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## **Socio-Cultural Contexts for Defining the Role of Counsellors**

The authors of this paper reflect on the socio-cultural contexts for defining the role of counsellors. They indicate the differences and similarities of the role of the counsellor in different countries and cultures in the context of contemporary social changes. The authors emphasise the complexity of a counsellor's role indicating context-related issues (social, cultural, political) in which counselling itself, understood as a social process or/and 'culture product' is anchored.

**Key words:** counsellor, the role of counsellor, social context, cultural differences

### **A Basis for the Analysis of Different Definitions of the Role of Counsellors**

Counselling – as Alicja Kargulowa stresses – is not only an interpersonal interaction, but also a social process, a social action, an organised activity. It is a form of social assistance and, as such, it can also be a research field of a scientific discipline (Kargulowa 2004). As Marcin Szumigraj has shown in his studies, counselling is embedded in many social life contexts and is, therefore, bound up with economy/industry, social policy and culture (Szumigraj 2011). The specialists who practice it (most often known as counsellors) may be employed not only by various distinct counselling institutions, but also by establishments that are not engaged in offering others professional advice. This situation and the diverse nature of the tasks performed by different counselling centres, consultancy bureaux, consultancy teams, and the like, make us inquire what are the concepts of the role of the counsellor and to what extent they are universally shared.

Answering these questions requires reflection on the similarities and differences between notions of the role of counsellors in various countries of the world. In our view, we have to address the complexity of this subject area, rooted in many fundamentally important issues. Crucially, we need to take into account the 'invasive' nature of cultural and social changes (see Bauman 2006; Giddens 2007; Mathews 2005). These changes, as Zygmunt Bauman and others stress, are contributing to

the emergence of observable opaqueness and the fluidity of contemporary reality in all cultural domains, irrespective of nationality or regional location (Bauman 2006).

The most frequently cited crucial global transformations are: the emergence of post-industrial societies, the advent of the postmodern epoch/era with its distinctive features such as the development of new technologies, growth in population migration processes, economic transformations, etc. (Postmodernism, Postmodernity, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology* 2006; Tractenberg, Streumer, van Zolingen 2002; Szumigraj 2010 et al.). Daniel Bell, Leonel Tractenberg, Jan Streumer, Simone van Zolingen and others stress that these transformations and social changes continually generate new ways of perceiving human life and an individual's role in shaping reality. They also generate a new way of perceiving the role of counselling in shaping social reality. It is because counselling, as a specific 'cultural construct' and as a social process, is undergoing continual transformations. The implications of these transformations are bound up with changes in expectations toward counsellors on the part of clients, the institutions in which they work or the agents responsible for providing counselling services within a particular community. Even fragmentary studies indicate that counsellors face new tasks. The scope of their duties is changing and external agents are granting them new powers. In other words, anything labelled as a social role of counsellors is undergoing transformation (cf. *Role, Social Role, Role Theory*, *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* 1998).

In the most general terms, however, it can be noted that globalisation processes are extremely important for perceiving the role of counsellors. These processes, on the one hand, contribute to the emergence of observable trends promoting the standardisation of viewpoints on this role around the world. On the other, they contribute to the diversification of 'prescriptions' for the role of counsellors in different communities or cultures. Though mutually contradictory, these tendencies, as the cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai notes, co-occur in all societies, because globalisation is not homogenisation, but – quite to the contrary – it is the introduction of differences into homogeneous community structures (Appadurai 2005).

In the remainder of this text, we will try to answer the following questions: 'How do coexisting oppositional trends foster both the standardisation and diversification of counselling reflected in different notions of the role of counsellors?', and 'which of the differences in notions of the role of counsellors are culture-specific?'. In order to do this, we will be referring to the studies carried out by Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede (Hofstede, Hofstede 2007), expanded and repeated by other scholars and recognised within many disciplines – including cross-cultural psychology – as classic studies of cultural differences (Matsumoto, Juang 2007).

At the outset, we adopt two general assumptions:

- ◆ Firstly, we think – like John McLeod – that there are many reasons why counselling cannot be identified with psychotherapy and the counsellor with a psychotherapist (McLeod 2003).

- ◆ Secondly, we outline the similarities and differences in the role of counsellors from a counselling perspective, i.e. one that embraces all counsellors, regardless of the kind of the counselling they practice or the type of guidance they offer.

Moreover, we assume that both the similarities and differences in notions/concepts of the role of counsellors are a peculiar ‘outcome’ of multifarious global transformations producing a ‘world of multiple modernities’, as Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (2009, p. 357) defines it.<sup>1</sup> We assume that in this world, the changes in approaches to counselling, giving rise to different definition of counselling professionals’ role in different societies, are caused primarily by the transformation in three spheres of human activity. These spheres are:

- ◆ Research and scholarship (with transformations in general academic reflection on counselling).
- ◆ Politics (with emergence of economic similarities and differences across modern societies and changes occurring in the integration processes of some states – especially within the European Union – in which counsellors’ work can be utilised or recommended).
- ◆ Counselling practice itself (with changes in the ‘localisation’ of counselling in specific institutions, for example, education and welfare systems, which has a diversifying effect on the ‘philosophy’ and methodology of the counselling services).

Our analysis of the differences and similarities in the notions of the role of counsellors refers to these three spheres of social and cultural changes. We also keep in mind that the aforementioned opaqueness and fluidity of contemporary reality have made considerable diversification in the notions/concepts of the role of counsellors possible, not only on a global scale, but also in individual countries. These differences result from such factors as the uneven economic development of regions, particular societies’ multiculturalism, unclear guidelines regarding the social role of counsellors and also the scarcity of such guidelines (2012).<sup>2</sup>

We also highlight the fact that the social role of counsellors depends on how counselling is defined, i.e. on how a particular community has come to comprehend

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<sup>1</sup> S.N. Eisenstadt, ‘Utopia i nowoczesność. Porównawcza analiza cywilizacji’, Warszawa 2009, Oficyna Naukowa. The author introduced the concept of ‘multiple modernities’ as a counterargument to Max Weber’s ‘first modernity’. Eisenstadt polemicalises with Weber, doubting whether adopting the basic thesis about the decisive importance of Protestantism to the shaping of the first western modernity is of any help at all in comprehending today’s world, a world of multiple modernities, a world of intense globalization which has gone far beyond the premises of the classic modernity narrative, beyond the visions of nation states and revolutionary states as embodiments, one might say, of these premises and classical capitalism (p. 257).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Information-services/guidance-and-counselling-for-learning-career-and-employment.aspx> (Access date: 20.01. 2012).

counselling as such. However, defining counselling is bound up with the fact that there are many theoretical paradigms, each offering a different perspective on it. psychologists, educationalists, counsellologists and HRD scholars all differ in their reflection on and understanding of counselling.

The different concepts of the role of counsellor result from these different approaches to counselling. The definitional chaos spreading worldwide (Watts, Guichard, Plant, Rodriguez 1993) is additionally related to the 'subjective' classification of counsellors based on their place of employment and the kinds of problems they deal with (vocational, family, economic, educational, personal, etc.). Predictably, such confusion is not conducive to a clear definition of their role.

It hardly needs mentioning that the social role of counsellors is understood in many different ways depending on the kind of counselling practice. A different social function is, namely, fulfilled by educational and vocational counsellors, by career counsellors supporting unemployed people, by career counsellors supporting the outplacement process, families or school pupils or by counsellors giving tax or legal guidance. The interviews with Polish counsellors have shown that the role of counsellors is also understood in various ways in different workplaces (Szumigraj 2011). We discuss these issues below.

## **Similarities in the Notions of the Role of Counsellors**

### ***Similarities from the Scholarly Perspectives***

As researchers have noted all over the world, the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an intense development of both counselling practice and reflection on counselling. In Poland, this laid the foundations for the development of counsellogy. In many countries subdisciplines have also developed which made counselling the focus of research and detailed analysis (Guichard 2007; Paszkowska-Rogacz 2012).<sup>3</sup>

Rootedness in a specific academic discipline/subdiscipline makes reflection on counselling implicated in its paradigms and priorities. Hence the role it assigns to the counsellors is intertwined with the tasks discharged by its own practitioners (psychologists, pedagogues, counsellologists, HRD specialists, etc.). That is, counsellors' roles come to duplicate those of the representatives of the subdisciplines in which research is most frequently embedded. Career counselling researchers highlight the fact that the rooting of theoretical reflection in a specific academic subdiscipline entails the structure/format of counsellors' training and their vocational identity (Watts, Guichard, Plant, Rodriguez 1993). In countries in which counsellors take education-related degrees (such as pedagogy or andragogy), they 'are expected to be' educators and, at the same time, they construct their own professional

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.sdsiz.pl/index.php/publikacje/161-doradztwo-zawodowe-w-krajach-unii-europejskiej> (Access date: 20.02. 2012).

identities, conforming to the traits/standards/expectations/competences required of an educator. However, counsellors trained in psychology feel like psychologists and also have tasks of this nature assigned to them (Watts, Guichard, Plant, Rodriguez 1993; Skalbania 2012).

It seems that the theoretical shift from the positivist to the humanistic paradigm in science/theory is the most common element in reflection on counselling and its suggestions for defining tasks and roles of counsellors. This shift has appeared both in individual disciplines engaged in research on counselling as a psychotherapy, and in the 'theories' of career, educational or personal counselling (McLeod 2003). This is evident both in psychology and pedagogy (or reflection on education). In counselling literature, the shift is described by John McLeod as the 'narrative turn' (McLeod 2003). In the counselling practice, it is a shift from directive to liberal counselling (Bańka 2004; Wojtasik 2003). As a result of this shift, the counsellor faces a number of tasks different from those she/he would have faced in the past.

This shift – the narrative turn – has a broader background and important implications, but is associated first of all with some of the aforementioned social changes and changes in approaches to the role of counselling itself. This is expressed in the idea that the task/mission of counselling – as Polish, Dutch and British academics stress – is no longer to find a simple solution to a problem or place the 'right person in the right place' (Szumigraj 2011; Meijers 2009). Now this task is – as Bożena Wojtasik and others contend – to support a client in '*individual learning how to reflectively reconstruct his/her biography, (...) learning to live with anxieties and doubts*' (Wojtasik 2003, p. 349).

Therefore, the modern counsellor is currently expected to fulfil not simply the role of an expert, but rather – as the cited author expresses it – that of a consultant, a reliable guardian or a laissez-faire practitioner (Wojtasik 1993). In other words, contemporary reflection on counselling emphasises that the counsellor fulfils the role of a companion and supporter to a help seeker, who is an agent constructing his/her biography.

This trend and manner of delineating/outlining the role of counsellors is evident in many countries. In the United States, Carl Rogers' work initiated a gradual departure from directive counselling (i.e. the counsellor-expert model); in Europe new ramifications are developed, for example, in France (Guichard 2007), the Netherlands, Poland and Slovakia; and in Asia, e.g. in China, attempts were made to apply Western theories in the 1990s (Yan Li 2008/2009, p. 39).

Departure from assigning counsellors the role of an expert proceeds in parallel to debates on their competences. In Poland, questions are being posed not only about the skills they should possess and the tools they should employ, (i.e. about technical/methodological knowledge, as Polish counselling calls it), but also about the general knowledge and skills (including the ability to use this knowledge) their education should provide them with (Kargulowa 2004). However, in countries in which the pragmatic approach to scholarship dominates (e.g. the United States, the

Netherlands and Great Britain), the counselling methodology is more often than not the primary focus of reflection on counselling (cf. Savickas 1996; Savickas, Cochran 1997; Corey 2005 et al.).

As the various models of counsellor roles outlined by modern counselling theories are easy to identify all over the world (due to easy worldwide access to counselling researchers' publications), similarly opinions proliferate about their practical application and the practice-related difficulties. Researchers from such countries as Poland (Szumigraj 2011), Greece (Kriwas 2010), the Netherlands (Kuijpers, Meijers 2009) and Great Britain (cf. Watts 1998) highlight obstacles hindering the application of narrative and dialogical methods and tools in counselling practice. Similar obstacles appear while defining new counsellor roles in counselling within the education systems. However, in some European countries (e.g., the Netherlands and Poland), attempts are being made to understand why theoretical approaches, and the counsellor roles they define, are so difficult to apply in practice.

Analysing similarities in the notions/concepts of counsellor roles formulated in the academic reflection on counselling, we should also address the appearance of various theoretical concepts of social activities similar to counselling. Across the world, such concepts as coaching, mentoring and consulting have come into being. Each of them implies specific roles for 'counsellors' (coaches, mentors and consultants). These roles differ slightly from the role of the traditionally defined counsellor (Dębska 2010). The very fact that these concepts have a global reach proves that similarities between them exist. These similarities are being amplified as a result of proliferation of international associations and independent organisations that assemble coaches, mentors, consultants and other counselling professionals (e.g. the Institute of Career Certification International and others).

Summing up the argument on similarities in the notions/concepts of counsellor roles analysed in terms of various academic disciplines, we would like to emphasise the importance of the double hermeneutic visible here. Namely, as Anthony Giddens (Giddens 2003) and others have pointed out, theoretical reflection both changes and is changed by social practice, i.e. the social role of the counsellor in one sense is defined by theories of counselling and, in another, actually creates these theories.

### ***Political Implications of the Notion of Counsellor Roles***

One thing many nations of the world have in common is the implementation of a neoliberal philosophy of social life. This has evident implications for counselling, especially when it is conceived simultaneously as a kind of social welfare system and as a component of other social welfare systems.

Neoliberalism basically insists that 'the individual is a source of initiative, wealth and change (...) a creative searching human being who is prepared to fight for a cause' (Dziubka, Szlachta, Nijakowski 2008, p. 137). Capable of taking

responsibility for his/her life, the individual should thus be capable of making rational, independent choices. The task of the state then is to protect individuals' liberty and independence. The only boundary imposed on this liberty, as many philosophers, academics and politicians assert, is the liberty of others (cf. Buber 1992; Rorty 1998, Szahaj 1995 et al.).

These basic assumptions have implications for approaches to counselling and the counsellor's role in the states which implement neoliberal philosophies and policies to a lesser or greater extent. These implications may affect two levels of counselling:

- a) The organisation of counselling – the countries of neoliberal policymaking and social life increasingly tend to promote privatisation of all social services, dismantlement of the welfare state, and so on. Marcin Szumigraj emphasises that in the privatised market of counselling services, the counsellor fulfils a vocational/professional role side by side with the role of a participant in a peculiar social game in which the maintenance of the counselling services market is at stake. S/he therefore acts as a 'deliverer' of services – an entrepreneur who tries to fulfil the expectations of help seekers. Help seekers, in turn, become clients who use his/her services against payment (Szumigraj 2007).
- b) Counselling as an interpersonal interaction – the counsellor cannot/should not make decisions for the help seeker. The 'burden' of responsibility for one's life-course rests with that person alone, while within such socio-cultural contexts the counsellor fulfils – as Joanna Minta writes – *the role of a mirror, creating opportunities for an individual to envision himself/herself in different circumstances, to recognise his/her own attributes, capabilities and limitations and to see himself/herself through others' eyes*, (Minta 2010, p. 28). The counsellor's task is, therefore, to *'encourage the help seeker's introspection so that (...) ultimately s/he is able to independently solve problems and cope with inner impediments and inconsistencies* (ibid.).

At the same time, counselling and the counsellor are being invested with special significance partly, at least, as a result of the aforementioned dismantlement of the welfare state and reforms in the social welfare systems in many countries.<sup>4</sup> Special significance is attributed to counselling and counsellors also because of the economic crises affecting the economies of many countries around the world for several years now. This particularly applies to career counselling which, in its own special way, is interlinked with labour market and economy as well as broadly conceived social policy. On the one hand, as Aviana Bulgarelli writes, *counselling plays a key role in the support of lifelong learning, career management and the achievement of personal goals* (Bulgarelli 2009, p. 1), and, on the other hand, it is immensely

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<sup>4</sup> Including the Netherlands, Poland and other European countries (cf. Esping-Andersen 2010).

important for the whole of society. Namely, it is one of the 'instruments' that contribute to the efficient functioning of the labour market and also counteract social exclusion. As Dutch, British and other researchers stress, counsellors, especially career counsellors, face a difficult task of mediating between individuals' desires (expectations, opportunities etc.) and society (the labour market and social policy). This is a difficult role and, in fact, a challenge, especially because – as A.G. Watts emphasises – some objectives of contemporary social policy (or labour market policy) tend to be mutually exclusive (e.g. labour market flexibility vs. prevention of social exclusion) (Watts 1998).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) points out that in many countries (e.g. France, Slovakia, Poland, Austria and Germany) modern career counsellors are expected not only to provide individuals with assistance, but also to be familiar with the local environment and its vocational and educational needs as well as to be able to decide how these needs can be met (Cedefop 2009, pp. 18-20). Counsellors must thus be ready to be local organisers of social life, coordinators of helping activities in a particular area, etc.

Clearly, in European countries there is an increasing emphasis on aspects of counsellors' social roles that go beyond the client-counsellor relationship and relocate the counsellor within a broader social life context.

Such attitude to the role of counsellors can, as Alicja Kargulowa (2004) emphasises, be a reaction evoked by the ambiguities inherent in social life and people's growing helplessness. The latter is directly contradictory to the current paradigm, which postulates that the individual should be able to manage in difficult life situations. It also exposes appropriation of the counselling discourse by the economic discourse. This appropriation and the privatisation of counselling services – hence the creation of counselling services markets – can also constitute a peculiar threat to individuals. This is so because proliferation of diverse counselling institutions can cause people to feel helpless and generate new tasks for counsellors; namely, they may be compelled to deliver swift and direct solutions to life's difficulties and relieve individuals of the need to solve their problems.

Merging with changes in education systems and worldwide population migrations, European Union integration processes also affect counselling. They contribute to the spread of multiculturalism. This means that in many countries the counsellor must be prepared to work in a multicultural environment, which more often than not forces him/her into the role of a link between different cultures (Corey 2005; Cieślukowska, Kownacka, Olczak, Paszkowska-Rogacz 2006; Słowik 2008).

Summing up, the role 'assigned' to the counsellor by the political system is extremely complex and multidimensional. The role is influenced by an economic dimension (sometimes determined by the global processes), a sense of social

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<sup>5</sup> A.G. Watts, Reshaping Career Development for the 21<sup>st</sup> century [http://www.derby.ac.uk/files/reshaping\\_career\\_development.pdf](http://www.derby.ac.uk/files/reshaping_career_development.pdf) (Access date: 23.02.2012).



responsibility and personal investment in relationships with clients. What is more, as A. Kargulowa aptly notes, in a world in which *social life is played out in the shadow of a crisis in traditional systems of control and organisation* (2004 p. 131), the counsellor himself/herself might feel helplessness and confused. A demand is, therefore, appearing for 'counselling for counsellors', euphemistically labelled 'supervision', i.e. support is being organised for counsellors themselves.

### ***The Impact of Counsellors' 'Localization' on Perception of Their Roles***

Despite considerable differences in defining of the role of counsellors employed in various institutions, some similarities are observable as well. This is so because, irrespective of the country or the institution in which they are employed, their task is to fulfil particular social needs and the important needs of individuals. As Earl Babbie states, these needs caused establishment of institutions which are components of the education system, the social welfare system, the psychological assistance system, etc. The systems cater to the needs in a similar fashion, irrespective of the country they are located in (Babbie 2007, pp. 77-78). Unsurprisingly, there are similarities in the ways of defining roles of counsellors working in these institutions.

For example, despite many differences in the actual organisation of education systems around the world, there are quite a few similarities in definitions of the role of career counsellors/mentors/coaches, especially in Europe. These similarities are generated by several trends, as A.G. Watts, Jean Guichard, Peter Plant and Maria Luisa Rodriguez believe.

Professionalisation of counselling is the first trend. It stresses the importance of both formal training/education for counsellors and acquisition of specific skills. Within education systems, special emphasis is put on a teacher's ability to support pupils, not only in the education process or in vocational choices, but also in any situations in life whatsoever.

The second trend is evident in the attempts to establish institutions supporting individuals throughout their lives (*lifelong counselling*). Clearly, a support systems is being created for adults, who expect the assistance of a counsellor rather than that of a teacher or carer.

Increasing emphasis on the importance of counselling service quality and the attempts to raise this quality are the third trend. This is expressed through the growth of international research and frequency/range of experience exchange among counselling practitioners (Cedefop 2009; Słowik 2008).

Analysis of these trends suggests that across the world, both within and beyond particular systems, counsellors are perceived as those who substantially contribute to improving assistance in coping with life and in life. Secondly, it is believed that a counsellor should be a professional, fully prepared for his/her vocation. S/he should have specific knowledge, competencies and skills. This professionalisation is associated with: 1) research assessing the degree of the professionalisation of counselling

in different countries and 2) with attempts to establish standards of counsellors' essential competencies, education/training and so on (Cedefop 2009).

As an aside, attempts made in the European Union to universalise standards for counsellor training, i.e. the acquisition of core competencies and skills needed for counselling, result partly from the implementation of the Bologna Process, although no European countries have identical counsellor training systems (Watts, Guichard, Plant, Rodriguez 1993).

Similarities in perceiving the counsellor's role can be noted in many counselling institutions, providing career counselling services or supporting vulnerable people, refugees, the families of psychiatric patients, and so on. We believe that such similarities exist, as it were, due to the specific nature of work with particular help seekers. In so-called western societies and western culture in particular, similar expectations are expressed towards counsellors working with addicts, the vulnerable, young adults choosing a vocation, and the like.

### **Differences in the Notions of the Role of Counsellors around the World**

Generally, in anthropological terms, it is a society's culture (i.e. 'a certain people's way of life') that generates the most acute differences. Exploring what this 'way of life' is, Charles Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompenaars (Hampden-Turner, Trompenaars 2002) and Gordon Mathews (Mathews 2005) have developed a so-called 'layer' model of culture or level-based model of culture. These models show the complexity and multi-layered nature of culture. Perceiving culture in this way, we can recognise that the aforementioned similarities in a general notion of counsellor roles are primarily an outcome of globalisation, namely the standardisation of the 'external level of culture'. This level manifests itself mainly through man's 'visible/observable' behaviours. It is also an outer manifestation of deeper levels and – according to G. Mathews and others – it can undergo modifications and transformations (Mathews 2005). The deeper levels are value systems, ways of perceiving family, work and institutions supporting individuals, individuals' and society's attitudes to professional help and other cultural 'determinants'. These cultural layers have the strongest diversifying effect on the notions of the role of counsellors in various countries. The deepest levels of culture tend to create diversity among cultures rather than homogenise them. We can conclude so because there are no societies which organise their social lives, including counselling services and systems, in exactly the same way, despite the fact that contemporary societies are almost equally affected by globalisation processes. Furthermore, we agree with G. Hofstede and G.J. Hofstede that reflecting on various cultures as unique entities, one must remember that individual representatives of these cultures considerably differ from each other and can profess attitudes, values and principles that are radically different from those typical of a particular culture (Hofstede, Hofstede 2007).

With these reservations, we will discuss how the role of counsellors in various countries of the world is determined by the dimensions of culture singled out by Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede. Throughout our argument we shall refer to their research results.

The dimensions include:

1. Power Distance (near – far). This has a diversifying effect on expectations and acceptance of unequal power distribution expressed by less influential (or subordinate) members of institutions or organizations (2007, p. 59).
2. Collectivism versus Individualism. The dimension has a diversifying effect on society in terms of relations between the individual and social groups.
3. Masculinity versus Femininity. This has a diversifying effect on the clarity of principles behind gender roles in particular countries (or societies).<sup>6</sup>
4. Uncertainty Avoidance (weak – strong). This means diversified sense of threat among a particular society's members in the face of new, unknown or uncertain situations (p. 181).
5. Long-Term versus Short-Term Life Orientation.<sup>7</sup>

The authors make it clear that some of these dimensions 'overlap', creating diverse cultures across the world. They also explain that in the age of globalisation and standardisation cultures may have shifted but as long as they shifted together under the influence of the same global forces, the scores remain valid (Hofstede, Hofstede 2007).

### ***Counsellors in Cultures of a Greater or Smaller Power Distance***

According to G. Hofstede and G.J. Hofstede, in societies displaying a greater power distance, inequalities between people are justified and desirable. In these societies, many people, regardless of their level of education, profess to endorse authoritarian values. In upbringing, great weight is attached to children's obedience, and respect for one's elders is a compulsory core virtue. The schoolteacher is a 'guru' passing on his/her knowledge and wisdom to his/her pupils, and s/he is treated with respect and esteem also outside school. In such societies, institutions are generally centralised and employ a large supervisory staff.

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<sup>6</sup> The authors understand 'masculine' societies to be those in which social roles linked to gender are clearly defined. Men are supposed to be assertive, tough and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life (Hofstede, Hofstede 2007). However, societies are regarded as 'feminine' if both women and men are supposed to be modest, tender and caring, while the social roles of both genders overlap.

<sup>7</sup> The authors write that long-term orientation denotes the development of virtues bringing future benefits, especially persistence and thrift. By contrast, a short term orientation denotes 'nurturing values connected with the past and present, especially those such as respect for tradition, "keeping face" and fulfilling social obligations' (Hofstede, Hofstede 2007).

By way of contrast, societies displaying a small power distance in all human relations, promote partnership and understanding. Relations among people are the focus of particular care and attention. Children, pupils and students are treated as partners and are expected to display initiative.

The short outline of cultures displaying a greater power distance indicates the counsellor in these cultures fulfils the role of an expert who, like schoolteachers, university lecturers or bosses in the workplaces, knows the 'objective' truth (Hofstede, Hofstede 2007). In addition, s/he also enjoys recognition outside work, in the local community. The counsellor-client relationships in cultures displaying a greater power distance tend to be more formal than personal and do not go beyond professional issues. The help seeker may greatly respect the counsellor simply because the counsellor occupies a 'position of public trust', (Czerkawska, Czerkawski 2005, p. 11; Mielczarek 2009). Furthermore, s/he might be passive or obedient, as demonstrated, for example, in the research conducted by Wei-Cheng Mau on a group of American students and students from Taiwan, i.e. countries fundamentally different in terms of power distance. Research results showed that Taiwanese students are less autonomous in deciding about their vocational lives and more reliant on authority and guidelines provided by their counsellor/family/friends (Mau 2000, pp. 365-378) than their American counterparts.

As G. Hofstede and G.J. Hofstede claim, it seems very significant that the power distance in these cultures is 'desirable', since this may have an impact on the expectations of a person seeking help from a counsellor. A help seeker 'steeped' in a culture with a greater power distance might simply expect the counsellor to act as an expert or an information provider. S/he may, in turn, feel uncomfortable in relationships based on partnership, especially if the counsellor is older than him/her.

In societies with a small power distance, the counsellor, as might be expected, acts as a consultant, a reliable guardian or a *laissez-faire* practitioner (Wojtasik 1993); thus, the relationship between counsellor and help seeker becomes less formal. In this case, the help seeker may expect the counsellor to cooperate with him/her in solving problems rather than to provide precepts s/he should conform to. In contrast to a person from a culture with a large power distance, such help seeker may feel bad in situations in which the counsellor fulfils the role of an expert, passing on his/her complete (and 'infallible') knowledge about the world.

The table below summarises this stage of our argument and displays the differences in the notions of counsellors' roles in cultures of large and small power distances. Both the remarks above and the table are meant to provide basic orientation, hence their relative simplifications.

<b>Culture Dimension</b>	<b>Counsellor Role</b>	<b>Sample Countries</b>
Large power distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• counsellor: expert, information provider, has the knowledge of life,</li> <li>• relationships: formal, based on respect</li> <li>• a position of public trust</li> <li>• counsellor's education: preferably a university degree</li> <li>• preferable counsellor age: older than the help seeker</li> </ul>	Malaysia, Slovakia, Guatemala, Panama, the Philippines, Russia, Romania, the Arab Countries, China, India, Switzerland, Brazil, France, Poland
Small power distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• counsellor: companion, reliable guardian or laissez-faire role, friend, supporting the help seeker</li> <li>• relationships: less formal, friendly</li> <li>• vocation equal to other ones</li> <li>• the counsellor's personality is more important than his/her education, although professionalisation of the vocation is a desirable aim</li> </ul>	Austria, Israel, Denmark, New Zealand, German-speaking Switzerland, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Great Britain, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands

Source: our own elaboration, based on G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede 2007.

### ***Counsellors in Collectivistic and Individualistic Cultures***

As the much cited G. Hofstede and G.J. Hofstede write, 'individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: Everyone is expected to look after themselves and their immediate family only. Collectivism stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty' (ibid., p. 88). The authors add that countries with a large power distance usually have a low index of individualism and vice versa.

The role of a counsellor in collectivistic cultures will differ considerably from the role of a counsellor in individualistic societies, because these cultures differ in almost every aspect of social reality structures – from the perception of the individual's problems and position in the world, through family and its meaning for the individual, to vocational and social life.

Collectivistic cultures have been labelled 'cultures of shame' (shame has an 'interpersonal' dimension and is a social phenomenon), which means that experiencing problems, individuals in these cultures feel ashamed before their loved ones for failing to satisfy their expectations. They are regarded then as losing 'face' or 'honour'. This happens because, living in a collectivistic culture and constructing his/her identity on the basis of belonging to a particular social group, a person learns that s/he must give up his/her own aspirations and ambitions for the good of the group/family. S/he defines himself/herself more as a 'we' than as an 'I'.

In individualistic cultures, labelled ‘guilt cultures’ (guilt is an individual matter, an individual experience), experiencing problems is perceived as an individual experience (which does not mean that it never affects the individual’s loved ones; the difference resides in how the individual’s loved ones perceive and experience such situation). In individualistic cultures, an individual classifies himself/herself as an ‘I’ and constructs his/her identity on the basis of his/her own experiences. S/he clearly expresses his/her ambitions, aspirations, and the like. An individual in a problematic situation can lose his/her self-esteem (not as ‘visible’ as losing ‘face’) or a sense of dignity.

In individualistic cultures, social services (including counselling services) are more often privatized, which is immensely significant in defining the social role of counsellors, because, as already suggested, privatisation somewhat ‘forces’ counsellors to participate in a game to acquire customers for their services.

As before, sample differences in perceiving the role of counsellors are presented for comparison.

<b>Culture Dimension</b>	<b>Counsellor Role</b>	<b>Sample Countries</b>
Individualism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• counsellor: a free, self-conscious individual having the right to refuse to cooperate with the client;</li> <li>• counsellor: participant in a game to sustain counselling services in a privatised market;</li> <li>• counsellor: taking care of his/her own development and competencies; a companion to the help seeker, as s/he constructs his/her identity and happiness, in the process of becoming a self-conscious expert on his/her own life;</li> <li>• counsellor: a “professional facilitator” of the self-help process;</li> </ul>	United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, Hungary, the Netherlands, New Zealand
Collectivism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• counsellor: often a significant close relative, an informal counsellor;</li> <li>• Counsellor: a person accompanying or directing the socialisation process/ an individual’s adjustment to social life requirements.</li> </ul>	Guatemala, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, Columbia, Pakistan Indonesia, Costa Rica, Taiwan, South Korea

Source: our own elaboration, based on G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede, 2007, and other sources.

Importantly, in individualistic cultures, it is not only the help seeker, but also the counsellor, who becomes the focus of a counselling situation. As G. Corey and others claim, the counsellor should become aware of his/her own virtues, faults and limitations while participating in encounters with the help seeker (2005).

Detrimentally, the access to information on counselling services and counselling assistance is considerably worse in collectivism-dominated countries. We think that it is scarcer and less available because the network of counselling services is weakly developed, possibly as a result of the poor economic situation in some of these countries. It may also result from the lack of reflection on counselling. It could, however, be caused by the fact that 'incidental' or 'circumstantial' counselling (to apply Elżbieta Siarkiewicz's coinages [2004]) prevails in these countries. It means that the counsellor is a 'non-professional helper' who is not expected to deal with formal expectations and tasks.

### ***Counsellors in Masculine and Feminine Cultures***

G. Hofstede and G.J. Hofstede acknowledge that the masculine/feminine dimension of culture arouses the greatest controversy, with some researchers inquiring even whether it actually exists. And yet, they resort to it in their publications in order to distinguish what, in their view, are important characteristics which diversify cultures and societies throughout the world.

Masculine societies are societies in which individuals particularly value success (be it success in their education/professional life or the success of a whole country), as well as challenges, competition and the 'career' opportunities (often the central motive when choosing a vocation). Social roles are clearly defined in terms of gender. The 'tough', resilient, resolute men are expected to support and protect their families, etc. Women are supposed to be tender, patient, caring and forgiving.

Masculine societies are also more religious and profess more traditional values. They also tend to be corrective. Great weight is attached in them to continuous economic growth, while people tend to attribute responsibility for life's misfortunes (e.g. poverty) to the people who experience them. Social and other conflicts are solved by means of confrontation and 'fight'.

Feminine societies are those in which interpersonal relations count more to individuals than success and competition (this also applies to the educational process). Women and men do not have specific roles or characteristics ascribed to them. Both sexes are required, on the one hand, to be ambitious, resilient and constant and on the other, to be nurturing and caring. In these societies, the work-life balance is considered very important. A nation of feminine culture cares for the well-being of its citizens. Feminine societies are more often secularized and more tolerant and open to diversity (including homosexual relationships). Conflicts (whether social or work-related) are resolved through negotiation and compromise (Hofstede, Hofstede pp. 129-173).

The notions of counsellor roles in the briefly described cultures can differ in many respects, especially when it comes to perceptions of their social contexts. As G. Hofstede and G.J. Hofstede claim, feminine societies are more likely than

masculine societies to implement welfare-state policies, so any social services will be perceived as social benefits deserving a great deal of attention and effort (2007).

In comparison with other countries, Sweden (the world's most thoroughly feminine culture), according to the Swedish scholar Einar Dalhin has long granted counselling a special role in promoting constructive social changes. Swedish counselling has, therefore, been vested with significance far beyond merely helping individuals to find their own (vocational) paths. The objectives of (career) counselling, as Dalhin goes on to write, were usually defined on the basis of sociological theories, even though these theories are not directly applicable in face-to-face contact with a client. In the 1970s, these objectives were to alter society (as already mentioned), provide support for school pupils and underprivileged families and foster social equality. Peculiarly, Swedish counselling was set the twin objectives of compensating for individuals' inability to self-analyse and raising their self-awareness. The counsellor not only is sometimes obliged to act as an 'instrument' in social engineering projects, but first and foremost has to be capable of actually doing this in practice (Dalhin 2012).<sup>8</sup>

The Swedish example shows both how counselling is perceived in feminine cultures and how the role of counsellors is defined so as to imbue it with importance beyond mere support of individuals (so characteristic of American culture). The manner of reflecting on counselling is also different from the American one, as masculine culture is more prevalent in the US than in Sweden. Swedish thought on counselling (especially career counselling) is more similar to Polish thought, which is also largely based on sociological and philosophical reflection.

Differences in the notions of the role of counsellors in masculine and feminine cultures are summarised in the table below.

<b>Culture Dimension</b>	<b>Counsellor Role</b>	<b>Sample Countries</b>
Masculine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• counsellor: expert, information provider, strong and independent person (man)</li> <li>• counsellor: reliable guardian or laissez-faire role, friend (woman)</li> <li>• counsellor: 'corrector' of undesirable and inappropriate behaviour and any 'defects' in an individual, or a person tending to a help seeker's proper socialisation/localisation in social life</li> </ul>	Slovakia, Japan, Hungary, Austria, Venezuela, German-speaking Switzerland, Italy, Mexico, Ireland, Jamaica, China, German, Great Britain, Columbia, the Philippines, Poland

<sup>8</sup> Dahlin E., A Swedish Perspective on the Importance of Bourdieu's Theories for Career Counselling, available at: <http://www.allbusiness.com/human-resources/careers/680071-1.html> (Access date: 20.02.2012).



Culture Dimension	Counsellor Role	Sample Countries
Feminine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• counsellor: reliable guardian or laissez-faire role, friend,</li> <li>• counsellor: trigger of social changes, a person acting for the good of society or fulfilling a social mission</li> </ul>	Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Chile, Denmark, Slovenia, Costa Rica, Finland, Estonia, Portugal, Thailand, Russia, Surinam.

Source: our own elaboration, based on G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede 2007, and other sources.

### *Counsellors in Cultures Avoiding Uncertainty*

This dimension of culture has a diversifying effect – according to Dutch researchers – on the manner in which uncertainty in life is perceived. Uncertainty is triggered by new, unfamiliar, ‘odd’ situations and people and situations different from those encountered in everyday life. Uncertainty can also be produced by any risky situations occurring in everyday life. People generally try to avoid uncertain situations. Yet in some cultures uncertainty is a circumstance that poses too much of a challenge and people try to avoid it at all costs, while in other cultures new situations do not constitute such jeopardy.

In cultures in which risk and new situations are strongly avoided, individuals experience deep anxiety in ambiguous and uncertain situations. Family life in these countries is stressful and bound up with an imperative to provide children with clear guidelines on how to behave in life. Similar guidelines are expected by pupils in schools and students at higher education institutions. The teacher/lecturer should, therefore, know the answer to every question. In societies in which uncertainty avoidance culture is prevalent, the incidence of intolerance, nationalism and xenophobia is higher.

In contrast to these cultures, in cultures with a weak uncertainty avoidance tendency, people more often manifest tolerance and acceptance of broadly conceived ‘otherness’, civic attitudes and readiness to accept immigrants. Children, pupils and students value openness and a constructive approach to problems and do not expect clearly stipulated guidelines for action. A parent/teacher/lecturer, therefore, need not know the answer to every question and does not have to offer ‘ready-made prescriptions’ for life.

In cultures with a low level of uncertainty avoidance, human problems and tasks are approached in a constructive manner, while the ambivalences and ambiguities inherent in reality are easily ‘accommodated’ and treated as an inseparable component of human life (Hofstede, Hofstede 2007).

This brief outline of cultures differing in levels of uncertainty avoidance implies that these cultures diversify manners in which a counsellor’s tasks are perceived. This is particularly significant in the context of developing multicultural societies, growing uncertainty in social life, escalating crises and the like.

In states of high uncertainty avoidance culture, the counsellor working in a multicultural environment may be compelled to act as one of the 'links in the chain' contributing to the assimilation of immigrants, even if this is not an explicitly expressed task. Signalled by society members and national governments, such expectations can constitute a peculiar 'silent' consent to assimilation, even if this contradicts official policy of multiculturalism.

As Ulrich Beck claims (Beck 2002; 2004), when threats are proliferating and risk societies are emerging, in cultures with a high level of uncertainty avoidance, the counsellor might be assigned a difficult task of relieving the tensions that lead to social unrest and eliminating human helplessness and impotence.

Differences in the notions of the role of counsellors are summed up in the table below.

<b>Culture Dimension</b>	<b>Counsellor Role</b>	<b>Sample Countries</b>
Strong avoidance of uncertainty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• counsellor: expert, information provider, life tutor, deliverer of guidelines and answers</li> <li>• counsellor: one of the 'links' in the immigrant assimilation process</li> <li>• counsellor: a kind of shield against failures in an individual's life</li> </ul>	Greece, Portugal, Guatemala, Uruguay, Flemish-speaking Belgium, Malta, Russia, El Salvador, French-speaking Belgium, Poland, Japan
Weak avoidance of uncertainty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• counsellor: laissez-faire approach, reliable guardian, friend,</li> <li>• counsellor: a 'link' binding immigrants with society</li> </ul>	Singapore, Jamaica, Denmark, Sweden, Hong Kong, Vietnam, China, Ireland, Great Britain, Malaysia, India

Source: our own elaboration, based on G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede, 2007, and other sources.

In contemporary societies, growing threat (posed by economic and ecological disasters and terrorism) adds to the fluidity and uncertainty of reality. Predictably, members of the cultures in which uncertainty is strongly avoided may prove unable to cope with risk situations as effectively as members of cultures with a stronger tendency for risk taking. This may increase the demand for counselling services in countries in which the former cultural model is prevalent.

### ***Counsellors in Cultures of Long- and Short-Term Orientation***

The last dimensions highlighted by the Dutch researchers are associated with the peculiar tendency of cultures to cultivate and foster characteristics among their populations that are oriented toward the future (long-term orientation cultures) or conversely, toward the past and present (short-term orientation cultures).

Cultures displaying long-term life orientation cultivate such characteristics as persistence, thrift, endurance, foresight and patience. In these cultures, the ability to adapt is fostered and large socio-economic gaps and disparities are not accepted. People in these cultures tend to attribute their failures to themselves and their failure to put in enough effort.

By contrast, in short-term orientation societies individuals tend to attribute their success or failure to 'good or bad luck'. Individuals believe that any effort they exert should bring swift results (Hofstede, Hofstede 2007). These cultures resemble the 'instant cultures' and cultures of consumption described by Zbyszko Melosik (Melosik 2001), whose members expect everything 'now', and show no willingness to hold out for potential later gratification. A. Kargulowa (2004) observes that the rapidity of the social transformations, identified above, the development of technology and other such factors have caused many people to turn to counselling as a stimulant or medication, counting on an instant outcome – the resolution of all their problems in life.

We believe this explains why the counsellor in a culture displaying a short-term life orientation is perceived as offering a swift and 'painless' panacea for anything 'bad' an individual can experience. Polish and Dutch research shows that there is a particular tendency in these societies to expect the counsellor to find an instant resolution to all manner of existing problems. Institutions, especially those financed from state budgets, expect the actions of counsellors to produce a kind of 'immediate effectiveness' (Szumigraj 2011).

Some nations, as already stated, are inclined to withdraw from the provision of counselling services and revoke their right to play an important role in shaping social life rather than to monitor their effectiveness over a longer time frame.

Differences in the perception of the role of counsellors in cultures of a short- and long-term life orientation are presented below.

<b>Culture Dimension</b>	<b>Counsellor Role</b>	<b>Sample Countries</b>
Short term orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• counsellor: a 'cure for all wrongs', which, when taken, will bring instant relief;</li> <li>• counsellors working in state institutions are expected to provide swift and effective action at the lowest possible cost</li> </ul>	Pakistan, the Czech Republic, Nigeria, Spain, the Philippines, Canada, Zimbabwe, Great Britain, United States
Long term orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• both the help seekers and the counsellor's superiors understand the nature of the counselling process, so the counsellor is not expected to produce instant results from her work</li> </ul>	China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Hungary, Singapore, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Ireland

Source: our own elaboration, based on G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede 2007, and other sources.

The brief outlines of each dimension of culture indicate how diverse social roles a counsellor may fulfil in different countries. Of course, the presented outlines are an attempt at summary and interpretation characterised by a high degree of 'epistemological uncertainty' (cf. Siarkiewicz 2010, p. 22). Moreover, our analyses have been carried out from a counsellogy perspective, hence are typical of reflection peculiar to this subdiscipline. They have a philosophical-sociological-anthropological grounding. Our aim is to demonstrate the existence of certain potential approaches to counselling, yet we are fully aware that we are describing both cultures and counsellor roles as ideal types.

Furthermore, our manner of comprehending culture entails the assertion that the dimensions of culture presented above also have a diversifying effect on the construction of social reality in the aforementioned cultures. This diversification process results in different counsellor training systems, different requirements set for young people starting out in the counselling vocation, different methods of certification, and so on.

Our analysis has concentrated on similarities and differences between the notions/concepts of the role of counsellors. Our aim was not to offer an exhaustive presentation of specific notions appearing in a particular country, because such notions/concepts often officially do not exist. The identification of some notion based on the literature describing the state of counselling in a particular country would require many years of study. Instead, our aim was to attempt to explore how trends favouring the standardisation and diversification of various counselling types and fields are reflected in the notions of the role of counsellors.

By presenting the issue in this way, we simply wished to indicate and highlight the importance of existing trends and tendencies rather than analyse separate notions/concepts and provide a detailed list of existing differences and similarities. One of our conclusions is that we need to critically address the complexity of the counsellor's role, in particular, the immense diversity apparent in methods of defining counselling itself, the tasks assigned to it, forms of practising it and the preparation of counsellors to fulfil their cultural and social role. Moreover, we are aware that the counsellor's role is dynamic and is therefore undergoing continuous change, which can make it difficult to identify.

Translated from Polish by Philip Palmer

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