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The quandaries of a counseling scholar vis-à-vis conceptual chaos and discrepant practices

Social, cultural, and economic changes set new tasks for experts who assist individuals in their growth and development. Both scholars and practitioners strive to develop new models or modify the existing ones, which leads to novel visions or just re-visions of the counseling-studies concepts and counseling practices. Ideas and solutions abound, but it is difficult to choose the most fitting ones. This article focuses on the quandaries haunting counseling scholars and reflective practitioners who wish to professionally design and implement career counseling interventions. With a view to classifying these dilemmas, they are discussed in relation to their ontological, epistemological, axiological, methodological, and existential dimensions.

Keywords: counseling studies – counsellogy, career guidance, *Life Design* counseling

It is a truism to say that supporting career construction in today's world is an important responsibility of helping professionals. However, the question: *how should it be done?* no longer invites any clear answer. Both researchers and practitioners are trying to develop new models of help-provision or modify the existing ones, which results in innovative visions or revisions of counseling-studies concepts and practices. We cannot complain about the deficit of ideas and solutions, but with all this theoretical and methodological "abundance," it is difficult to choose the best substantive justifications and practical solutions. This is due not only to a surfeit of proposals, but also to another problem, i.e., the need to clarify *for whom* and *in what respect* the selected solution is supposed to be the best, and *who* is supposed to determine that. Therefore, counseling scholars are increasingly beset by quandaries, which seem unsolvable, for the time being at least. My article will probably not offer any ultimate solutions to these questions either, but it seeks to sort out the fundamental dilemmas faced by those who would like to reflectively assist others in their growth and development.

Sources of the Quandaries Faced by Counseling Scholars

Generally speaking, the primary source of the quandaries and dilemmas faced by counseling scholars is to be found in the conceptual chaos which is shaking the theoretical foundations of interventions aimed at supporting people who want to decide about their life course and career development. It is exacerbated by the disarray which has been observable in the labor market for some time now. Changing work organization systems – from the profession-based one, to Ford's competence-based one, to an occupational chaos model (Guichard & Huteau, 2001; Guichard, 2018a) – entail the changing demand for specific types of labor and a transforming understanding of competences and qualifications, which results in changed expectations as to how people are trained for engaging in paid work. As a result, guidance services are also changing (or rather should change) so as to remain adequate vis-à-vis the problems and challenges identified in the realities people inhabit. That this is not the case, that these are not compatible phenomena and processes, is both empirically observable and easily inferable from accounts presented in recent studies. In scholarly publications relevant to counseling, both the terminology and recommended counseling practices differ significantly from those outlined in official policy documents of the European Union and in national regulations issued by the Polish Ministry of Education. All of them, however, share the belief (although its significance varies) that the development of all socially accepted careers should be supported in practice. As a consequence, counselors, who are unable to identify any coherent underpinnings of recommended interventions, are in principle free to use (sometimes randomly) selected methods, techniques, and tools in their work, regardless of the theoretical assumptions which inform them. The chaos is aggravated by the proliferation of institutions/organizations/agencies (not necessarily educational ones, but also those that consider career interventions to be a lucrative business) which aspire to promote solely those scholarly theories and counseling activities which they deem appropriate.

Another source of the quandaries haunting counseling studies and of confusion in practical pursuits is the inconsistency between school-cum-administrative logic and the logic used in everyday life, which seems to be completely ignored by educational decision-makers. This translates into difficulties which academic teacher experience in their daily professional work. To refer to my personal experience, as the coordinate of specialized degree programs in *Counseling and Psycho-pedagogical Assistance* and *Career Counseling and Career Coaching* at the Institute of Pedagogy, University of Wrocław, which train future counselors, I often have to deal with our graduates' requests for additional or repeated confirmation of the competences (learning outcomes) acquired and developed during the course. Although the graduate profile including the acquired competences is described in great detail in the documents they receive on graduating, head teachers of educational institutions, education inspectors and supervisors require an additional "explanatory

note,” because the language of these descriptions differs somewhat from the formal bureaucratic terminology.

All the developments, processes, and facts mentioned above, which produce conceptual and practical chaos, result in a number of quandaries in which I have found myself as a counseling scholar, an academic teacher, and a counsellor. In order to compile them and group them in a systematic manner, below I address them by referring to their ontological, epistemological, axiological, methodological, and existential dimensions.

An Ontological Quandary

The first and at the same time fundamental quandary among counseling scholars is ontological. It concerns the terms that are used in descriptions of career counseling, because they determine its meaning and purpose. Obviously, how terms are used is not only a matter of lexical or stylistic preferences; it crucially entails endorsing one of the many possible ways of understanding the human being and the essence of support. Therefore, it is not only about language games, but also about the very core of things. When we use a given term to define the counselor, the counselee, the established counseling relationship, or the entire support-provision process, we have in mind the implicit question *What is the human being?* The very first sentence of this article reveals my beliefs about the essence of support in the area discussed here. Because I sought to avoid the terms which are most commonly used in this context, such as *vocational/career counseling/guidance*, I used the expression “*supporting career construction*.” This indicates that I refer to support activities understood as an intentional interactive process rather than as a one-off act.

In the common usage, counseling and guidance are basically synonymous terms¹. However, in the field of counseling studies – counselology, Alicja Kargulowa has made a clear distinction between these concepts. Counseling has a much wider range of meaning and includes directive, dialogic, and liberal frameworks (Kargulowa, 1986, 2004). Guidance, on the other hand, is a directive form of counseling; it means support-provision in solving difficulties or challenges for which a fixed algorithm of action has been developed or which specifically call for fixed methods and techniques leading to a pre-set objective. However, in the relevant literature and legal regulations, the counseling-vs.-guidance distinction is not always taken into account, and in counselological texts terms such as *vocational guidance*, *vocational counseling*, *school and vocational (pre)orientation*, *career education*, *career*

¹ For some reason in Polish language the word guidance/advisory services (“doradztwo”) is associated with more prestigious kinds of activities than counseling. Guidance/advisory services are meant for more successful clients (who benefit from financial, legal, economic advisory services), while counseling seems to be for the helpless (as in mental counseling, pedagogical counseling, citizen counseling). When setting up a successful business, we would much rather call it an “advisory hub/agency” than a “counseling center.”

counseling, and finally *Life Design* counseling appear side by side. In order to fully understand their meaning, it is necessary to know thoroughly the time and the context in which these concepts were proposed, for when they are not interpreted contextually and in-depth, misunderstandings tend to multiply and conceptual chaos increases.

Given obvious constraints on the length of this paper, I will only explain that in the international literature, the interventions supporting people in the choice of occupation through advice were originally referred to as *vocational guidance*, but in Poland they were and still are called *vocational counseling*. At the same time, *school and vocational orientation* is a translation of the French phrase *l'orientation scolaire et professionnelle*, an equivalent of *vocational counseling*, the term traditionally used in Poland (Drabik-Podgórna, 2005). Derived from the Latin “*vocare*,” which means “to call, to summon,” *vocation* in principle denotes a “calling.” This originally referred to the calling to do God’s service or to live a Christian life, that is, to assume a function or a position in life in compliance with God’s design. Over time, the concept evolved and lost its religious connotations, acquiring the meaning of *an inner calling, a strong impulse, or a tendency* to follow a certain path and to engage in a specific activity, though the scope of this activity was not precisely defined. Following Frank Parsons, the emphasis was placed on developing talents and skills in choosing an occupation or a profession, which ultimately resulted in the meaning of “vocation” being narrowed down to paid work, meaning *profession, trade, or business* (Parsons, 1909). As these terms continued to be redefined along with cultural and economic transformations, further misunderstandings arose as to how phenomena and processes in the field of broadly understood vocational counseling should be defined and understood. One of these contested terms is “vocation” or “occupation” as such.

Examining the dynamics of change on the modern labor market – typified by impossibility to choose one occupation for entire life, the emergence of new occupations, and the move away from professional verification towards checking competences – we can say that counseling which supports choice-making is becoming “less and less vocational” (Drabik-Podgórna, 2016). *Occupation/vocation/job* as a concept has been replaced by *career*, which is understood as a professional development path, rather than as success and promotion. Hence, the accounts of counseling started to focus on methods of supporting professional development and counseling itself came to be conceived as and called *career counseling*. These pursuits were initially based on psychological concepts of human development, mostly on Donald Super’s theory. Mark L. Savickas, however, claims that Super’s concept is more associated with *career education* than with *career counseling* (Savickas, 2014). *Career education* denotes the interventions which focus on learning and preparation for different roles in life, which are visualized as a rainbow, where one role (not necessarily that of an employee) is central and the other ones are subordinate to it. Super’s concept has contributed to the emergence of various programs of career

education around the world. In Poland, the activities ascribed to schools in this area are called (wrongly alas) *vocational guidance* and *vocational orientation*.² Jean Guichard emphatically calls for a new career education model, which he envisions as pursuing a very ambitious tasks, i.e., not only preparing people for the choice of occupation, but also linking this process to efforts to build a sustainable, just, and humane world and to foster access to decent work (Guichard, 2018c).

Finally, the terms *vocational counseling*, *vocational guidance*, *career orientation*, *career counseling*, and *career education* have recently been joined the emergent notion of *Life Design*. It indicates another paradigm shift in counseling studies (Savickas et al., 2009). Super's student, Savickas, who is one of the leading proponents of this paradigm, reworks Super's concept and insists that the responsibility of counseling is to influence not only individuals' work careers but also their lives as a whole (Wojtasik, 2003). He believes that identity formation is a dynamic, life-long, holistic, and non-linear process in which various possible realities and personal patterns must be taken into account (Savickas et al., 2009). In this paradigm, the individual is viewed as a subject, a designer, and a constructor of his or her own life, instead of as a passive executor of life scenarios designed by social engineers, of ready-made projects waiting to be implemented. The founders of the *Life Design* concept believe that individual knowledge and identity are "products" of cognitive and social processes which unfold in interactions between individuals and groups, as a result of negotiations of meanings given to reality and co-constructed in social, historical, and cultural contexts (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 244).

As can be seen, the above observations concerning the concept of counseling and the morphing language used to describe counseling stem from a fundamental change in the idea of the human being as such. Specifically, a crucial shift is taking place from thinking about the *individual* as pre-programmed and pre-determined, to thinking about the *person* as constantly self-constructing and self-co-constructing in and through relationships with others.

An Epistemological Quandary

Epistemology explains both the principles of cognition and what is known. It focuses on the issues of truth, beliefs, knowledge, and justifications. Epistemological reflection relates thus to the way in which a human being can be known and how this knowledge is formed. This fundamentally means seeking to answers questions such as *What are the paths of knowledge? What is true in what we know? Who is right?*

² The same tasks implemented at the lower level of school education – the kindergarten and grades 1-3 – are called *pre-orientation*, which adds to the already rather severe confusion and disagreement over definitions, leading to unnecessary conceptual chaos. The term has been criticized and no longer appeared in the counellological literature in the last few years (for more information, see Drabik-Podgórna, 2005, p. 90). Along with the reform of education in Poland, it has made a comeback in some publications.

Who is to be trusted? Epistemology inquires into how we obtain knowledge and thus into the credibility of researchers – authors, their discoveries, and concepts they develop. Here is another, epistemological quandary of counseling scholars. In our attempts to answer the above questions, we come across yet another unsolvable problem concerning the foundations of counsellogical knowledge, i.e., chaos in the substantive explanation of facts/phenomena/procedures of counseling.

A plethora of books on counseling and career development is available on the market, especially if we consider not only scholarly, counsellogical, pedagogical, or psychological publications, but also all personal development self-help volumes. They present various concepts, which are based not only on research (with the scholarly standards of several research projects being questionable anyway), but also on the common sense of practitioners/advisers or other thinkers. These concepts can be treated as the outcome of spontaneous popular prescientific knowledge. Although common-sense knowledge is the fundamental cognitive basis of humanity, it is imperfect. Thus, besides scholarly books based on reliable research, there are also books which merely pretend to be academic, or which are primarily designed as self-help books for a wide readership. This may be the case even when they are produced within projects funded by the European Social Fund, which include the training of guidance professionals. By weaving their overall frameworks of well-known and less known concepts, they propose an “eclectic approach” to working with counselees.

The need to decide which of the concepts evoked in the publications is the most appropriate cannot be fully satisfied by reading scientific works either. While the achievements of the founding fathers of vocational counseling and scholars of the mid-20th century should be appreciated, relying on their discoveries only is definitely not sufficient in today’s world. For scientific theories have their time in a particular epoch and function until they are verified, improved, extended or completely replaced by other theories or until they are useful at that time (Cuprjak, 2016, p. 253). We experience this when we read older publications, in which we can see that the prototype vocational counseling concepts developed at the beginning of the 20th century (e.g. Parson’s theory, but the theory elaborated by John Holland, as its follow-up) assumed personal characteristics were constant and unchanging (just as they claimed that there was a guarantee of stable and secure jobs), others – derived from the psychodynamic approach (e.g. Roe, 1957) – saw professional decisions as consequences of early childhood relationships, while concepts emerging in the second half of the 20th century presented career as a clearly defined sequence of life stages (Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, & Herma, 1951; Super, 1957). The scientific arguments in favor of these concepts – as Guichard rightly points out – are justified, but only in the context in which they arose and for the people they were meant to serve (Guichard, 2018b).

Today, in the precarious, ambiguous, globalized and rapidly developing reality of ingenious technologies, there are not only new ideas and solutions, but also the

necessity to develop scientific foundations for the description of the whole process of people's life activity, including their choice of profession and taking up employment. With this in mind, Savickas and the *Life Design* research group (Savickas et al., 2009) propose a new paradigm of counseling research, based on constructivist-constructionist epistemology. This innovative proposal was developed by an international research and development group (including Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Switzerland, the USA and Italy). The setup of the group followed the aspiration to ensure universality and, consequently, to avoid difficulties in adapting the solution, which usually result from the transfer of innovative ideas from one country to another. The group adopted a shared ontological assumption that human SELF is constructed through narrations by which the individuals express themselves, and which evolves and changes together with the transformed contexts in which the person is included. The analysis of life themes and life scripts found in personal stories allows to discover constructed meanings and to find motivation to act (Duarte, 2012).

The change on the ontological level, concerning the nature of human existence, implies a change in the ways in which we know it. Therefore, while the theory of characteristics-factors was based on results obtained through psychometric research (inventories of interests, ability tests, personality type questionnaires), the psychodynamic theory of Roe was based on clinical therapeutic work, and development theories (Ginzberg, Super, etc.) were based on empirical research (quantitative and qualitative), while the theories of the early 21st century are based on joint efforts of researchers and practitioners, who came up with new ideas, tested them and finally, reflected on them together. They included data from observation of human behavior and actions, analysis of dialogues and self-dialogues of "subject" individuals, as well as predictions of new models of human work.

Explanations of people's life activity and ways of doing counseling work developed jointly within the *Life Design* group are brand new, and in Poland so far, they have not yet been widely used neither in counseling practice nor in official documents, despite their inclusion in many publications (e.g. Guichard & Huteau, 2001; Guichard, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Minta, 2012, 2016; Duarte, 2014; Cybal-Michalska, 2015; Piorunek, 2017; Drabik-Podgórna & Podgórný, 2016) and their presentation at various international conferences³. Therefore, it would be hard to say that they have already been able to reduce the epistemological quandary.

³ Since 2013, the Institute of Pedagogy of the University of Wrocław has hosted the UNESCO International Chair of *Lifelong Guidance and Counseling*. The first Chair Director was Prof. Jean Guichard (INETOP-CNAM, Paris), succeeded by current Head of the Chair Professor Maria Eduarda Duarte (University of Lisbon). In 2017, the international research network UNITWIN NETWORK *Life designing interventions (counseling, guidance, education) for decent work and sustainable development* was established, bringing together 19 universities from Europe (three universities from Poland), North and South America and Africa. Since the beginning of its existence, the Department, apart from scientific research and publications, has also organized conferences and scientific seminars, providing an opportunity to exchange views between scientists and practitioners. I will

An Axiological Quandary

Another quandary that stems from the counseling-studies reflection is axiological and concerns the values that are to be fulfilled by counseling in the modern world. Obviously, they are connected with the values implicit in the understanding of “active life.” Guichard, linking the term “active life” to issues concerning professional activity, recalls the distinction made by Hannah Arendt, who pointed out that this category includes three dimensions: *labor*, *work* and *action* (cf. Guichard, 2018a, p. 238). Thus, in his opinion, active life is more than just a professional activity identified with paid employment, it also includes many different actions/activities that individuals do while simultaneously performing multiple life roles. From this point of view, the author recalls, that since its inception, *vocational guidance/ counseling* has been subordinated primarily to economic values: it concerns employment and pursues the interests of the labor market and employers, not of employees. In his opinion, the aim (explicit or implicit) of counseling constructed in this way is to fostering economic growth by increasing work productivity of an individual (Guichard, 2018a, p. 241), assisting individuals’ integration into work organizations and their inclusion into specific places on the social chessboard (social structure). Therefore, counseling interventions that support liberal and neoliberal economic ideas focus on helping counselees in finding a job or enabling them to adjust work-wise, so as to optimally fit in with the economic and social demand.

Contrary to these expectations, the *Life Design* counseling focuses on helping people build their own SELF in different dimensions of life. It makes recourse to humanistic values and takes into account the whole life ecology. It is based on an assumption that active life/work cannot be reduced to employment, and tries to assist individuals in pursuing their interests in the contexts in which they live and which they co-create. The overarching premise of this model of assistance is to build a better world that gives the opportunity to work in decent conditions. Its assumptions are based on the belief that only then is a dignified life possible. Interventions of *Life Design* focus on the search for answers to questions concerning humanist values. They refer to the purpose and the meaning of human life, and to its entirety. *Life Design* is thus about finding out: *What kind of active life can give purpose, value, perspective, meaning to one’s existence?* (Guichard, 2018a, p. 237).

Going a step further in reflections on axiological issues, Guichard asks the question about the nature of objectives set for counseling interventions. In traditionally

mention only the major ones: *Career guidance, education and dialogues for a fair and sustainable human development* (6-7.11.2013, Wrocław); *How can career and life designing interventions contribute to a fair and sustainable development and to the implementation of decent work over the world?* (4-5.06.2015, Florence); *Career and Life Design interventions for sustainable development and decent work* (6-7.06.2016, Wrocław), *Guidance and Counselling for Solidarity, Social Justice and Dialogues in a diverse world* (24-25.05.2018 Wrocław). More details about the activities of the Chair can be found in the previous issues of the Journal of Counselology.

understood *vocational guidance/counseling*, only the operational/indirect objectives are relevant: assistance in the choice of school and profession, in entering the labor market and finding a job, and in professional adjustment. *Life Design Counseling* sets itself the final goals related to the meaning of the whole life and its context. It can be finding one's place in the world, a dignified life, or sustainable development. Its founders wish the new counseling paradigm to be emancipatory and empowering, significant both for individuals and their environment, because it takes into account the consequences of human decisions that impact the whole planet. Therefore, it promotes interventions that can contribute to global, humane, just and sustainable development (Cohen-Scali et al., 2018).

Axiological quandaries, in which counseling scholars tend to be immersed for years, in practice are very quickly and "ruthlessly" resolved. The final objectives and values pursued by counseling depend on the institutions that finance specific types of intervention (Guichard, 2018c; Kargulowa, 2015). And funding usually goes to those counseling practices that can be calculated, measured in an "objective" way, and then presented in the form of tables and charts that can then be included in reports.

A Methodological Quandary

The quandaries described breed yet another – methodological – one, which is enforced by the necessity to decide: *what and how to teach*? The first problem to be solved here is: are we to prepare students to provide classically understood *vocational guidance*, or rather teach them to offer modern *career education*, or should we focus on biographical and narrative work in order to implement the model of career and life counseling according to *Life Design*? Each type of counseling work requires different preparation and different kind of education. In order to practice the former, it is necessary to master the diagnostic toolbox, to learn about standardized tools; in the latter – to train and develop facilitation skills for educational activities (using didactic games, simulation, experimentation, etc.); in the last case – to acquire skills in conducting life construction dialogues (Guichard, Cohen-Scali, & Bangali 2017; Guichard, 2018b) or career construction interviews (Savickas, 2007). Some competences are needed when the counsellor is only to diagnose and provide information, others when his or her task is to design educational activities, and still others when his or her role is to help clients to reflect on their lives and subjective forms of identity and, as a result, to construct various anticipated SELVES in the future. In order to master the first type of skills, it is necessary to have an information model, the second – educational, the third – narrative. The first one assumes that the person (pupil, client, counselee) is passive, the second one – assumes that he or she needs time to develop, and can only gradually, in line with a given stage of development, learn to take control of his or her life, while the third one takes

for granted human (pro)activity, agency, and subjectivity. In Savickas' language: the first model is for the *actor*, the second for the *agent*, and the third for the *author* (Savickas, 2011; Minta, 2012, 2016; Drabik-Podgórna, 2016).

The new Core Curriculum launched by the Ministry of Education⁴ introduced the obligation to offer vocational guidance classes in primary and secondary schools. However, the name *vocational guidance* is probably used here in a way that would require further reflection, because what is meant is internationally called *career education*⁵. In the explanatory notes to the detailed elaboration of the teaching curriculum we find a mixture of concepts: the leading theory is Eric Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, supported by the diverse concepts of Roe, Ginzberg and Super (since, according to the authors, only as a whole they account for unconscious and conscious factors influencing professional decisions) and supplemented by theories by John D. Krumboltz (2009; Krumboltz & Levin, 2004) and Savickas (included within this area due to what Zygmunt Bauman wrote about liquid and flickering postmodernity (Bugaj et al, 2017)⁶.

Despite such "rich" theoretical assumptions of the core curriculum, it is traditionally assumed that the proposed modules will follow the Parsons' principle known for over a hundred years: *get to know yourself* (knowing your own resources), *get to know professions* (knowing the world of professions and the labor market, as well as educational paths leading there) and *make appropriate adjustments* (planning your own development and making educational and professional decisions). Without going deeper into the detailed analysis of the content of sample programs for orientation and vocational guidance (this would require a separate critical study), I will only point out that combining different ways of working

⁴ In Polish educational law, the core curriculum of the Ministry of Education is the mandatory content of teaching and skills for a given stage of education. The core curriculum for all types of schools is published by the Ministry of National Education.

⁵ Some interpret the new tasks in this area as a necessity to introduce a new subject called *Vocational guidance*, which is a complete misunderstanding. The counsellors-educators do not teach vocational guidance (if we accept this name at all), but conduct classes that pursue its goals, i.e., assist in students' learning about their resources and capabilities, developing the competence to acquire professional information, support students in making professional decisions, strengthening their self-confidence, designing their future, etc. Vocational guidance/career counseling is taught by academic teachers (during graduate studies), trainers (during workshops and trainings), when they train future counselors. While a biologist studies biology and as a teacher teaches biology, an educator studies pedagogy/counseling study – counsellogy, but does not teach pedagogy/counseling/guidance, i.e., does not convey knowledge about what education, help and support is, how to help, how to talk to the counselee, how to help him/her in designing his/her career, etc. He or she is simply a pedagogue, a counsellor. A counsellor "practices/implements counseling/guidance, i.e., assists, talks with students, helps them to discover resources, helps them to design a career, etc.

⁶ It should be noted that the development of this project was partly covered by ESF funds – "A model vocational guidance curriculum for general secondary schools" was developed within the project "Effective educational and vocational guidance for children, young people and adults" co-financed by the ESF and implemented by the Centre for Education Development.

with students at the level of methodological solutions may not raise much doubts and reservations, because it can be seen as the evidence that we strive for broader knowledge. However, when we take a closer look at the ontological assumptions underlying these interventions, it turns out that they are irreconcilable. We simply cannot assume that people have permanent, unchanging characteristics ("Men work best when they are doing what nature has especially fitted for them.") (Parsons, 1894, p. 16), that they are determined by the relationships they had with their parents during childhood and that there is a predetermined and predictable stage sequence in human life, and in addition, on top of the above, that every human being is a free, self-constructing, and co-constructing entity within changing contexts. These ontologies are mutually contradictory – as a result, the counseling scholar will notice that the accumulation of absurdities reaches a critical level here. This calls not only for careful study of official documents, but also for specific choices in the field of counseling courses at universities.

As an academic teacher, on the one hand, I am obliged to present my knowledge to the fullest extent possible, and on the other hand, taking into account the latest theories and their contexts, I can choose and focus only on those that I consider the most useful for explaining the problems that arise in the life of contemporary person. However, taking into account the chance that my graduates will find their way onto the labor market where conditions are unpredictable also for them, perhaps also working in educational institutions, where they will have to implement ministerial recommendations, I try to solve this practical dilemma (unfortunately, without any conviction that this is the best possible solution) by presenting and analyzing individual theories and their implications, and emphasizing the latest ones.

An Existential Quandary

While the above dilemmas could somehow be resolved by taking a unique chosen perspective, the fifth quandary goes beyond the problems that have already been discussed, for it is very personal and, at the same time, existential in nature – it boils down to questions: *What is the meaning of my activities as a counseling scholar and an academic teacher? What is the meaning of the counselors' activities in general?* It appears especially in such critical moments as educational transitions (proceeding to the next stages of the educational ladder) of primary and secondary school students. Once a year, when recruiting students to schools and universities, the problem returns: what is the point of helping young people in planning their life path, in constructing life projects, creating conditions to awaken reflection, what is the point of broadening awareness, experimenting with different versions and scenarios of themselves in the future, and on the other hand, spending EU or other funds on creating hundreds of pages of scenarios, teaching aids, jobs for career professionals and investing in their education, since the entire recruitment system in

education (because that is what basically determines the fate of young people) is based on points calculated from school certificates and exam marks. As a result, when they go on to join another educational institution, nobody talks to young people, nobody asks them about their dreams, goals, projects. Data from exams, in the form of tests, are introduced into the system, and the choice is made by an algorithm that has no interest in a person, with his or her ecology of life, values, interests, etc. Therefore, administrative and school logic (grades/points/subjects) rules, humanistic life logic is ignored. The logic of dialogue and cooperation loses here to the logic of competition. This makes young people choose professional paths that are a follow-up to subjects taught in schools, and yet – as Bernadette Dumora (1990, 2005) wrote – there are many more options for active life than school subjects. In other words – many professional activities and functions have no equivalent in school activities, and thus it is sometimes difficult for young people to imagine something that they never knew or experienced.

Analyzing this situation from the position of a counseling scholar, one can conclude that in the modern world we are dealing with a process of management of professional paths, based on fate and chance. Perhaps in such circumstances, the only theory that should be applied as the foundation of career counseling is Krumboltz's suggestion to "plan unplanned events" (Krumboltz, 2009)?

A "Meta-Quandary" in Lieu of Conclusion

I called the last quandary that haunts counseling scholars a meta-quandary. It comprises all of the issues presented above and can be summarized by the question: *How to deal with all these dilemmas?*

The situation in which counseling scholars have found themselves can be called the "Gordian knot of counseling," seen from the humanist's point of view as a process of supporting people in their own reflexive life choices. It is a complicated situation and probably impossible to solve, at least with the current knowledge and state of practice. As we know from the legend, the Gordian knot was a highly intricate knot of cornel bark, which connected the yoke and drawbar of the royal cart that decorated the temple of Zeus in Phrygia. According to the prophecy, the man who could unravel it was to become the ruler of Phrygia, or even the whole of Asia. Alexander the Great, conquering the Persian Empire in 333 BC, knew this prophecy and intended to untie the knot in order to win. Unfortunately, it turned out that this could not be done using conventional methods, so he simply cut it with a sword.

Thinking of the counseling scholar's quandaries, I feel that we are constantly struggling between rigorism and anarchism, between purism and eclecticism, and it seems that the dilemmas connected with this cannot be removed once and for all. Even if we decide them today, there will certainly be other quandaries, or the same

ones will reappear in a new version. Perhaps the only thing we can do is to come to terms with the idea that we are always going to face dilemmas and problems? On the one hand, maybe there is a simple, unconventional and radical method to solve this problem? Is there anyone out there, who would cut this Gordian knot of counselling studies?

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