The Suggestions of Qualitative Methods of Work of Career Adviser

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Introduction

In the world of considerable changes, the choice of profession, educational path and career is different than before the period of social and cultural transformation.

In the “risk society”, the uncertainty of employment increases, the model of hired labour recedes, there are new forms of employment, the working time is shortened, and the work is shared. The work is more often available as part-time work, on the basis of mandatory contract, contract for specific work.

It is necessary to make repeated choices in the scope of education and profession because defining oneself on the uncertain and unpredictable labour market is not easy.

The decisions in the scope of education and profession are not always made on a rational basis and planning is more similar to doing jigsaw of pieces made of available knowledge coming from different sources, e.g. TV, books, school, advertisement, the Internet, fashion, pop-culture, advice given by family members and friends. The decisions made in this way determine the future life of a man, their professional career, change of biography patterns.

The uncertainty of the modern world and the necessity to make multiple choices force people to look for the adviser’s help. Z. Bauman writes that the “post-modern people” need alchemists (underlined by B.W.) who can create “the precious substance of self-confidence from the scraps of uncertainty and the feeling of being lost; the philosopher’s stone needed by the post-modern alchemists (...) is the authority borrowed from science or taken from magic to which others do not have access.¹

Impatience and living in the state of “immediacy” cause that many clients expect that the adviser gives quick and easy answers to complex questions: Who should I be? What choices should I make? On one hand, people seeking advice expect an expert who “knows what is good and desired” and may quickly provide ready solutions,

chooses on behalf of a client, and at the same time assumes complete responsibility for
given advice\(^2\), simultaneously, the clients look for an adviser-therapist who will reduce
their anxiety, repair “the impaired interpersonal relationships”, hear them out, support
them in independent formation of the way in their lives. Living under constant stress,
in pursuit, uncertainty, the state of temporariness, without support of the nearest and
dearest, family, friends, causes that the people looking for advice search at the same
time for therapy which, most often, is a long-term process.

Pursuant to A. Giddens, the therapeutic culture is a remedy to living in the risk
culture\(^3\).

Thus it means that the model of the adviser’s activity is gradually deconstructed.
People search for directive and at the same time liberal advisers\(^4\) whose role consists
in supporting the clients in choosing their own way of life and shaping their identity.
Such an adviser strives for the best possible understanding of their client to enable
them to shape their identity on their own with the adviser’s support.

The advisers are prepared simultaneously for the role of analyst-expert and
the role of an “interpreter” who “translates the statements”, facilitates the communi-
cation between the discourse participants, holds the dialogue, and prevents the dis-
tortion of communication.

Mieczysław Malewski claims that the role of an adviser in the modern world is
to „be with others”, the emotional solidarity with people coping with their own lives\(^5\).

In my presentation, I would like to focus on the model of activity of the liberal
adviser who does not apply “hard” research tools. Such an adviser uses mainly ad-
visory conversation, does not use any tests, inventories or questionnaires. They may
also use the qualitative methods which are applied in biographical studies.

In the article, I would like to find whether biographical methods which are known
and widely applied in social sciences can be transferred to the counselling practice;
discuss how a career adviser may conduct such studies and how the results of such
studies may be interpreted; define how the career adviser’s and client’s tasks change
in this new counselling situation.

The subject of diagnosing in counselling
- human features or relationships

Formerly, an individual was characterised against the background of the entire pop-
ulation. A diagnosis based on the tests was a good predictor and some issues could be


forecast. At present, counselling is directed at individual assistance. The theories which are constructed on the basis of conducted large area social research in macro scale are no longer applied. It is rather concerned with micro-worlds of people, micropopulations. The standards do not say much about e.g. chances to achieve the success in life.

Formerly, the attention was focused on defining the maturation to adulthood whose landmark was the choice of profession; at present, we talk about whole-life career which does not refer only to the professional sphere, which means helping clients in solving the life problems in different periods of life.

We pay attention not so much to the features of an individual as to the relations established by it and the ability of living in the world.

Such a view is nothing new. Alicja Kargulowa, who analysed the evolution of views represented by C. Rogers, the author of the “client-focused therapy”, noticed that in the first period of therapeutic work he was focused on diagnosing the client’s experience, i.e. the aspirations, desires, anxieties. The goal of the advice was the assistance in defining the client’s problems. With the passage of time, C. Rogers started viewing the counselling situation not only in psychoanalytical dimension but also in social one and he concentrated on the course of relation between an adviser and a person seeking advice.

Therefore, following Alicja Kargulowa, one may ask what the subject of diagnosis in counselling is.

Human features or human relations, living in the world?

If these are relations, then we cannot study the conditions because interpersonal relations are always processes.

There is a turn concerning the methods and subject of studies in the modern counselling.

These are the biographical studies which may show how people function in the world, what their relations with Others are, how they shape their identity, how they construct their careers.

A career treated as a way in life is one of biographical narrations, a personal narration. A biography that we can invoke is only one of the possible histories of our life. The (professional) career treated as biography may be a kind of individual link between what a given person does and how a given person sees themselves. Biography defines a way in which a given person understands themselves in the context of their social environment – their future plans, existing successes and failures, present features and competence.

The construction of career is inextricably linked with learning. Sometimes, it is a form of education in institutions, sometimes non-institutionalised learning, surely – it is unofficial learning of life.

Each man creates their own life, their individual story. At the same time, it is emphasised that each individual biography (career) cannot be considered without broader context, relations between an individual and the society, culture and history. Social phenomena influence the models of the course of life and cause the development of competence with typically biographical character, the social reality also has “a biographical face”. It is confirmed by Ulrich Beck’s words who believes that everything that appeared separately in the theoretic-systemic perspective becomes at present an integral element of individual biography. Family, professional life, education, consumption, management and other separate spheres of social life meet in the dimension of existence of one human being, interweave to create entirety and define this human being’s individual status. At the same time, systemic complications, cracks and contradictions come down to the level of individual biography where they have to be coped with.9

The way in life – career is fragmented, complex and uncertain. Some phases of professional development or life may be skipped, some may be returned to. No one is surprised any longer that more and more often women have their first child when they are 40, that the interests are developed when people are more than 60 and that new qualifications are acquired then, or that children aged 12 work and people aged 50 go to school.

The path of professional development is not focused on one goal – the goals are not fixed. Therefore, it may be better to define biography, which is not directed at achieving the goals like career or way, as narration, story, construction of identity10.

The main task of a career adviser is to support a person seeking support in constructing their career and reconstructing it all the time since the scenarios of individual biographies have changed.

Qualitative study methods – biographical studies

Pursuant to Agnieszka Bron, the biographical studies are also defined as “the story of life”, “the history of life”, and “narration”11.

There is also a new term – biographicity – which means that we may design and redesign our own lives in new situation or in different context each time anew when we tell our own history. In this sense, the life appears as possible to be created and developed12.

Narration is a story having its author, its subject and motive or goal underlying the need of telling it. If it concerns own experiences of a person telling it, then we deal with auto-narration. Biography is an account of life of a specified person (...)13.

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12 Ibid p.43- 44.
Pursuant to J. Trzebiński, narration is a specific way of understanding the world, one of the forms of its understanding, natural and very important. The reality is often understood by people in the form of history. However, such histories do not exist as something “objective”. This is our mind that interprets different events as some specific histories

The author also emphasises the importance of reflection on the experienced histories. For through reflection, it is possible to activate the alternative interpretation scheme

Pursuant to M. Nowak-Dziemianowicz, the basis for giving sense and meaning is the knowledge obtained through everyday experience. This new knowledge is compared with the former images of self and the world

A person gives the knowledge about themselves in a biographical narration which is created in the adviser’s presence.

Transfer of biographical studies to counselling practice

The studies undertaken by the practitioners are not competitive with the ones by the professional researchers because they are somehow embedded in the counselling process itself. When studying the counselling situation, one should take into account that both the assistance process and its result are hardly measurable, filled with personal experience of involved persons, “creations” which rather cannot be categorised. When thinking about such studies, one should take into account the fact that an adviser does not use the numerical data, which is reliable data, in their studies – the counselling situation is open, unique and ambiguous.

Pursuant to Usher, Bryant and Johnston, each storytelling may be considered as the activity of writing and rewriting one’s self and world. The study practice is “embedded” in the studied reality – we can connect it with the study author’s concept of “self”, view the study as a kind of self-understanding, self-interpretation of both a client and an adviser.

In my opinion, such studies may be conducted by the advisers although it is true that conducting such studies (in particular, interpreting them) is not easy. In addition, they include small groups of people, are very time-consuming and thus quite expensive. However, conducting such studies skilfully has a lot of advantages – also therapeutic ones. First of all, it activates the people seeking advice in such a way that they may interpret their lives and give them some sense and make changes on their own.

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Biographical studies should be conducted with people who are unemployed for a long time, people in difficult life situations, people who went abroad, or foreigners living in our country.

The advisers – within the biographical studies – may conduct narrative interviews.

The narrative interview is not a summary of answers to asked questions but its goal is to obtain the story of life or its selected stages. As a result, we sometimes obtain a story of life which lasts even several hours and which can be tape-recorded.18

Seemingly, this technique is easy (it does not require the preparation of questions). However, conducting such studies is complex since it is necessary to explain the interviewed person what kind of expression is required. For narration should be connected with own biographical experience and not with the opinions expressed by different groups of people and concerning a given subject. The researcher should know how to listen to, encourage narration, refrain from asking questions at the stage of narration. The interpretation of such studies is also difficult.

Pursuant to Maria Straś-Romanowska, a researcher should make an attempt to understand a person and their fate, analyse the subjective experience and meanings which are the individual’s personal choices and indicators of individualised human life19.

How can an adviser conduct such narrative narration? A good description of such an interview includes five stages presented by Kaja Kaźmierska:

A/ The stage of beginning the interview – creating the atmosphere facilitating the narration,
B/ The stage of stimulation to narrate – explaining the interviewed person what kind of expression is required,
C/ The stage of narration – the core part of the interview, listening to the narration,
D/ The stage of ending the narration – the point of asking questions,
E/ The stage of ending the interview – “normalisation” of situation20.

I am not going to discuss in detail all stages of the interview. Instead, I will deal only with stage B – the invitation to narrate. During this stage, we have to clearly explain the interviewed person that what is of importance to us is the story about the narrator’s life and personal experience21.

The encouragement to narrate is significant. During this stage, we cannot ask questions as during the typical interview. To make the interviewed person aware

18 Kaźmierska K., p.35
21 Ibid p.36.
that we hope for a story, we may define some dividing line in time. In such a case, the interviewed person does not have to tell the entire life story but only some part of their biography.

Depending on what interests the adviser in the client’s biography, the adviser may encourage the latter to narrate in different ways. For example, when the adviser wants to understand how their unemployed client constructs their educational and professional way, the client may be encouraged to narrate in the following way:

*Can you tell me about your experience related to the course of your professional way? Start with the earliest years remembered by you until present. I am interested in everything that you may say about this. I am not going to interrupt you. I will just ask a few additional questions at the end.*

After listening to the client’s narration and tape-recording it, it is possible to proceed to the next stage of asking questions which will explain the inaccuracies. At this point, the adviser may ask questions concerning intentions, motives or feelings but it is also possible to ask about the turning points in life or significant persons that participated in the creation of educational and professional career.

The reconstruction of the course of life which occurs during the narration is aimed at retracing the events which show the continuity of biographical experience.

An adviser may analyse the stories which interest them not through the description of static condition but through the attempt to understand how a given phenomenon originated, developed or finally disappeared.

The analysis and interpretation of the narrative interview, the explanation of the text may take place in several ways. It is possible to analyse the gathered material in the context of questions asked by an adviser and therefore it is necessary to listen to and/or read the text several times.

The adviser who applies the biographical method to work with people who are unemployed for a long time may attempt to understand the situation of such people and help them in better understanding how they give sense and meaning to the situations that occurred in their lives.

M. Nowak–Dziemianowicz claims that biography may provide us with the answers to such questions as how the clients manage their affairs, how they orientate themselves in the society, what choices they make, how they adapt to new conditions, what goals they set themselves, how they prepare the plans of solving difficult situations, and – first of all – what sense they give their lives

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Pursuant to Agnieszka Bron, coping with crises, critical events as well as with hopes and positive events requires some knowledge and skills which may be improved by biographical learning25.

The biographical learning is manifested in the changes which occur within the identity under the influence of new experience and new knowledge.

The biographical learning includes experience, knowledge, reflection and self-reflection (...) By using our self-awareness, we learn from our biographies through summing up, reflection, self-reflection, telling the history to others and ourselves. This is the narration itself – the told history – which is the most important instrument (or tool) of biographical learning26.

The biographicity, *i.e.* the (re)construction of life, determines the ability of a man to design their own lives when they tell the history of their lives.

Peter Alheit mentions the biographical plan that everyone has and which is manifested during the analysis of narrative biographies27.

The categories of description depend on the questions which the advisers ask themselves.

The analysis of the biographies of people who were abroad for a long time searching for work and who encountered different culture may be facilitated by the *floating* theory.

The *floating* is a state when a mean feels up in the air. Such a condition occurs when someone is at the crossroads and does not know which decision to make, and in consequence loses the sense of security, has the sense of futility of life, feels helpless and lost. This person feels that they cannot influence their own lives. The author uses the metaphor of drifting across the life, floating on a raft without navigation28.

The condition of floating may occur when someone changes the place of their work, starts their education at new university or moves from one country to another. A man has to confront the new culture and environment and may conclude that they do not fit, that they are somewhere between29.

The concept of floating may help in understanding one’s self, in understanding the biographical learning, the process of becoming and of changing the identity30.

The biography may also display the “unlived life”. It turns out that unimplemented plans and uncompleted acts also have influence on a man’s biography.

They may be considered as some potential present in a human being. Most often,

27 Alheit P.,(2009), *Całożyciowe uczenie się i kapitał społeczny*, „Teraźniejszość- Człowiek- Edukacja” No. 4(48).
28 Bron A.(2009), Biografi czność…., p. 51.
29 Ibid, p.52.
people do not regret their past acts but rather they regret failing to do something because of fear, negligence, apathy or ignorance.

Agnieszka Bron does not examine the phenomenon of “unlived life” in negative terms. On the contrary, in her opinion, the analysis of such situations may give hope and new chances.\textsuperscript{31}

Pursuant to Agnieszka Bron, the biographicity is useful in theory since we have better understanding of a man, and also in practice since it gives hopes and perspective when adults go through some crises, trajectories or floating.\textsuperscript{32}

F. Schutze shows how to interpret the individual histories with the use of process structures: analysis of the process of course of events, capturing of the disorder in storytelling, the constructions in the background or obscuring (passing over, gaps).\textsuperscript{33}

The basic biographical processes of a given narration, \textit{i.e.} the process structures, may have the following forms:

- biographical patterns of behaviour when an individual has own plan of realising the professional career,
- institutional patterns when the individual’s activities are subordinated to institutional patterns,
- trajectory, \textit{i.e.} such form of experience when an individual is subject to external circumstances which are out of their control and influence their biography, the loss of control over one’s own life,
- biographical metamorphoses which are connected with positive changes in life.\textsuperscript{34}

A biography may be also analysed through selecting some narrative, descriptive and reasoning parts.\textsuperscript{35}

A biography may provide the answer to the question how the clients manage their affairs in the world of risk, how they (re)construct their professional career, what goals they set themselves, what sense they give their lives.

**Conclusion**

The sense of the career counselling has changed in the modern world for it is now connected mainly with acquiring the ability of reflective construction of own career. Thus the career counselling and further educational and professional counselling change their character and become more the counselling concerning the development of career.

Pursuant to A. Kargulowa, the career counselling has biographical character and its goal is to facilitate being in a group, in professional work, in family, to ensure self-acceptance through reflective reworking of life experience.\textsuperscript{36}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Cf. Ibid p.44
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid, p.44.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Quoted pursuant to Kaźmierska Kaja p.42-43..
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Quoted pursuant to Kaźmierska Kaja p.42-43.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Kaźmierska Kaja, p.39.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Kargulowa A. (2005), Zmiany tożsamości poradnictwa zawodowego i ich reperkusje, „Chowanna”
\end{itemize}
Therefore, the task faced by an adviser does not consist in defining the problems but in:

- participating – together with a client – in their reflective consideration,
- assisting in understanding their meaning from the biographical point of view,
- assisting in considering their multiple reasons,
- assisting not so much in solving as in coping with them.\(^{37}\)

At present,
- we do not speak about giving advice but about constructing advice, (re)negotiating
- we do not speak about choosing a profession for a client but about analysis of client’s career which is important from the client’s biographical point of view
- we do not speak about solving the problems but about the possible ways of coping with a problem.\(^{38}\)

The changes in counselling are connected with emphasising the development of reflexivity of both a client and an adviser, the ability to (re)construct the narrative identity.

We may ask whether giving the diagnosis concerning profession is possible, or rather joint construction of the design of life or giving the auto-diagnosis (transition from the features in diagnosis to studying the interpersonal relations).

U. Beck claims that biographies become self-reflexive (auto-reflective) and they transform from biographies outlined by the society into the biographies created by the individuals themselves. An individual in the individualised world must learn how to understand themselves as the centre of action, of planning of their own biography, own skills and abilities, orientation, partnership contacts. What is important is active participation in everyday life whose centre is ME.\(^{39}\) The individuals who are free and make independent decisions as to their biographies have a lot of patterns of life or career and are fully responsible for their own successes and failures.\(^{40}\)

The issues related to the redefinition of one’s own identity, the choice of values are all the time present in the adviser’s work but the responsibility for the choices should be assumed by the person seeking advice.

The meeting of an adviser and a person seeking advice is the meeting of “two worlds”. Both parties have their vision of help, expectations, attitudes, plans. Each party in this contact may create their own “silent knowledge” which may be made subject of critical reflection by the adviser.

Therefore, the reflective adviser may monitor their own work, make self-assessment, apply new methods of work, attempt to better understand themselves and others, which – in consequence – leads to improving the helping process.

\(^{37}\) Kargulowa A.,(2010), O poradnictwie społeczeństwa sieci, „Teraźniejszość- Człowiek- Edukacja” No. 2(50)

\(^{38}\) Ibid


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