes profile, (2) value system, (3) personality style (4) adjustment style, then searching with them for (5) the best possible integration of these four dimensions, to match it with certain occupations or professions described according to the same dimensions. It seems clear that such information can be a major determinant of a person's decision-making process, when he/she has previously concluded, from her thinking about her active life's direction, that it is the exercise of a professional function, a trade, or a profession, in the current systems of work organization, that should make his/her life meaningful.

**– An example of employability guidance primarily based on vague notions: the French bilans de compétences [competencies' elicitation interventions]**

In contrast to Dawis and Lofquist's model, many guidance interventions are grounded only in vague references to knowledge in the humanities and social sciences. In some cases, they are even limited to a metaphorical use of the concepts to which they refer. This is the case of a form of employability guidance, intended for French adults, namely the "bilan de compétences" [competencies' elicitation intervention]. The determined objective of these interventions is to help a worker or a jobseeker clarify which direction they could set to their career by making them become aware of all the knowledge, skills and attitudes that



they have constructed during their different life experiences (that is to say, by eliciting their “competencies”).

The notion of “competence” is therefore central to these interventions. This word comes from the legal vocabulary where it initially meant the legally recognized ability of a public authority to do a particular act under specific conditions (Robert, 1984, p. 349). Incorporated into linguistics by Noam Chomsky, this term gave rise to the construction of a scientific concept. In this discipline, this concept designates the system formed by the rules (grammar) and the elements to which these rules apply (lexicon), memorised by the user of a natural language. This system enables the speaker to formulate a limitless number of grammatical sentences in their language and to understand the sentences which they have not heard before. Competence is a potentiality whose actualization (by word or writing) constitutes the performance (Robert, 1984, p. 349). This scientific concept was in turn transferred to the field of career guidance where, in the absence of rigorous theoretical study and precise empirical research, it constituted a vague metaphorical notion. The French Wikipedia defines competencies as “the abilities of an individual to perform functions or tasks; one also speaks of skills. The term is often opposed to that of performance, which refers to the measurement of behaviour which is observable and measurable” (Compétence, 2017).

If clearly defined, the notion of competence could have given rise to the construction of one or more scientific concepts on the basis of which empirical research enabling more rigorous interventions would have been developed. Such a research could, for example, be aimed at answering questions such as: In the field of career and life design interventions, can the concept of “competency” be conceived in an undifferentiated way or is it necessary to distinguish between different types of competencies depending on, for example, the process of their development, or of their transfer from one context to another? What role(s) do competencies (or certain types of competencies) play in the construction of future expectations, by which people give meaning to their lives? Is it possible to notice any differences between people? Etc.

In the absence of such scientific research, competencies’ elicitation interventions currently constitute a broad class of heterogeneous practices. The most common ones are based on a conception of competencies that equates them with aptitudes - natural dispositions or capacities acquired to do something (Robert, 1984, p. 92). In this perspective, the competencies’ elicitation intervention is to some extent a softened version of the vocational guidance interventions used in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The client’s task is to respond to various tests and questionnaires (skills, values, professional interests and sometimes projective tests). The presentation of the test results to the client gives rise to discussions with the counsellor. This discussions form the basis of the counselee’s construction of their professional (or training) plan, which stands

in accordance with their abilities, values, interests, and personality traits. Other competencies' elicitation interventions (which seem to be offered less frequently) refer, more or less precisely, to contemporary epistemology. They consider competencies as the narrative products of counselling interaction. According to this conception, it is the counselee's reflexive analysis (supported by the verbal exchanges with the counsellor) of their various forms of learning and professional or extra-professional activities which allows them, by means of the connections they make between them while narrating them, to produce, in the long term, a certain self-concept: that of a subject bearer of certain competencies that can be recognized by a diploma, developed, or invested in a particular field of activity, professional or not (Aubret, 1996; Kostulski, Prot, 2004).

This double indeterminacy – conceptual and practical – constitutes an advantage for the counsellors who, while conducting competencies' elicitation interventions, can proceed as they wish to do (respecting the legal framework regulating such interventions and the professional culture of the institution that employs them). The counsees, however, face certain disadvantages. Neither do they know in advance what type of intervention will be offered to them, nor can they know if the intervention will deal with the issues that they explicitly face or those they may gradually express.

### **– Three advantages offered by career and life design interventions based on knowledge in the humanities and social sciences**

The example of the TWA is exceptional. In general, it is not a career and life design issue that gives rise to the construction of a research question, on the basis of which a theoretical model entailing numerous empirical studies is developed. The reverse is more common: It is the issues put forward by their clients that lead those whose mission it is to help them to reflect upon their active lives (especially: counsellors, institutions, researchers, etc.), to wondering how they could support them. When developing interventions to address these clients' issues, the intervention designers generally refer, more or less rigorously, and in varying proportions, to more or less vague notions, scientific concepts, social representations, personal or professional experiences, as well as to current institutional, financial or political constraints, etc. The metaphor used by Claude Lévi-Strauss in "La Pensée Sauvage" (1962) seems relevant here: while the Dawis and Lofquist's approach was the product of the work of an engineer, most current career and life design interventions resemble the work of a handyman. In such tinkering, the role of scientific concepts and knowledge can vary extensively.

The advantages of an explicit reference to precise scientific knowledge are indisputable when one looks at the way in which the life design dialogues were

designed. As has already been noted in paragraph 5 above, they are intended to help the counsees build meaningful life perspectives. However, conceiving an intervention aiming at this objective requires certain knowledge of the processes by which individuals form expectations for their future in their daily lives, as well as of the factors that play a role in it, regardless of what happens in a counselling relationship. Nevertheless, when constructing such life design interventions, references to this knowledge may be more or less explicit, systematic, rigorous and precise or, on the contrary, partial, vague, or imprecise. As regards the life design dialogues, they were developed by referring closely to a synthesis - as complete and precise as possible - of knowledge in this field (Guichard, 2001, 2004, 2005; Guichard, Pouyaud, 2018).

The first advantage given by reference to such a synthesis is to be able to centre the intervention on themes that are likely to contribute to its objective's achievement: an objective that the scientific observations to which the intervention refers allow to define more acutely. For example, current scientific approaches to human subjectivity consider it to be both plural and searching for unity. This therefore implies that the intervention at the same time allows the counselee to examine, in different life contexts, their relationships with themselves, with others and with objects, and to wonder about the connections that they feel or establish between these different forms of experience, in view of, precisely, eliciting a unifying future perspective.

A second advantage of such an explicit reference to knowledge in the human and social sciences is that some of their observations can play a vital role in defining intervention procedures. For example, as the next article explains, research of the specialists in pragmatics (Jacques, 1979) has shown the essential role of a type of reflexivity - trine reflexivity - in the individual's interpretations relating (in particular) to their life experiences. Such an observation implies, therefore, that the intervention stimulates the counsees' trine reflexivity: a reflexivity that allows them to make comparisons, connections and distinctions between their various life experiences.

A third advantage of such a reference is that a more rigorous definition of procedures makes it easier to observe and describe what actually happens during the intervention. Not only does this mean controlling whether the counselee makes progress in their reflection (which is possible for most scientifically- and non-scientifically based interventions), but in addition, describing the factors that contribute to (or, on the contrary, hinder) such progress. Such observations can contribute both to the expansion of the knowledge of the dynamics of human subjectivity and to improvement of the intervention's methodology.

## Conclusion: Eclecticism and Presentism

The observations reported in this brief review of career and life design interventions could be summarized by two words: eclecticism and presentism.

**Eclecticism.** Admittedly, the aforementioned interventions can be grouped into two broad categories: those which guide the reflexion of the counselees in order to lead them to improve their employability and those which aim at helping them to answer the generic issue of the active life's direction: "By what kind of active life might I give meaning and perspective to my existence?"

However, employability guidance interventions are diverse and varied. First, they form an eclectic collection in the sense that they intend to help the counselees answer the various translations of this generic issue in the languages of the work (and training) organizations and exchange systems, which, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have dominated and currently dominate the world economy. These interventions are eclectic in a second sense, because some of them have been developed with explicit reference to knowledge in the humanities and social sciences, while others rely only on the "common sense" of their designer or the practitioner who implements them. Finally, they are eclectic as they are a function of both the professional culture of the institution offering them and the stand taken by each professional about this culture in the institution where they work.

Life design interventions have emerged as a result of doubts that appeared in the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century concerning the sustainability of current work organizations and exchange systems. Therefore, there arose the following question: in the context of developments in robotics, of growth of non-decent forms of work, of ecosystem crises and of badly soaring world population, can the career and life design interventions aim to only guide employability? Would it not be appropriate to conceive interventions, aimed at helping people to set direction to their active lives, which do not presuppose that this direction consists in their inclusion into the dominant work and exchange systems? It is with a view to providing a positive answer to this question that some life design interventions begun to be developed: in particular, Mark Savickas's *career construction interview* and Jean Guichard's (et al.) *life design dialogues*. Although differing, to some degree, in terms of their theoretical references and their methodology, these two forms of life design interventions are aimed at the same objective: to help the counselee construct future perspectives that give their existence a meaning. Both of these interventions seem to achieve this goal.

**Presentism**<sup>2</sup>. However, it is doubtful that such interventions will be sufficient to help individuals engage in active lives that will solve today's global crises. Indeed, life design interventions, as well as those of employability guidance,

<sup>2</sup> Presentism: „uncritical adherence to present-day attitudes, especially the tendency to interpret past events in terms of modern values and concepts”, *Oxford English Dictionary* (Editor's note).

refer only to issues that the counselees are able to express today: issues that are relating to their past experiences, their present and some short-term expectations concerning their immediate environment. The term “presentism” seems to precisely define such a situation. This concept was coined by the historian François Hartog (2003) to describe the ways in which cultures have conceived, according to their age, the articulation of the three modalities of time. Antiquity could be described as “pastist” (in coining a word from the model of “futurist”), insofar as it privileged great past myths to explain present phenomena. Modernity (which begun with enlightenment philosophy) was futurist: it emphasized progress of civilization and science and perceived it as a means of understanding the present, which was conceived of as a moment in the process of the future’s realization. The contemporary period is presentist. It anchors its vision of the past and the future in the present: it commemorates the past and conceives the future only as a mere extension of the present.

It is indeed in such a presentist framework that both employability guidance and life design interventions operate. Admittedly, the latter allow counselees to develop their thoughts on the direction of their active life, on considerations about the sustainability of the current global economy, or on their possible contributions to the resolution of problems threatening our ecosystem. However, on the other hand, these interventions do not imply involvement in such considerations. Is it enough? In the context of the current global crises, wouldn’t it be imperative for everyone to take into account the near future that appears so alarming? Is it not urgent to design interventions that help people think about issues such as: “What direction should I set to my active life, so that about 10 billion people can have decent and humane lives in a world with limited resources?” Isn’t it time to replace the current “presentist” career and life design interventions by others, rooted in the future: some new interventions based on the imperative, unanimously voted by the United Nations General Assembly (UN, 2015), to “transform our world”?

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