Contexts and Influences on the Need for Personal Flexibility for the 21st Century, Part II

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Abstract

Personal flexibility appears to be of growing importance in a global economy. However, personal flexibility does not occur spontaneously. It must be nurtured by schools and facilitated by counsellors in education, work and community settings. The need for new paradigms of career counselling, psychoeducational models, and testing are discussed as are possibilities for cross-national information systems and support for those engaged in cross-national migration.

Résume

La flexibilité personnelle semble prendre une importance croissante à l'intérieur d'une économie globale. Toutefois, la flexibilité personnelle ne s'acquière pas spontanément. Elle doit être alimentée par le milieu scolaire et facilitée par les conseillers en éducation et dans les différents cadres de travail ainsi que dans la communauté. Le besoin pour de nouveaux paradigmes du counseling de carrière, de modèles psychoéducationnels et de tests sont abordés de même que les possibilités d'établir des systèmes informatiques entre diverses nations ainsi qu'un système de support pour ceux engagés dans une migration d'une nation à une autre.

In a previous issue of the *Canadian Journal of Counselling* the companion article to this one explored the dynamics of the global economy and its stimulus to the growing need for personal flexibility in a world dominated by advanced technology, new economic and political alliances, and sweeping social revolutions. The emerging world of international competition is one in which it is increasingly recognized that the key factor in a nation's ability to compete in a global economy is the quality of its work force as defined by the literacy, numeracy, flexibility, teachability, and commitment to lifelong learning. Many nations, in Europe and East Asia, have understood this challenge for several decades and have created the policies and mechanisms by which to maximize the development of human resources as national priorities (Schlosstein, 1989, p. xiv).

For diverse political, economic, and social reasons, the nations of North America have been less clearly focused in their approach to the development and support of human capital than have selected nations in other parts of the world. Under the recent pressures associated with retaining economic viability, the United States and Canada have increased their attention to the economic successes of competitor nations, to educational and work place pressures, and to the attitudes and knowledge bases possessed by citizens of other nations. One construct which attempts to summarize the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that youths need to learn and adults need to be able to implement in the twenty-first century is personal flexibility.

Since the term personal flexibility is not a standard or well-defined term in the professional literature, personal flexibility can be described as a composite of such ingredients as basic academic skills; adaptive, transfer, mobility, and learning skills; entrepreneurial skills; career maturity and career adaptability (resilience, insight, indentity); planfulness; self-organizational understanding; communications and problem-solving skills. Many of these ingredients of personal flexibility overlap in some measure with what Amundsom (1989) has labeled competence. In his perspective, "competence refers to a state of being as well as to a state of doing. A competent person is one who has the capacity (or power) to adequately deal with emerging situations" (p. 1).

The problem for educators and counsellors in schools or human resource development specialists in community agencies or work places is how to develop personal flexibility. More specifically, what is the role of schools and counsellors in developing personal flexibility? The remainder of this article will address such perspectives.

EDUCATION FOR PERSONAL FLEXIBILITY

Since "knowledge workers" increasingly dominate the occupational structures of the industrialized nations (Drucker, 1989), education and economic development have become intimately linked. The skills acquired in schools and those acquired on the job are increasingly complementary. In the emerging occupations of most of the developed and developing nations, knowledge is replacing experience as the primary requisite to employability. But, personal flexibility is not just a matter of intellectual or academic skills, it is also comprised of affective skills and attitudes that mediate how academic or performance skills will be used and how persons will work with others, take constructive supervision, be responsible, deal with frustration and uncertainty, be self-initiators, and act with purpose. These attitudes and behaviours, like those more academic in content, must be learned and reinforced in schools as well as in the work place. There is a clear association between skills and opportunity, between knowledge and teachability, adaptability or flexibility, and between attitudes and purposefulness.

If the roots of these skills, knowledge bases, and attitudes are not embedded in one's behavioural repertoire in schools and nurtured in that context, students are likely to have a jagged transition to adulthood. Indeed, the fundamental behaviours of importance to adulthood begin to be shaped in preschool and in the elementary grades. Several examples make the point. As Staley and Mangiesi (1984) have observed, it is widely acknowledged that children begin to formulate career decisions at a relatively young age. They acquire impressions of the work people do, the kinds of people employed in different settings, and the abilities required for acceptable performance. Whether based on accurate infor-

mation or not, they enthusiastically embrace some occupations as possible careers for themselves and absolutely remove others from either present or future consideration. The elementary school by its climate and reinforcement schedule sometimes creates conditions by which students' sense of self-efficacy, sense of self-worth, or academic prowess is made contingent and thus not secure. These students do not develop the knowledge that they will have future opportunities to choose, the competence to do so, and the ability to be successful in academic or learning-based pursuits. As a result, they psychologically, if not physically, begin to withdraw from school at an early age and do not allow themselves the risks of being academically challenged. In doing so, they close off future options and learn behaviours that are reactive, not proactive, and that they carry into senior high school and adulthood. They essentially develop personal rigidity, not personal flexibility.

In a further illustration of the importance of the elementary school in forming behaviours likely to impair or facilitate subsequent personal flexibility, the studies of Hansen and Johnson (1989) have described how learning strategies observed in the classroom as early as in the elementary school and reinforced in the junior and senior high schools can lead to productive or non-productive work strategies in early adulthood. These researchers suggest that it is not simply the formulation of career awareness and a sense of future opportunity that is at issue in the elementary school, but that early classroom learning strategies may help predict the individual's tendencies to engage, dissemble, or evade in difficult work place situations, particularly in early employment. This research accents the fact that the roots of work strategies take hold in the early years of schooling, as do the sense of self-confidence and valuing of different tasks that underlie elements of personal flexibility. As such, they become either part of the "hidden curriculum" of the school or that which is systematically planned to occur.

It is against such a context that it is important to acknowledge that personal flexibility as a major component of a national priority on human capital development rests upon seeing schools as mediums for "social engineering" in the most positive sense, of all the attitudes and skills of significance to the work force. It has been said of Japan, for example, that "Americans have yet to recognize that we are competing not only with the Japanese factory, but with the Japanese school as well. The Japanese have not only invited us into competition at the market place, they are also inviting us into educational competition" (Duke, 1986, p. 20). The Japanese have obviously recognized the interrelatedness of the factory and the school. In their view, "the industrial productivity of a nation is intimately related to, as it were, the productivity of its schools" (Duke, 1986, p. 20). While many American and European observers look at management style, quality circles, industrial processes,

and factory output to identify the elements of Japan's success, they miss the fact that the Japanese worker's skills, high rates of literacy and numeracy, attitudes to work, loyalty to the group and to their employer, diligence and cooperation are carefully nurtured from the first grade forward in the schools. The lesson from the Japanese is that "a nation's competitiveness cannot be measured merely in terms of factory output, rates of productivity, or day-to-day management practices. Rather, the overall competitiveness of a nation's factories derives from the effectiveness of the entire infrastructure of the society and basic to that is the school system" (Duke, 1986, p. 20).

While Japan may be a clear and successful example of embedding in schooling the training of students to be "personally flexible" on terms important to that nation's economic structure and work organizations, the need to see schooling as the major medium for advancing "personal flexibility" of workers for a global economy is equally important in Europe, in Scandinavia, in Africa, as well as in North and South America. In each of these locations what happens in schools and what happens in the work place are not mutually exclusive phenomena. Indeed, within the education reform movements and national development plans of many nations, there are attempts to make schooling more career relevant, more attentive to various elements of "personal flexibility," as we have defined them, in order to better equip students with self-understanding, understanding of technology and of life options available to them, skills of conflict resolution and social skills, and skills to more systematically plan and prepare for work. Industrialized and developing nations have variously implemented approaches to the infusion of academic subject matter with career development concepts; created decision-making courses and experiences; introduced required courses on the principles of technology to help students envision the effects of advanced technology in work places and in the occupational structure; established career resource centres in schools; expanded contacts between schools and the larger community; instituted work study, work shadowing, work experience schemes; and instituted other career related mechanisms in communities, schools, and work places.

In sum, there are many ways to integrate the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours found to be of importance to obtaining personal flexibility in a specific nation within that nation's system of education. In most of these systems, counselling has a major role in facilitating the elements of "personal flexibility" in students, but it is typically not the only process of schooling to have such a responsibility. It is, however, possible to think about counselling for personal flexibility independent of its role in schooling and in relation to populations other than students. The next section will pursue such perspectives.

COUNSELLING FOR PERSONAL FLEXIBILITY

It seems clear that the concept of counselling for personal flexibility will inexorably broaden traditional paradigms of career counselling. Given that career counselling and career guidance operate at the intersection between individuals and their environments, counsellors promoting personal flexibility will likely be seen increasingly as brokers or maximizers of opportunities; as interpreters or translators of the relationships between educational training or retraining and their implications for different career trajectories; as providers and classifiers of information, in particular that which describes not only national opportunities but that available within regional economic structures (e.g., the North American Free Trade Agreement); as support systems by which persons can acquire insight into their own stereotypes and irrational beliefs which have acted as brakes on their mobility; as stimuli to the use of strategies by which to increase their feelings of power and self-efficacy; as providers of psychoeducational mechanisms by which persons can learn skills—e.g., assertiveness, anger management, decision-making, conflict resolution, stress reduction, job search—of pertinence to their exploration and mastery of a meaningful work life; as mentors who provide feedback, coaching, and advice about career-related tasks; as persons who are sensitive to the grief and mourning experienced by those whose cultural identity has been lost in their migration from one nation to another; and as enablers of personal initiative and control.

Since our analysis of personal flexibility or personal competence described in the earlier article (Herr, 1993) in this *Journal* suggests a taxonomy of possible skills and insights that persons operating within the expanded parameters of a global economy may require, the content of counselling for personal flexibility is essentially clear and the status of persons relative to their possession of various required skill sets is capable of being assessed. Against such appraisals of skills persons need to acquire, counselling for personal flexibility is likely to be active, collaborative, and goal-directed. Counselling for personal flexibility will, for many people, be a mechanism that frees them from the captivity of negative attitudes, irrational beliefs, information deficits, and low self-esteem. As such, counselling for personal flexibility must champion both release and purpose: opportunities to shed the shackles of self-imposed or environmentally imposed limits on self-worth, dignity, or ambition as well as processes by which to translate renewed feelings of confidence and competence into plans of action, risk-taking, and growth. These are among the building blocks of personal flexibility.

Dealing with issues of self-esteem may involve the counsellor with the application of cognitive behaviour therapy. Because a lack of self-esteem frequently stems from negative evaluations of one's worth, such evaluations and the bases for them may need to be confronted and alternative

ways to viewing oneself must be examined. Because self-esteem is so fundamental to one's way of viewing others, the world, and the utility of one's continuing to live and being purposeful, the counsellor must create in his or her communication with the client a relationship that is characterized by caring, trust, understanding, honesty, sincerity, acceptance, liking, and interest. These relationship variables may sound so familiar that they are passed over lightly; the point is, however, that these interpersonal elements are precisely what have been missing from the counsellee's life and have brought him or her to a lack of self-esteem or self-worth. These types of counselling variables are the healing ingredients by which people can be helped to self-disclose, exhibit trust in another, and communicate the feelings of pain and loneliness that underlie and presage dealing with problems of self-esteem.

Individual identity is built out of our relationships with other people; psychological health depends almost entirely on the quality of relationships with others. Johnson (1986) contends that each of us needs to be confirmed as a person by other people. "Confirmation consists of responses from other people in ways that indicate we are normal, healthy, and worthwhile. Being disconfirmed consists of responses from other people suggesting that we are ignorant, inept, unhealthy, unimportant, or of no value, and, at worst, that we do not exist" (p. 3). In a world of loneliness, rapid change, discrimination, complex stressors, and psychological or physical abuse, many have never learned nor have been systematically exposed to interpersonal skills that allow them to develop self-worth, identity, or effective relationships with others. Thus, their behavioural repertoire may be very limited in how to act in an interdependent world, or they may feel so limited in their locus of control, their ability to manage their lives, that they attribute everything that happens to them to fate or external control by other people. The sense of stress, powerlessness, frustration, and lack of personal worth that results may frequently be manifested in vandalism, aggressiveness, uncontrolled anger, violence, bullying, chemical abuse, and other self-destructive or antisocial acts. Although the terminology may vary, an important antidote to such behaviour is the help offered by the counsellor to counsellees of any age to consider alternatives, sharpen values, deal with their individual quests for meaning or spirituality, understand more about their strengths and their possible application in social and work situations, and identify and learn the skill sets (e.g., interpersonal, problem-solving, communication) likely to permit them to live a more purposeful and productive life.

When counselling for personal flexibility is concerned about issues other than reinforcing self-esteem or control, additional techniques become relevant. One is empowering the individual to plan with purpose and with specificity. Amundson (1989) among others has suggested that counsellors should help persons conceptualize and create a career devel-

opment plan that focuses on identifying personal strengths, matching personal and organizational goals, assessing progress, and establishing action strategies (e.g., Amundson, 1989). Such approaches are intended to reinforce a personal sense of competence to make a difference in how they approach their future, to advocate an internal locus of control rather than an external locus of control, to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity, anticipate and develop strategies to act upon potential barriers, to be alert to available support systems in other geographical or cultural settings, and to project the types of transitional steps one will likely encounter during a career. Such approaches are designed to promote goal-directed activity, personal empowerment, and a sense of purpose as well as of personal flexibility. Additionally, these approaches are designed to make planning tangible and action-oriented, not simply a set of abstract insights, and to make planning an act of personal ownership and commitment, not something imposed upon an individual by a counsellor or organization.

Counselling for personal flexibility will take somewhat different forms depending upon the population and setting at issue. For example, within a human resource management organization in industry providing career services to employees designed to increase career resilience, career insight, and career identity (London & Stumpf, 1986), a number of techniques are important: for example, identifying the key competency that workers need to acquire or possess to advance along career paths within the organization whether these are designed to increase their technical competence or to move them to supervisory and management positions; provide learning guides about how to set goals, find information, use educational opportunities available in or out of the organization to increase one's personal "bank of competencies" from which one can draw as new opportunities open; and expose persons to simulations or games that allow them to handle ambiguity effectively, to rehearse or experiment with new roles in a protected environment and receive feedback about how one can refine particular skills or strengthen them.

With regard to counselling for career insight with organizations, personal flexibility may be enhanced by such approaches as motivation awareness training including, for example, videotapes of workers that describe how they might get a sense of achievement from their work, deal with new assignments, take actions with uncertain outcomes, depend on others, balance work and non-work activities, form career goals, obtain feedback, and compete for promotions. Within the individual or group counselling context, counsellors can discuss how their responses compare with those on the tape, establish priorities for their development, establish action steps to accomplish their priorities, and share them with the counsellor or with other counsellors in a group format to solicit feedback. Counsellees or clients in such contexts might be encouraged

to keep developmental journals as records of their job experiences, skills developed or found to be needed, information about career opportunities, self-assessment measures focused on expectations, needs, interests, or values as ways of expressing personal purpose, productivity, growing self-efficacy, and personal flexibility.

Career insight can also be gained through having counsellees or workers engage in computer-based career planning programs that can be tailored to a company's internal opportunities and that can match employee's abilities, needs, or interests to such opportunities, or the counsellee or worker can participate in the various career planning modules available in such computer-assisted career guidance programs as DISCOVER (for adults), CHOICES, or SIGI PLUS. Whether in individual counselling alone or as augmented by other technologies (simulations, gaming, motivation training, computer-aided planning, or assessment centres), the acquisition of career insight as a component of personal flexibility includes such elements as: (1) analyses of their present career satisfaction and understanding of the career changes they may face; (2) assessing themselves on interests, skills, and values; (3) gathering information about career opportunities; (4) helping identify decision-making styles and improve decision-making skills related to career moves; and (5) identifying realistic goals and establishing an action plan to increase the likelihood of success (London & Stumpf, 1986). Such a set of perspectives is obviously important as a paradigm for employees within organizations as well as for adolescents needing to obtain career insight in preparation for the transition to work. And, they are consistent with what Holland, Magoon, and Spokane (1981) have identified as the components necessary to any set of effective career interventions, whether in schools or in adult settings:

- Occupational information organized by a comprehensive method and easily accessible to a client;
- Assessment materials and devices that clarify a client's self-picture and vocational potentials;
- Individual or group activities that require the rehearsal of career plans or problems;
- Counsellors, groups, or peers that provide support; and
- A comprehensible cognitive structure for organizing information about self and occupational alternatives.

With respect to building career identity with organizations as a necessity for individual and organizational effectiveness, providing information about job opportunities, career ladders and lattices, opportunities to make lateral moves to a different job or department as a way to increase one's problem-solving skills and knowledge of the organization, each become ways to define oneself in organizational terms, vehicles for increasing personal flexibility and, therefore, counselling content.

Counselling for personal flexibility is likely to take other forms for populations that differ from those engaged in dealing with issues of mobility throughout an organization. For example, whether because of organizational shifts or changes in their personal and family lives, many adults will be undergoing major transitions. Theory and research of the past decade has made clear that adult development is the evolution of a life structure which goes through a sequence of alternating stable periods and transitional periods. In opposition to notions that adulthood is one of stability and certainty, the concept of transitions suggests that adults are constantly experiencing change, either deliberately, because it is chosen, or inadvertently, because of forces external to the self. Such changes can engender growth, new concepts of self, perceptions of opportunity, or crises and deterioration. In either case, stress frequently accompanies the transition and required adaptation. Within such perspectives, there is ordinarily no prior expectation that either persons or institutions experiencing transitions as crises are suffering from underlying pathology. Rather, their defense mechanisms and coping resources may not be sufficient to deal with the event or problem they are encountering; they may not know how to muster the resources actually available to them; they may be overwhelmed with uncertainty, anxiety, or inadequacy; they may need to back off from the problem, rest, allow a new store of energy to accumulate; they may need help to look for alternatives that are not apparent to them; they may need to reframe or rename what they are experiencing as something other than a crisis so that it can be seen with less emotion and less diffuse vagueness, with more clarity and focus as a natural developmental experience through which they are moving toward greater stability and control.

Watts (1980) contends that there are at least three models for looking at the needs of adults for career counselling and career planning or career guidance. The first is the model which addresses *developmental stages* in the life cycle as they are related to various periods of chronological age. In such a perspective the role of career counselling would be to help persons understand, adapt to, and master the requirements of the developmental tasks characteristic of each stage. A second model focuses upon *roles*. This model views aging as a process of learning new roles and relinquishing old ones. The career counselling response here would involve periodic stock-taking about roles and about the interactions and transitions between them, learning to let some roles go, and developing the skills and insights to take on new roles. The third model focuses on *life events* which involve significant transitions. Here the career counselling role is one concerned with coping with crises and realizing the growth potential that may be innate with such crises.

The requirement for the individual in transition or in crisis is not to begin again from ground zero, to engage in a 180-degree turn, or to

attribute the emotion of the transition (crisis) to having done something wrong or being inadequate to cope with the future. Rather the solution is again a form of counselling for personal flexibility which is goal directed and which includes elements similar to what Tyler (1961) entitled several decades ago as Minimum Change Therapy. The goal of minimum change therapy is not to reconstruct personality but to assist individuals to heighten their awareness of their assets and resources, to accommodate new strategies, new ways of viewing themselves and their alternatives. Whether viewed in terms of crisis theory, transition theory, or minimum change therapy, identity becomes an issue wherever the individual faces a transition.

Central to coping with transitions is the requirement to reevaluate who we are, what we want to be, and the discrepancies between the two. Questions of the personal meaning of life are likely to arise as are questions of patterns of commitments, necessary skills, and new life structures that need to be created. In transitions, doubting, searching, and questioning are normal. The task of counselling for personal flexibility is to help the person in transition to search for the matrix of crucial choices that must be made about each of the implied areas of concern, to set priorities, and to manage the requirements of such transitions as effectively and systematically as possible. Change is never quite as smooth or linear as theories about change or transition project. Therefore, different coping styles can be employed to deal with the transition (Brammer & Abrego, 1978). For example, *one can employ actions to change the situation* by planning, taking direct action, or otherwise modifying the transitional situation itself. Or, *one can employ responses that attempt to control the meaning of a problem* by making positive comparisons of how things are now compared to one's development five years ago, or counting one's blessing and ignoring many current demands upon one for change, or by changing one's hierarchy of priorities, devaluing unavailable rewards and substituting new rewards or opportunities for the old. Or, *one can attempt to reduce personal discomforts in a transition* by denying or avoiding directly problems to be faced. Thus, one may engage in denial, withdrawal, resignation, substance abuse or other forms of escapism or anxiety reduction.

Brammer and Abrego (1978) have suggested a useful taxonomy of coping skills designed to reflect flexible options for helping persons tolerate and overcome threats and challenges associated with transitions. They include:

Category 1: Skills in perceiving and responding to transition.
Category 2: Skills in assessing, developing, and utilizing external support systems.
Category 3: Skills for assessing, developing, and utilizing internal support systems.

Category 4: Skills in reducing emotional and physical distress and managing stress events.

Category 5: Skills for planning and implementing change.

There is a further emphasis on which counselling for personal flexibility will become of vital importance as the dynamics of a global economy becomes an increasing reality across the world. In one sense, this is an extension of the notions of transition with which we have just been dealing. But, of particular concern, are the issues that surround those who are unemployed and underemployed because of job dislocations, corporate mergers, plant closings or other economic phenomena associated with the transitions in organizations, and industrial or information processes involved in the global economy. Described elsewhere have been the glowing linkages between career counselling, career development, and mental health (Herr, 1989a). That perspective will not be repeated here except to acknowledge that there is growing evidence that the absence of work or underemployment is, for many persons, reflected in behaviour which suggest problems in living or, indeed, mental illness. Unemployment has been found to be associated with feelings of bereavement and loss, victimization, substance abuse, child and spouse abuse, early death, rises in cardiovascular disease, depression, anxiety, aggressiveness and violence. Thus, in many parts of the industrialized world, career counselling is increasingly being seen as a mental health modality, a critical ingredient in the process of reconnecting unemployed, and underemployed, vocationally dissatisfied, or indecisive youth and adults to renewed sense of purposefulness and self-efficacy; in so doing, career counselling is expected to be helpful in diminishing the stress-related side effects of hopelessness and despair associated with a work-life which is seen as unsatisfying or mismatched to the individual's aspirations and abilities. In a sense, such tasks for career counselling become a special case of counselling for personal flexibility. For example, Hayes and McNulty (1981) suggest five ways in which career counsellors can work with the unemployed. They include:

- Enhancing or maintaining the individual's self-esteem by helping him or her manage anxiety and develop more effective problem-solving skills;
- Improving the fit between the individual and his or her life space;
- Promoting job-seeking skills;
- Developing new work-related skills;
- Developing positive attitudes toward work and acceptable work habits (p. 112).

There are many such perspectives that overlap with the ingredients of personal flexibility suggested earlier in this paper. On balance, one might argue that counselling for personal flexibility is concerned both with prevention—for example, counselling children, adolescents and

others to anticipate and acquire the elements of personal flexibility as these will be required by a global economy—and with remediation—for example, in cases where a lack of these elements has put persons "at risk" at points of transition, unemployment, or underemployment, counsellors must help such persons reconstruct and implement those elements of personal flexibility which are lacking in general or in specific situations.

PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL PROCESSES

While the preceding section has focused on counselling for personal flexibility there is a complementary intervention that is increasing in utility in areas such as those of our concern: the use of psychoeducational models. Psychoeducational models are frequently linked to cognitive-behavioural or behavioural therapies, but that relationship is not absolute. Psychoeducational models tend to combine educational procedures such as planned or structured curricula, didactic teaching, and specific content, exercises, and homework with a range of psychological techniques such as simulations, role-playing, behavioural rehearsal, modeling, feedback, and reinforcement. Basically psychoeducational models teach students, clients, or employees specific skills pertinent to dealing with current and future problems. Counsellors in educational institutions, community agencies, business and industry, and independent practice are likely to use psychoeducational models either for treatment or for prevention of problems. Programs as diverse as career education, deliberate psychological education, stress management, decision-making training, anxiety or anger management, job-search strategies, parent effectiveness training, assertiveness training, social skills development, and communication skills each incorporate psychoeducational models and skills (Herr, 1989b). In some instances they do so to provide clients with skills that their problems in living affirm they need if they are to effectively correct some skill deficits implicated in their behavioural difficulties. For example, clients who have problems with anger may simply not have a behavioural repertoire from which to select behaviours likely to be more socially acceptable or interpersonally sound. Therefore, they are likely to use physical violence or intense verbal aggression that leads to education, job, or social maladjustment. The solution to this problem may be coping-skills training through which clients can better understand what precipitates their anger, how they can exert more self-control in dealing with anger-producing situations, and learn communications, positive assertiveness, or other skills that allow them to express anger in a constructive fashion. In contrast, coping skills training or psychoeducational models may be used to prepare students or clients to anticipate certain types of problems and help them acquire needed skills when they face such problems, thereby reducing the sur-

prise, novelty, or other stress-inducing emotions when a problem of a particular type occurs. In such a role, they can be useful in facilitating personal flexibility.

TESTING

A further intervention that complements counselling for personal flexibility or the use of psychoeducational models related to such goals is that of testing. But, testing in relation to the ingredients of personal flexibiltiy is likely to require new paradigms or emphases. Among them are increased attention to testing in relation to the status of persons on various dimensions of the "process of choice," rather than testing about the content of choice. Dealing the characteristics of persons relative to the "process of choice" is concerned with such behaviours as their independence from others in their choice-making, their orientation or commitment to choice, their assessment of barriers to choice, their possession of information about choice options, and their knowledge of and ability in decision-making. Thus, the historical reasons for testing in vocational guidance for purposes of classification, identifying, and creating talent have shifted increasingly from the assessment of individual differences in performance or the matching of traits and factors making up the content of individual choices (e.g., aptitudes, interests, job requirements) to assessments primarily concerned with the "process of choice." The relevant questions in such a context are: how ready is the individual to choose; how planful and how knowledgeable is the individual about the choice process; and how able is this person to define the choice-problem immediately ahead, and to collect pertinent information and weigh its personal value. Pursuing such understanding, psychometricians and researchers have turned their attention to identifying the important influences that mediate how one's career behaviour unfolds, of undecidedness and indecisiveness, of work salience, of different decision-making styles, of perception, of self-efficacy, of the acquisition of academic and task-approach skills, of the presence of irrational beliefs about work and personal capacity of career adaptability. Many of these elements overlap with elements of personal flexibility.

To extend the point further: in much of our routine testing we have been concerned with content of choice issues, particularly the assessment of aptitudes, from which we can evlauate how competitive individuals can be in a particular job or career and the likely upper limits of their performance. However, in the future in the global economy, as work organizations are likely to be less pyramidal or hierarchical in design, and less management driven, the assessment concerns are likely to be less about how competitive the individual may be and more about the status of his or her skills in terms of "complementarity." For example, how is this person likely to function in a group, as a facilitator of the performance of

others in the work place, as a leader of a problem-solving or participative decision-making group, as a conflict resolver. These are the skills of personal flexibility that are likely to be more and more prized in the work organizations that are emerging. Other assessments of growing importance to personal flexibility will be how readily this person can learn, and how teachable, how rigid, or adaptable s/he is.

There are other changes in the views of the need for assessments as well. One of them has to do with the quest for personal excellence. During the past decade, because of the rise in international competition and the increase in educational requirements stimulated by the pervasive adaptation of advanced technology, there has been much rhetoric in the United States about educational reform and the need for educational excellence. The pursuit of educational excellence is undoubtedly an appropriate national goal. However, the achievement of educational excellence is a function of student commitment to personal excellence, to individual action directed to effective choice-making, planning, and preparation within the opportunities afforded by a context of educational excellence. Educational excellence is shaped by and reciprocal with the willingness and the confidence of students to pursue programs of action with challenge their abilities, provide access to earned opportunity, and which rest upon informed choice. Testing, then, must increasingly be seen as primarily used to inform, enlighten, and stimulate the person tested to individual commitment to personal excellence at whatever level of achievement one can accomplish.

The need to use testing as a form of empowerment, self-efficacy, and information, as a way of helping students, workers, or clients develop theories about what is important and how to choose it, will likely change the testing process itself. As Healy (1990) has persuasively described, "If appraisals are to strengthen clients in their ongoing monitoring of their career . . . they need to improve clients' self-assessment skills. If appraisals intend to help clients create a career, rather than merely chart one leg of it, they need to assist clients in becoming aware of how influential their contexts are in shaping who they are, and they need to sensitize clients to how they can manoeuver in their contexts to realize career ambitions . . . Finally, leading the client through an expert's approach will strengthen a client in piloting a career only if the client clarifies how to incorporate aspects of the expert's process into his or her approach" (p. 22).

Healy's reformation of testing reflects the earlier work of Super (1976) in advocating the use of career appraisals as processes intended to help people identify, gather and interpret information for pursuing viable career options. Extending that important point, Healy suggests that "since careers are continuing interpersonal accommodations, their direction requires a sense of purpose, skill in decision-making, and support from significant others . . . Indeed, career appraisals presume that clients

are scientists who are developing personal theories composed of beliefs about their careers and skills for charting them" (p. 215). Such a view is very much consistent with facilitating personal flexibility as we have described it.

CONCLUSION

Included here are only rudimentary perspectives on educating, counselling, and testing for personal flexibility in a global economy. Undoubtedly, there will be other requirements for facilitating personal flexibility as well. For example, the maximizing of personal flexibility will likely require new forms of comprehensive information on education and occupational opportunities across the various economic regions with which workers of a particular nation are likely to interact. Linked national data bases as well as integrated forms of published information about opportunities are likely to result. A combined directory integrating the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook with its Canadian or Mexican counterparts to create a North American Occupational Outlook Handbook would be feasible and useful. Such a directory could be linked or cross-referenced with the directories of occupational opportunity now being compiled under the aegis of the European community. Computer data bases about higher education and other training opportunities in Canada and Europe could be linked with American systems as could occupational data bases describing job opportunities in these nations as well as analyses of how educational or other worker qualifications are being harmonized or accepted across national boundaries.

Further, it is likely that counselling services directed to personal flexibility in a global economy will include among its agenda the provision of support services for persons as they prepare to leave their nation of origin and for persons arriving in another nation. People who go abroad to work may need direct psychological support as they attempt to process the sense of loss or cultural identity and come to terms with new career anchors, differences in interpersonal expectations and relationships, in work volume and expectations, in supervision patterns and in other more subtle issues of adjustments including coping with the lack of the extended family and other family support systems that serve to buffer them, fully or partially, from environmental stressors (Pearson, 1990). In general, the support needs of mobile workers across national boundaries are no different from those of migrant workers moving from one nation to another because of political or economic reasons. Each category of mobile workers needs to find a sense of community and meaning in their new environments as soon as possible if they are to re-establish patterns of productivity and stability. Counselling for personal flexibility needs to include as part of its rationale the importance of support services for

such persons and for their families as they engage in cross-national transitions. Similarly, incoming workers or students from other nations, particularly those nations with well-developed career guidance and counselling services, will expect counsellors to be havens of support and brokers of information about cultural adaptations, jobs, and other transitional issues important to their implementation of personal flexibility. The latter may likely lead to increased requirements that counsellors in one nation become more knowledgeable about and acquire information about counselling services in other nations in order to fully assist mobile students or workers to understand how to access such services going abroad. One of the likely outcomes of such activity will be the need for counsellors to see themselves as members of a profession which is worldwide, requires cross-cultural and international sensitivity and information access, and paradigms of personal flexibility that are located in the broader visions of a global economy.

The psychological, occupational and economic dynamics of a global economy redefine the parameters within which persons in the twenty-first century are likely to negotiate and play out their self-identity and career paths. One result will be new models of the knowledge and behaviours that shape and give substance to personal flexibility in a world of rapid change and increasing ambiguity about the integrity of national boundaries, occupational structures or the work available. Such phenomena will stimulate the search for and the construction of counselling services designed to facilitate personal flexibility. Such changes will likely spawn, as well, new models of career counselling that will emphasize personal empowerment and competence that is sensitive to the complexities of shifting educational, psychological, cross-cultural, and cross-national contexts.

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