


Careers Guidance in Context



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SAGE Publications
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi

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First published 2001

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SAGE Publications Ltd
6 Bohhill Street
London EC2A 4PU

SAGE Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
32, M-Block Market
Greater Kailash – I
New Delhi 110 048

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library

ISBN 0 7619 6905 5

ISBN 0 7619 6906 3 (pbk)

Library of Congress Control Number: available

Typeset by Keystroke, Jacaranda Lodge, Wolverhampton
Printed in Great Britain by Biddles Ltd, Guildford, Surrey

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CAREERS GUIDANCE IN A NEW ERA

There is considerable consensus that at the start of a new century we are living in a new era, although how it is described varies. Castells (1999a) calls it the 'information age', Wijers and Meijers (1996) the 'knowledge society', Mulgan (1997) a 'connected world', and Beck (1999) 'risk society'. Although the titles vary, there is a great deal of agreement as to what characterises this new era, and the consequences of the rapid change witnessed in the last 20 years. The impact of this change is being increasingly explored by those writing about careers guidance (Collin and Watts, 1996; Roberts, 1997; Savickas, 1993) and it is the purpose of this chapter to explore the nature of the new era in order to consider the consequences for career guidance services and for its impact on the role of careers workers.

The nature of the new era

In his recent important study, Castells (1999a) discusses the rise of the network society which he describes as based on a new mode of development, informationalism, historically shaped by the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production. What is new about informationalism is that the action of knowledge upon knowledge itself is the main source of productivity, and thus the development of technology is directed towards ever increasing levels of complexity and information processing. Castells claims that this new technology is so pervasive that it penetrates society in such a way that new forms of social interaction, social control and social change are emerging. Indeed, these changes can be identified on a global scale with all societies being influenced by informationalism, to some extent.

Mulgan (1997) calls this 'connexity' and discusses how we live in a connected world. He uses this term rather than information or knowledge because connexity is the capacity to store, to spread, to disseminate and connect that makes sense of information processing and gives value to it. The pervasiveness of the new technology springs from the fact that information is an essential part of all human activity. This leads to networks at

many different levels, providing great flexibility and potential for change. Another vital feature of this technological revolution is the highly integrated nature of the technology, leading to powerful connections between telecommunications, computing and electronics. These characteristics have led to the establishment of a truly global economy which is new; it is the capacity to work as a unit in real time on a planetary scale (Castells, 1999a). Thus there are globally integrated financial markets facilitating the rapid flow of capital, whilst science, technology and information are organised on a global scale and markets are increasingly globalised.

The term 'globalisation' is increasingly used as a way of defining this new era, and there has been much debate as to the meaning of the term. Giddens (2000) emphasises four aspects to globalisation: first and most important, the world-wide communications revolution; second, the 'weightless economy' with financial markets leading the way; third, the demise of the Soviet Union; and finally, growing equality between women and men. Davis (1998) describes globalisation as capitalism in the age of electronics, making clear the crucial link between the new technology and the economic system. Hobsbawm (2000) puts a different emphasis on globalisation, describing it as the elimination of technical obstacles rather than economic ones, with an abolition of distance and time. Kundnani (1998) sees the globalised market as based on the use of informational and symbolic goods which are themselves the most dynamic and profitable areas, resulting in manufacturing relying for its competitiveness on information processing and leading to a state of perpetual technical innovation in order to remain competitive. Globalisation has also meant an increasing interdependence of international trade and global competition with information technology as the 'indispensable medium for technologies between different segments of the labour force across national boundaries' (Castells, 1999a). Collin and Watts (1996) describe these dramatic changes as a move to a 'post-industrial stage' or 'post-Fordism', with mass production controlled by a centralised bureaucracy now being replaced by small-batch production using computer technology and a flexible workforce. In addition, there has been a 'crisis' of the large corporation and a growth of small and medium employers. These changes in the economy have led to the growth of the network enterprise (Castells, 1999a) which makes material the culture of the informational/global economy; it transforms signals into commodities by processing knowledge.

The consequence of these developments is that work and employment is being radically changed. Post-industrialism is characterised first by an emphasis on information generation as the main source of productivity, second by a shift from goods production to the delivery of services, and finally by the rapid growth of managerial, professional and technical occupations, with increasing polarisation within the occupational structure. Castells (1999a) defines the UK as a service economy model, where manufacturing employment has rapidly diminished. He sees a new division of labour emerging with occupations clustering around three types of activity:

first, value making, which includes research, design, integration and execution of tasks; second, relation making, which involves networking; and finally, decision making. New terms such as outsourcing, downsizing and customising indicate the trend for a greater degree of individualisation of labour. More people are in temporary and part-time employment; increasing numbers are self-employed so that the traditional form of work, based on full-time employment, clear-cut occupational assignments and a career pattern over the life cycle, is being eroded away (Castells, 1999a).

Mulgan (1997) points out that the new economy lays greater and greater emphasis on exchange and transformation as opposed to direct engagement with materials. He states that it has shifted the centre of gravity of societies away from those occupations which favour continuity on to occupations which favour change, unpredictability, spontaneity, innovation and creativity. The demand is for people with interpersonal and intrapersonal skills to become intermediaries and interpreters dealing with a myriad of human relationships. Increasingly, these skills allow workers to become mobile in the global market. Conversely, those who were in unskilled manufacturing jobs find themselves redundant; this is especially true of men, with women proving to be more adaptable to shifts in the labour market.

This assessment is supported by a number of other writers (Arthur et al., 1999; Collin and Watts, 1996; Killeen, 1996; Roberts, 1997; Savickas, 1993). For example, Arthur et al. (1999) discuss the implications of moving from the 'industrial state' to the 'new economy' for individual workers, claiming that these profound economic changes have led to radical changes in the nature of career. They point to a move from a 'strong' situation that prevailed when large bureaucracies and companies were dominant to a 'weak' situation where work is much more flexible, with, for example, a more feminized workforce balancing home and employment. Killeen (1996) identified a number sources of change that were determining the social context of guidance. These were technological change as exemplified by information technology; globalisation with an internationalisation of careers and products; industrial restructuring and, in particular, the rise of the service sector; unemployment, especially among the young; the rapid increase of women in the labour force; and finally, an ageing labour force. He points to new career realities which imply 'uncertainty, unpredictability, insecurity, reduced likelihood of promotion, increased likelihood of mobility out of one's initial occupation, non-standard contracts and part-time work and self-employment' (1996: 15).

Roberts (1997) talks of prolonged transitions to uncertain destinations facing young people. Prolonged transitions reflect the extent to which young people are either remaining in full-time education post-16 or participating in some training scheme, and the uncertain destinations refer to the rapid economic changes which have transformed the economy, making employment much less predictable. This theme has been further

developed by Bentley and Gurumurthy (1999), who discuss changing routes to adulthood brought about by changes in the economic structure and employment and education. They also point to profound differences in family life, in some cases leading to young people becoming homeless; social exclusion, which is concentrated in certain geographical areas, with crime as a particular problem; and increasing mental health problems for young people. Savickas (1993) describes a move from a twentieth-century 'career ethic' based on large bureaucratic organisations, where typically the white middle-class male found success by moving up someone else's ladder, to a twenty-first century 'development ethic', where success comes through cooperation and contribution in a postmodern society in which individuals are more able to shape their lives and meaning is more open to interpretation. Hawkins (1997) suggests a new vocabulary is needed to describe new careers, with terms like portfolio, personal growth, maintaining employability and lifelong learning replacing career, progression, rising income and security and education and training. However, there is also evidence of increasing job insecurity and work intensification (Burchell et al., 1999) especially among professionals, leading to poorer health and greater stress in family relationships.

Social change and identity

Having examined the main economic and technological changes currently taking place, it is appropriate to see how these developments relate to social change and, in particular, to the identities of particular groups such as young people. Gender has been at the heart of social change for the last three decades. Castells (1999b) proclaims the end of patriarchy – a revolution that goes to the roots of society and to the heart of who we are. This revolution is the result of a number of factors. The new technology which has transformed advanced economies has led to the creation of new jobs, many of which have been filled by women, who have the necessary flexibility and the relational skills demanded. Levinson (1996) divides this paid employment into three categories: unskilled/semi-skilled work offering limited pay and prospects that women often combine with their family responsibilities; traditional 'female occupations' such as teaching and nursing that offer better career prospects but where the most senior posts are often occupied by men; and finally, higher-status occupations in business and the professions where women are increasingly challenging men, but their advancement is sometimes limited. These advances made by women in paid employment are mirrored by higher participation in post-16 education and increasing academic attainment, to the extent that boys are now seen as having problems in attainment.

The change in gender relations is marked in the way in which the concept of the family has altered. The increase in divorce has led to the creation of many one-parent families, mostly headed by women. The 'traditional

marriage enterprise' (Kaltreider, 1997; Levinson, 1996) is no longer the norm, with most women having to seek a difficult balance between paid employment, child-rearing and a domestic role. In addition, the concept of the family has been extended to take in gay and lesbian relationships which has further challenged the status quo. Similarly, women's ability to control their fertility has radically increased the choices open to them, leading to later, smaller families or childlessness.

Women's consciousness has been raised by feminist thinking and women's action arising from this new consciousness. Feminism has taken many different forms (Castells, 1999b) that have proved to be pervasive and challenged patriarchal attitudes and institutions. Discrimination and abuse against women still exist but it seems that we are in the middle of a massive experiment to see how much advantage women will take of the egalitarian opportunities now opening up for them. Recent evidence (Bynner et al., 1997) suggests that the benefits for women are seen at the upper end of the educational and occupational scales. With the challenge to the 'patriarchal family' Hage and Powers (1992) propose that new personalities emerge, more complex, less secure, yet more capable of adapting to changing roles in new social contexts.

In regard to young people, Bentley and Gurumurthy (1999) describe the 'new adolescence' as arising earlier than it did a generation ago, but also that the transition to adulthood has become more protracted. They suggest that many of the structures and norms that acted as props and prompts – marriage, childbirth, community structure, employment – have been weakened by wider and more general forms of change. They point to a world where there are opportunities for young people to progress and thrive through individual initiative, but for the disadvantaged minority, the 'new landscape' is threatening and insecure. There is a stark contrast between those young people 'getting on' and those 'getting nowhere' (Bynner et al., 1997).

Increasing attention is being given to this marginalised group of young people. They are at risk for a host of reasons. For instance, many young people live in poor housing in economically run-down areas in which families are workless, possibly with a lone parent. They may have a criminal record or be in care as well as suffering from low esteem, psychosocial disorders and drug abuse. Their educational attainment will be low, based on poor attendance or exclusion, and lacking in work-related skills. This leads to low-paid work or unemployment. Black young people are twice as likely as their white counterparts to belong to this marginalised group (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999). Roberts (1997) identifies winners and losers among the young. Winners include girls, some ethnic minority groups and those coming from households with two adults working full-time in good jobs. In their study of young people, Bynner et al. (1997) found a more polarised generation with family background, as expressed by the father's social class, still exercising strong influence on school achievements and occupational positions in adulthood.

The construction of identity has long been of concern to social scientists (Castells, 1999b; Erikson, 1968; Giddens, 1994). Indeed, the issue of 'who we are' and 'who we might become' lies at the heart of careers guidance: thus it is crucial to examine changes brought about by the network society in relation to identity formation. Giddens (1994) maintains that self-identity is not a distinctive trait possessed by the individual. The self emerges as reflexively understood by the person in term of her/his biography. He goes on to draw attention to the diversity of choices offered by 'late modern life' and to the lack of help as to which options should be selected. Choices made help determine lifestyle, which determines not only how to act but who to be.

Lifestyles are determined by pattern of consumption but also by life chances which are strongly conditioned by work, or lack of it. Arthur et al. (1999) describe how in the 'new economy' individuals are able to enact their careers. In this process of enactment, people create their own career narratives as a means of personal sensemaking in a changing environment. The authors maintain that the process creates but also constantly modifies the structures of institutions and of individual lives.

Potentially, a bewildering range of options and choices is available in the network society and so is a great deal of information and expert opinion. Giddens (1994) states that, in this situation, strategic life planning is necessary – life planning being a preparation for future actions mobilised in terms of the self's biography. Actual place become less important with the wide range of options made possible by globalisation and the virtual reality of the net. With each phase of an individual's transition, there tends to be an identity crisis.

There is a debate as to the role played by information technology in this process (Barglow, 1994; Castells, 1999b; Turkle, 1996). Castells (1999b), for example, maintains that because new technology is based on knowledge and information, there is a specially close linkage between culture and productive forces, between spirit and matter, in the informational mode of development. Turkle (1996) explores the relationship people have with computers and the implications of this for their identity. She describes how a culture of simulation substitutes representations of reality for the real, with computer screens the new location for our fantasies. Information technology can lead to a multiplicity of selves, in keeping with the diverse and fluid postmodern world. Whilst recognising the potential benefits of this multiplicity, Barglow (1994) points out the consequence can be insecurity, with less for us to do, perhaps less for us to be – less that establishes us as uniquely human.

The politics of careers guidance

Watts describes careers education and guidance as a profoundly political process, because

It operates at the interface between the individual and society, between self and opportunity, between aspiration and realism. It facilitates the allocation of life chances. Within a society in which such life chances are unequally distributed, it faces the issue of whether it serves to reinforce such inequalities or to reduce them. (1996a: 351)

Thus there is always a political and ideological agenda in relation to careers guidance and this has become increasingly explicit in the 'new economy'.

The growing threat of unemployment, especially amongst young people, that developed during the 1980s thrust careers guidance services into the political arena. The decline in traditional manufacturing industries had led to a sharp reduction in manual occupations, filled mostly by young men. With this radical and painful reshaping of work came a political need to respond to the first large-scale youth unemployment since the 1930s. The 'new right' government of Mrs Thatcher sought to influence careers guidance services in three ways (Watts, 1991). First, from a social control perspective, the government sought to recruit young people onto youth training schemes and report those who turned down places. Second, guidance services were encouraged to attend to the needs of the market by ensuring that market intelligence was excellent and that young people should respond to this accordingly. Finally, it was believed that there should be a market in guidance itself, making it more efficient and more responsive to its client groups.

Governments have had broad aims for guidance services: economic efficiency via their role in the allocation of young people to work, and social equity through access to educational and occupational opportunities (Watts, 1996a). Originally, guidance services in Britain conformed to a social welfare model, being fully funded and controlled by government. With the advent of 'new right' thinking which dominated British political life for nearly two decades, this model has been successfully challenged by a quasi-market model where there are varied sources of funding and control. Thus in 1993, careers guidance services were removed from local government control and put out to tender, resulting in a form of 'privatised' guidance.

With the election of 'New Labour' in 1997, a new emphasis in policy has emerged and this has had a direct impact on the way in which the Careers Service operates. The focus is now upon socially excluded young people, culminating in the publication of *'Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16–18 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training'* (SEU, 1999). The Careers Service is now identified as a 'key player in delivering the Department's agenda' (DfEE, 2000a) and will play a major role in the formation of the new youth support service, Connexions, in 2001. Hence, public policy is redefining the Careers Service, this time in conjunction with other agencies such as social work, and creating a new professional role, the personal adviser.

Careers work in higher education has not been immune from the impact of public policy. With the publication of the Dearing Report (National

Commission of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997), impetus was given to changes that had been taking place during the previous years. Higher education careers services were identified as having a central role in ensuring the employability of their graduates through the introduction of career management skills and transferable skills into the curriculum.

It is clear that careers guidance at all levels will remain central to future governments' policy agendas, because of the emphasis on employability, social inclusion and national targets for education. As a result, the roles occupied by careers staff are changing and the services are being restructured accordingly.

Professional identity and change

As we have seen, those working in careers guidance are also subject to the same forces of change as their clients. Reflecting on this process and becoming more aware of the nature of this change is an essential part of maintaining and developing a credible professional identity. In order to become an effective practitioner, it is important to explore how professional identities are formed. First, training to work in this field involves an element of theory (Kidd et al., 1994) which Brammer (1985) says acts as a rationale for what one does in the name of helping and which involves basic assumptions of how people learn and change their behaviour. Consequently, there are a number of dimensions to this which include values, a cognitive 'map', notions of development, and learning styles.

Second, the practitioner's world view needs to be taken into account (Ivey et al., 1987). By this is meant that we all have a perception of how the world works, how we decide to act, what motivates us and other people, and what are our important values and beliefs. This frame of reference will always influence how practitioners work with clients and thus has to be acknowledged.

Schon (1991), in promoting his notion of the 'reflective practitioner', made a number of points that relate directly to careers staff today. He describes the professional-client relationship as central and contrasts the traditional relationship with that of a new, more reflective relationship. For example, in this new relationship the practitioner has an obligation to make his own understandings accessible to his client and to be ready to explore the client's meanings. It is also significant that the practitioner is more directly accountable to the client.

Schon characterised the reflective practitioner as recognising that s/he is not the only one in the situation to have relevant and important knowledge, that uncertainties may be a source of learning to both parties. By not maintaining a professional façade, a real connection can be made to the client. The relationship can lead to a sense of increased involvement and action. This approach means that a reflective contract allows for mutual respect, a greater sense of partnership, and a shared sense of purpose.

There is a clear recognition of the sorts of issues raised by Schon (1991) and Ivey et al., (1987) in the new learning outcomes for capability in careers guidance (DfEE, 1999). The learning outcomes are set out in seven units and three of them make direct reference to these issues. Unit two, 'Self Evaluation', sets out the need to critically reflect upon and evaluate own practice, and demonstrate commitment to own training, improvement and continuing professional development. Unit five, 'Core Values', focuses on professionalism. Statements are made about students examining and evaluating their own beliefs and values and their effect on the conduct of guidance practice, demonstrating an impartial client-centred approach and developing a critical awareness of potential conflict between agency and professional values. Finally, unit six, 'Equal Opportunities', emphasises the need to develop strategies to identify and manage the effects of own values and beliefs in guidance practice. These new learning outcomes are much more explicit than earlier ones in emphasising the necessity for careers professionals to be reflective practitioners.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT THEORY

The way in which our careers develop is a complex process involving many different and changing factors. In order to understand it more clearly, a body of theory is required and this has become increasingly available over the last 100 years. These theories have to be seen within the context of the time they were developed, for as Law (1996a) observed, they have 'responded to the social concerns prevalent' at a particular time. It is necessary to view career development theories as 'growing out of their times' but also influencing the way in which careers guidance has been practised.

Careers guidance formally began with Frank Parsons, who established the Vocation Bureau in Boston (USA) in 1908. The following year he put his ideas into words. First, he stressed, a clear understanding of the individual's aptitudes, interests and limitations was necessary. Second, a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of different kinds of employment was essential. Finally, an ability to match these two would result in successful guidance.

Thus Parsons laid the basis for the notion of talent matching. He went on to suggest some techniques, beginning with the collection of personal data by means of a private interview at some length. Various tests of sight and hearing might well be used, as well as an assessment of memory and general intelligence. He was also concerned with character analysis during the interview. Parsons saw it as part of his work to advise interviewees on the value of voice culture and the economic value of the smile, and he held that if a boy's manners were in any way objectionable or underdeveloped, he should be frankly told and urged to correct his errors.

Occupational information was the basis of his second area of interest and he collected this for use with clients. He advised that a boy who was underdeveloped and inexperienced and showed no special aptitudes should read about occupations and visit places of work and, if feasible, try his hand at different kinds of work.

Frank Parsons does not seem to have been much influenced by the psychological thinking of the time. However, industrial psychologists were becoming increasingly interested in this field, an interest that was