

A Perspective on Career Counselling in Japan

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As a result of internationalization, globalization, and a demographic change of population, Japanese people have been forced to equip themselves with competencies for adapting to a transition from traditional to post-modern employment conditions. In situations of rapid change such as these, it is widely recognized that the services of well-trained career counsellors and practitioners are urgently needed.

The purpose of this article is to outline the issues relevant to the professionalization of career counselling practitioners who are expected to acquire key competencies to help individuals develop and maintain their careers across the lifespan. The authors also present a brief history of the evolution of career practitioners in Japan, and a brief analysis of groups of workers who need such professional help.

The end of the 20th century in Japanese society marked a major milestone within the 60-year history of career counselling. It was the

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first time that the existence of “career counselling” as a distinct profession caught the eyes of mental health professionals, labour economists, and even personnel managers in business and industry. As in many other advanced industrial countries, career counselling has now been recognized as a socio-political instrument, vital to the economy, and of great importance in addressing national goals. Career counselling is one important way of providing services to vulnerable members of the population, particularly since the collapse of the economy has affected Japanese society and industry as a whole.

Under the impact of the “third wave” (Toffler, 1980), the nation as a whole, and each of its citizens, have been forced to face drastic changes in a time of uncertainty in Japan (Gelatt, 1989). It is clear that even though economic conditions would naturally vary positively or negatively over time, the various rapid qualitative changes which have occurred thus far in industrial and societal contexts through internationalization and globalization, for example, are continuously impacting upon people at various stages of life and at various points along their career path. Under these circumstances, the time has come to face up to the reality that more professionally trained counsellors are urgently needed in Japan.

An aim of this article is to present some of the issues relevant to the professionalization of career counselling in Japan, based on the belief that true career counselling has its roots deep in counselling psychology. The scene is set with a brief history of career counselling in Japan and by reference to the growing interest in training such professionals.

Brief History of Career (Vocational) Counselling in Japan

It is relevant first to indicate that some degree of alienation has existed for 60 years between the domains of “career counselling” and “counselling psychology.” In other words, career counselling has been

imagined as an information dissemination act for any job seeker's decision-making. Counselling psychology has been identified as a psychotherapeutic method mainly based on one-to-one communication. Further it should be clarified that career (vocational) counselling has not been accepted in Japan as a major function of counselling psychology. No special efforts have been taken within professional circles to clarify the relationship between these two domains, or to sweep away the currently ambiguous status of career counselling as a profession. At present, when career counselling catches the attention of other associated professionals, these individuals begin to question its role and how it might affect or impinge upon their own identity and roles within the professional field.

One area of confusion surrounding career counselling and counselling psychology became apparent in 2001. The Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) took notice of the professional function of career counselling in the United States (U.S.), and decided to introduce such counselling as a new and efficient strategy to help mid-career and older workers in their career choices or changes (MHLW, 2001). However, because of the ambiguity in the concept of counselling, the government finally decided to use the terms “career *consultation*” and “career *consultant*” to replace “career counselling” and “career counsellor.”

The description regarding the role and function of career consultation found in the government paper is summarized as follows:

[Career consulting is] ... a support to help workers in considering their specified means and direction for career formation and further its accomplishment through information dissemination, advice giving and counselling.... Career consulting aims to match worker's needs for career formation and requirement of enterprise to workers. (MHLW, 2001, p. 1)

This definition was followed by the brief explanation justifying why the new term “career consultation” was finally adopted:

In terms of the support for career formation, there are many similar activities existing in Japan such as career counselling, vocational counselling (職業相談), career guidance, vocational guidance (職業指導) industrial counselling, occupational ability development, and so on. Since those activities partially overlapped with each other, therefore the terms of career consultation and career consultant as its professional role are accepted as general terms ... The basic skill of counselling is also helpful for career consultation. (MHLW, 2001, p. 2)

It is easy to infer that the government wished to avoid the use of the specific term “counselling” because the notion of counselling tends to remind lay people only of such practices as treatment for the emotionally disturbed. However, the Committee for Career Consultant, which was initiated by the MHLW, recommended recently that every career *consultant* should be equipped with basic *counselling skills* and basic knowledge about stress management in order to work effectively as a career consultant (MHLW, 2001). Stress management may be regarded as involving psychological and therapeutic theories and practices. While the concept of counselling is not clearly defined by the Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), it seems to use the term as if it is synonymous with effective communication skills or good helping-relationship skills. So, it is reasonable to ask: Is “counselling” different from “consulting”? Does “career counselling/consulting” involve “counselling psychology”?

In order to appreciate the perspectives of career counselling in Japan, it is necessary first to trace the origin of such confused conceptualization of general counselling, consulting, and career counselling. In the first place, an outline of the historical background of career counselling and

counselling psychology helps us understand the particular circumstances of career counselling in Japan.

In the early 1950s, counselling (psychology) and vocational guidance were introduced by American counselling psychologists as instruments of national policy designed to democratize educational opportunities for Japanese youngsters. Since then, a number of American counselling psychologists have been invited to give lectures and workshops to Japanese audiences. Many Japanese people have also studied counselling and vocational guidance in American universities and institutes. Quite a few publications discussing counselling theories and techniques, as well as Super's (1957) *The Psychology of Careers*, have been translated into Japanese and read by many Japanese professionals. In the intervening years, however, Japan has not experienced an expansion of both vocational guidance and counselling, as well as counselling psychology, as was expected (Watanabe & Herr, 1993). However, it must be mentioned that the notion of career development proposed by Super certainly influenced the definition and goal of career guidance in secondary schools in Japan (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, 1981). Unfortunately, Super was introduced as a career development theorist but not as one of the founders of counselling psychology as an independent discipline. Since Rogers's "client-centered therapy" was introduced in the mid-1960s (Watanabe-Muraoka, 2002), vocational guidance began to separate from counselling psychology in Japan, and this situation still continues.

Vocational guidance and counselling have been recognized as functions of home-room teachers in secondary schools, and as the main person-job matching strategy for the unemployed at Public Employment Security Offices. Unfortunately, those who provide such vocational guidance and counselling have largely been left untrained, or at best, minimally trained, for such work.

By way of contrast, counselling psychology has never established its status in Japan as a distinct discipline in psychology, as it has in other countries. Accordingly, no systematic courses or programmes for counselling psychology have ever been offered by any Japanese universities. It seems significant that as soon as career counselling and school counselling received attention in Japanese society, many universities began to open courses titled “counselling,” whose goals and contents, however, were quite different from those of American or Australian universities.

The second historical factor concerns the circumstances of counselling psychology that are particular to Japan. As mentioned above, counselling psychology was introduced with vocational guidance and counselling to Japanese academic circles by the American counselling psychologists in the early 1950s, immediately after American Psychological Association changed the Guidance and Counselling Division into the Counselling Psychology Division. Since then, the more popular the terms “counselling” and “counsellor” have become in Japanese society, the more the confusion has deepened about their actual meaning, even among psychologists. This chaotic situation still remains unresolved. One example is that school counsellors are in the position of having a licence as clinical *psychologists*, not as counsellors per se (Yagi, 2008). The introduction of career consultation, clearly involving the application of psychological principles, is the second example. These examples indicate that counselling and counselling psychology may not survive as unique professional disciplines in future, and may disappear within the next decade.

In 1980, Watanabe and Herr (1980) analysed why counselling psychology had never taken root in Japanese academic circles, despite the fact that a variety of theories and techniques in counselling had been introduced and recognized by Japanese psychologists. Two decades

since the first analysis, Watanabe-Muraoka (2002) reviewed professional publications written by Japanese psychologists and professionals in neighbouring fields to analyse their definitions and connotations of counselling. No basic differences were found in her analysis surveys in the two different periods. As a result, she proposed five tentative categories of definitions and connotations (Watanabe-Muraoka, 2007, p. 99) as follows:

1. Counselling is regarded as synonymous with the word psychotherapy (e.g., Ogawa, 1995). The term “counsellor” is thus regarded as synonymous with psychotherapist.
2. Counselling is regarded as a treatment of one-to-one communication used by human service professionals such as social workers and nurses.
3. Counselling is taken to mean a good and warm human relationship in any situation. The phrase “counselling mind” was coined by a school superintendent about 30 years ago. It is very popular in Japan and is easily confused with counselling itself. The phrase “counselling mind” connotes an attitude that values human relationships and the motivation to develop human relationships (Kokubu, 1986).
4. Counselling is regarded as the non-directive behaviour of “just-listening” and accepting what the other person says while not giving advice or information. This is still the most popular (but misguided) image of counselling.
5. Counselling is regarded as the technique of resolving another’s mental problems through giving advice or information.

In 2002, following the establishment of the “career consultant” system by the MHLW mentioned above, the President of the Japanese Association of Counselling Science (which is the only organization for counselling) formally commissioned a special committee whose mission

was to consider the conceptualization of counselling psychology. The interim definition was presented in the President's keynote speech at the 37th annual conference of the Association in 2004. He characterized counselling psychology as a scientific function conducted through a human relationship in which the client is fully respected by the counsellor. Further, he proposed three major goals of counselling psychology as: (a) promotion of human development based on the approaches of lifespan development and career development, (b) prevention of problems, and (c) helping to solve practical problems (Tagami & Ozawa, 2005). The formal definition of counselling psychology itself, however, has not yet been presented by his committee (Watanabe-Muraoka, 2007).

In order to contribute to social needs related to the internationalization of society, the professionalization of counselling psychology is inevitable and is dependent on professionals related to the counselling field taking responsibility as reality-oriented policymakers. It is proposed that these professionals should take responsibility to address the confusion within their own professional fields and to take action to resolve it. The following issues are proposed to help identify the first steps to take:

1. Should counselling psychology be a unique and independent discipline in psychology, with its own theoretical and practical approaches? In other words, it is necessary to clarify the true identity of counselling psychology and indicate where it has uniqueness in its contributions to people and society. Alternatively, it is necessary to show that counselling psychology is simply a technique for therapy under the more general umbrella of clinical psychology.
2. Professionals should recognize that Rogers's early conception of a non-directive approach, introduced to Japan in early 1960s, has

penetrated deeply throughout Japanese society and still remains the dominant influence in constructing the image of counselling. The situation creates a view that counsellors are good listeners who never initiate problem-solving but rather wait for clients to make decisions when they are ready. The view that counselling does not include any other interventions such as psychological assessment, information dissemination and advice-giving, has promoted a dichotomy between career counselling and counselling psychology. It seems that such views should be clarified as soon as possible by providing correct explanations of Rogers's theory, as well as by adopting the image of counselling as a professional helping process that aims to help an individual become a fully functional independent person in his or her society.

Environmental Changes and Needs for Career Counselling

In order to consider internationalization and career counselling in Japan, it is necessary to briefly identify some social and economic trends which have accelerated the need for career counselling and for professionally trained career counsellors in Japan.

One important area is career counselling for youth in school-to-work transition. Until the late 1990s, Japanese young people had better employment opportunities, characterized by a low youth unemployment rate and a high proportion of regular full-time workers. This was the product of a Japanese-style human resource management system embodying long-term employment, systematic in-house training, and flexible transfers within and beyond workplaces. Traditionally, companies employed new graduates as regular full-time workers periodically, immediately after students leave school. Specific job skills of new graduates were not a precondition for hiring because companies provided new graduates with intensive and group training and then assigned them to specific jobs (Nomura, 2007).

However, the youth labour market has changed dramatically as a result of the long economic recession commencing in the late 1990s. During the recession, the chance of new graduates being employed as regular full-time workers has decreased because large-scale companies have greatly reduced the number of new graduates employed. Recently, companies have increased the proportion of non-regular employment and outsourcing, while decreasing new graduate intake, especially from high school. Since then, there has been an increase in youth unemployment rate (see Table 1) and an increase in the number of irregular (part-time and casual) workers (see Figure 1). The youth unemployment rate of 20–24 years old was 9.3% in 2002, more than double over a period of ten years.

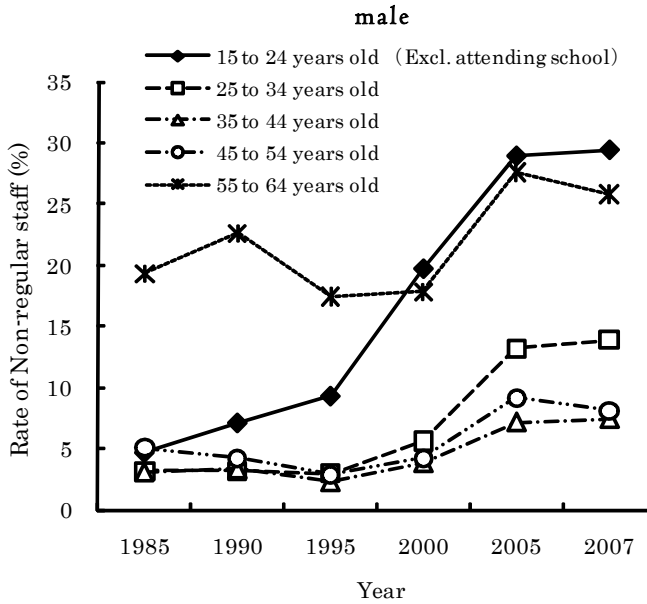
Table 1. Unemployed Rate by Age Group

Group	1990	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008
15–19	6.6%	12.1%	12.8%	11.7%	9.4%	8.0%
20–24	3.7%	8.6%	9.3%	9.0%	7.7%	7.1%
25–29	2.7%	6.2%	7.1%	6.4%	6.0%	6.0%
30–34	1.9%	4.8%	5.8%	5.0%	4.6%	4.5%
35–44	1.5%	3.2%	4.1%	3.9%	3.4%	3.4%
45–54	1.2%	3.3%	4.0%	3.4%	2.9%	2.9%
55–64	2.7%	5.5%	5.9%	4.5%	3.9%	3.6%
65–	0.8%	2.2%	2.3%	2.0%	2.1%	2.1%
Total ages	2.1%	4.7%	5.4%	4.7%	4.1%	4.0%

Source: Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2009).

Facing this situation, the Japanese government in 2003 established the Independence and Challenge Plan for young people, to reverse the trend of increasing youth unemployment. For instance, additional staff have been employed nationwide within the Public Employment Security Offices, and one-stop service centres (called “Job Cafes”) established to enhance career guidance and career counselling (MHLW, 2004).

Figure 1. Rate of Non-regular Staff by Age Group



Source: MHLW, 2008.

A discrepancy now exists between school and society (industry) as many high school graduates (5.2%) and college graduates (12.1%) finish education without having made any career decision or commitment (MEXT, 2009). A recent survey cited reasons given by 20–29-year-old job leavers: “I chose the work as temporary”; “The work is not suitable for me.” These typical answers appear with higher frequency in younger age groups than in other age groups (Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2007). Traditionally, young people explored a variety of occupational experiences and eventually found steady work, but the exploration period is perhaps now longer than in earlier generations.

In order to cope with this reality, “career education” has been introduced by politicians. The conceptual model for career education was developed and implemented from elementary to high school (MEXT, 2004). Further, in 70% or more of university career centres, various methods of career development support for students have been introduced, such as internship, career guidance, individual counselling, interview skills and résumé writing skills (Japan Student Services Organization, 2006). The support of school-to-work transition has become more important as conditions in the labour market become more severe.

Another area of importance is career counselling for adult workers. Today, the situation surrounding workers is changing dramatically. Business restructuring demands quick organizational changes and job redesign or reallocation. Socioeconomic change, such as global competition, technological innovations, and diversity of individual values and needs, requires more flexibility of services, organizations and workers. Organizations began to require workers to be responsible for their own career development under structural changes of employment management, such as a shift from a seniority system to an outcome-

evaluation system (Yashiro, 1997). It is clear that new career paths require more individual career management.

According to the basic survey of human resources development (MHLW, 2007) regarding employee's views on career planning, close to 70% of full-time employees would like to undertake the process on their own. Also, the number of companies introducing an in-house system for career development support is increasing, particularly among large companies. The content of career development support is varied and includes consultation services such as counselling and career consulting; support for formulation of career plans; support for self-development and skills development; and the provision of time off for education and training. There are also allocation systems that respect independent individual career plans, including self-reporting systems, free agent systems, and open recruitment systems (MHLW, 2007). However, while many companies have introduced new systems of human resource management, those efforts are not always as effective as expected (Watanabe et al., 2005).

In such an environment, workers have encountered various problems. In a survey by Works Institute (2008), the percentage of workers who answered "I feel job insecurity" was 49.5% in 2008. According to the report of "Telephone mental health counselling for workers" (Japan Labour Health and Welfare Organization, 2008), nationally there are 23,829 times of telephone counselling, and the number increases every year. As individuals try to grapple with the increasingly difficult employment problems, the urgent need for more specific counselling by professionals has risen.

In order to prevent health problems (such as the death and suicide caused by overwork), the Industrial Safety and Health Act was revised in 2006, and the obligations of the enterprise to the workers was

emphasized more than before (MHLW, 2006). Recently, under such a societal demand, Employee Assistance Programmes have been developed, and enterprises have begun to introduce them as external support resources providing counselling and care for the total life of workers, including their mental health and career issues. The effectiveness of career counselling has been recognized as a primary prevention in mental health care (Ono, 2008).

Toward the Professionalization of Career Counselling

As mentioned above, internationalization and dramatic, rapid socioeconomic development, as well as demographic changes over the past 10 years in Japan, have begun to make substantial impacts on employment and management policies. In addition, they have fostered the diversification of individual value systems and career paths. In particular, with the bursting of the economic bubble, Japanese society experienced the loss of old certainties and a need to seek new directions. Effective approaches are needed now which can contribute to the well-being of citizens in a society pressured and characterized by increasing unpredictability.

It seems fair to say that the environmental changes which Japanese people have experienced since the end of the 20th century resemble the historical situation that gave birth to vocational counselling and later counselling psychology in the U.S. in the early 1900s, as indicated by Tyler (1961). Japanese people of all ages have been confused by transitions from traditional values to individualistic values, from certainty to uncertainty, from careers in organizations to careers out of organizations, from decision-making by the family or organization to decision-making by the individual, and from personnel management based on lifetime employment and seniority to diversification of the employment contract.

It is clear that such dramatic external and internal environmental changes require individuals to equip themselves with competencies related to taking personal responsibility for decision-making, for managing their own careers, for coping with stressful situations, and for adapting to an unpredictable future.

Personal and career development of individuals is essential in order to cope with these environmental changes. Within this context, it seems appropriate that the government has introduced the position of career consultant, even though it remains at a paraprofessional level. In this respect, it is positive to note that the General Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) programme was introduced in Japan in 2001 as a major area of study within a paraprofessional in-service training programme for career practitioners. This term is used as a generic term for workers involving with career services (Splete, 2001). GCDF programme, now well known internationally, was initially developed in 1997 through a collaborative arrangement among the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee, the Center for Credentialing and Education, and the National Career Development Association in the United States. Since that time, the GCDF was developed offering country-specific standardization and recognition to career development professionals in various countries (Splete, 2001).

In order to respond to social trends, the crucial task and responsibility is to establish a systematic educational programme for professionally trained career practitioners. A realistic conclusion the first author reached was neither to endeavour to normalize the relationship between career counselling and counselling psychology nor to develop counselling psychology as an independent discipline in Japan. Instead, what we are realistically able to do is to consider career counselling important and to make an effort to retrain the paraprofessional practitioners (i.e., mainly career consultants and career

guidance teachers) in elements of counselling psychology. We respect counselling psychology as the core theoretical background in order to develop master's level training programmes for career counselling.

In 2007, the University of Tsukuba and Japan Career Counselling Association began a joint project to develop a career professional training programme (equivalent to master's level) for Japanese society. This project, chaired by the first author, was constructed by interdisciplinary professionals such as counselling psychologists, clinical psychologists, organizational psychologists, psychiatrists, social economists, labour economists, human-relation consultants, personnel managers from international companies, and GCDF programme instructors. The first agenda of this project was to clarify the concept of career counselling and the direction of career services necessary for current Japanese society. The following definition was finally accepted as the most appropriate:

Career counseling (is) a largely verbal process in which a counselor and counselee(s) are in dynamic interaction and in which the counselor employs a repertoire of diverse behaviors to help bring about self-understanding and action in the form of "good" decision making in the counselee, who has responsibility for his or her own actions.... It is helpful, therefore, just as with any other segment of a comprehensive career helping service, to approach individual counseling on a systematic basis. (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004, pp. 540–541)

Accordingly, the transition from "occupational matching model" to "career model" should be the model that can contribute to people living in the internationalizing society (Herr et al., 2004).

In 2008, it was decided that a career professional training programme be prioritized in order to respond to the urgent social need. Its first version in 2008 consisted of 160 seat-hours of class time and 40

hours of individual practicum as supervisor. Classroom curriculum was constructed under the following three categories: (a) core courses for supervision (theory and purpose of supervision; functions of counselling, instruction, evaluation, consultation; process of supervision; competencies and skills of supervisor; supervision programme development; group dynamics and group work; case-study method); (b) core courses related to clinical judgement and mental health issues (understanding emotionally disturbed persons, working life and stress, stress management strategies, field-study of mental clinics); and (c) core courses related to human resources and organization development.

In 2009, a trial programme was offered to 15 GCDF instructors who already have approximately 10 years' experience as career practitioners in colleges and industries and with some teaching experiences. The outcome of this trial will be evaluated by the end of 2009 in order to develop a final version of the programme. Publicity concerning the final version is expected to reach the academic circle and governmental sections concerned with career services in 2010.

It might be clear that Japanese people, and its society as a whole, are in need of the professionally trained career practitioners similar to the career counsellors already existing in several other countries (including the U.S., Canada, and Australia), in order to cope with rapidly changing environments caused by internationalization and globalization of economy as well as demographic changes. During the 60 years' history of career (vocational) counselling in Japan, no systematic counsellor education programme has ever existed, while some programmes of American models have been introduced. Therefore, the joint project mentioned above is now highly anticipated by academic circles as well as by policymakers such as the MHLW. The project, with the purpose of developing a systematic master's level career training programme, is a very challenging task because it has to take into account "Japanese"

tradition of employment system as well as behavioural traits and traditions of Japanese people. It is expected to present the complete programme within two years.

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日本的事業輔導

面對國際化、全球化的挑戰和人口特徵的變化，日本人無可避免要裝備自己，以適應由傳統向後現代就業環境的過渡。在如此變化急遽的情況下，大眾都認同急需要曾有接受過良好訓練的事業輔導師和事業輔導從業員，為市民提供服務。

本文旨在概述事業輔導從業員專業化的相關議題。事業輔導從業員必須具備一些基本能力，以幫助他人在其一生中發展和維繫自己的事業。文章還會簡介日本事業輔導行業的發展歷史，並簡略分析哪些行業的員工需要這種專業幫助。