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Changing Work in Changing Contexts: New Perspectives for Job Analysis in Career Counseling

ABSTRACT

The uncertainty, unpredictability and rapid changes that characterize current times challenge procedures and activities usually carried out by career counseling professionals. There is then the need to give new meanings to dimensions and procedures previously used in the analysis of work activities, introduce dimensions more related to new visions of work and consider suggestions from international organizations.

After presenting the most recent theoretical perspectives and principles suggested to career counselors, we will propose a sustainability-guided and context-based approach to Job Analysis and provide an example of its potentials to support career counselors who successfully fulfill their professional tasks.

KEYWORDS: job analysis, work contexts, sustainability, life design, capability approach.

Among resources and tools available to career counselors, Job Analysis (JA) has been attributed a prominent role in helping clients systematically acquire information about occupations.

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Although for a long time it has been used for a person-job match that fits with the needs and characteristics of both, the meanings of JA in current times has recently been questioned. Some jobs, in fact, tend to disappear and others, albeit new, will very likely change over a short period of time; likewise, work contexts are rapidly and unpredictably fluctuating (Mourelo, Kühn, Milasi, Yoon, & Viegelahn, 2018). The underlying issue is, therefore, whether it is worth redefining this tool and using it more effectively, thus contributing to a sustainable economic and human development. In an attempt to answer these questions, we will first briefly refer to recent theoretical approaches that support searching for new meanings to make JA suitable for the 21st century and consistent with sustainability paradigms.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND GUIDING PARADIGMS FOR JOB ANALYSIS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Theoretical approaches that provide new insights that can help answer the many challenges postmodern societies pose to their citizens are Life Design (Savickas et al., 2009; Nota & Rossier, 2015) and Sen's Capability Approach (Kuklys, 2005; Sen, 2009).

Life Design is described as a lifelong, holistic, contextual and preventive process of self-construction in which relationships among the diverse contexts of life play a crucial role. It emphasizes the need to support people in managing their present and future multiple transitions by focusing on expanding knowledge, understanding complexities, detecting at-risk situations, anticipating the future and addressing changes. The aim is actually to equip people to know "how to do" rather than "what to do," instill the seed of equity in themselves and in others, and adopt an inclusive perspective (Savickas et al., 2009; Ferrari, Sgaramella, & Soresi, 2015).

The notion of capability, on the other hand, refers to the ability of an individual to evaluate situational contexts and appropriately apply skills and competencies (Sandri, Holdsworth, & Thomas, 2018). More specifically, in the complex set of interactions between the person and his/her multiple life contexts, external conditions can either enable or limit a person's ability to grow and realize his or her Self (Nussbaum, 2011). Given the contexts in which they live, this has implications in evaluating attainment, understanding barriers, and supporting people in achieving the highest level of participation and of quality of life.

These two approaches share a common emphasis on promoting *people's freedom* to achieve the functioning they value, *agency* and self-determined goals, a *lifespan perspective* on identity and social role development, a *holistic perspective* with an attention to both local and global contexts. They also share a focus on *providing opportunities* in the work and learning domains; on *exploration* to support people in developing a full understanding of their own characteristics and their routes to overcome barriers; on *maximizing capabilities* in challenges that individuals, especially those with vulnerabilities, have to face every day (Robertson, 2015). Besides focusing on positive constructs such as career adaptability, self-determination, hope and optimism, these approaches give voice to people and their stories, stimulate reflexivity, and support assigning new meanings to work.

Following these guiding paradigms, career counselors should invest more efforts and play an active role in promoting sustainability, that is, meeting current needs without compromising the possibility for future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland Commission, 1987). Frequently referred to as the "3P's" (Profit, Planet, People), "Triple E's" (Economics, Environment, Equity), "Triple Bottom Line" (Economic, Environmental, Social), sustainability addresses the highly complex, dynamic and interconnected economic, environmental and social problems with new ways of thinking, strategizing, organizing, and work-

ing (Buller & McEvoy, 2016; Epstein & Buhovac, 2014; Lawler & Worley, 2011; Mohrman, Shani, & McCracken, 2012; Porter & Derry, 2012). Counselors should then be required to revise from a sustainability perspective the tools that they traditionally use to help people increase their knowledge about the world of work, as is the case with JA.

JOB ANALYSIS AND CAREER COUNSELORS' CHALLENGES

As it clearly emerges from the literature, JA has been used for several purposes and more recent developments underline changes that increase its potentialities in career counseling. Being knowledge based, JA initially helped develop awareness of work contents and requirements. For a long time it was *work-oriented*, that is focused on collecting information about the local world of work, about work functions (the series of activities that altogether allow a worker to achieve a professional goal) but also tasks and actions performed to carry out a given work function (McIntire, Bucklan, & Scott, 1995). JA played a central role in describing knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics, known as KSAOs (Knowledge, Skills, Abilities and Other Characteristics), that individuals need to possess or develop so that organizations or people themselves could move closer to the strategic objectives (Brannick & Levine, 2002).

Subsequently, its role for a deep understanding of strengths and weaknesses of workers was highlighted. In the first years of the century, organizational psychology research studies suggested enriching KSAOs by referring to job demands and resources that characterize every organizational context, to physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job which, in turn, require physical, cognitive or emotional efforts or skills (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009), often with an impact on work-family balance (Lee, Grace, Sirgy, Singhapakdi, & Lucianetti, 2018).

Special emphasis was given to a set of person-centered resources crucial to promoting career and stimulating personal growth and development. These include *human capital resources* (i.e., education, training, experience, cognitive skills and KSAOs); *social capital resources* (information, competences and solidarity); *psychological resources* (positive psychological traits and states, expressed in diverse contexts including working ones); and *professional identity resources* (self-knowledge and awareness of one's own interests, abilities, skills, values, goals; of the meaning of one's job; of the relevance of these self-perceptions) (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Luthans, Avey, & Avolio, 2010; Woods & Hinton, 2017).

Additionally, the contribution offered by JA was underlined in describing contextual aspects and characteristics that, when present, may increase the probability of experiencing decent work. In an ever-changing work environment it is paramount to consider the context and its influence and attempt to understand the factors that hinder or foster work changes. From being *work-and worker-oriented*, attention moved to *social aspects* (i.e., social support, interdependence, interactions outside the organization, and feedback from others) and to *contextual characteristics* such as ergonomics, physical demands, work conditions and equipment used, as well as safety issues, autonomy and freedom in scheduling and carrying out work tasks (Mortenson & Humphrey, 2006), but also supports available at work (Crawford, Alepine, & Rich, 2010; Pignault & Houssemand, 2016; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Reenen, 2009).

In line with the complexity emerged, the recent model proposed by Buller and McEvoy (2016) in the field of Human Resource Management has shifted toward the sustainability paradigm: individual, organizational and group levels are all components of the development of human and social capital for the realization of a sustainability strategy. More in detail, KSAOs useful for sustainability at individual level include specific skills and attitudes such as creativity, strong work ethic, persistence, learning capa-

bility, willingness to share information, efficacious listening and interpersonal skills, team orientation, and discretionary behaviors. At organizational level, capabilities such as long-term orientation and environmental values are crucial for achieving a sustainable development of the organization. Remarkably, their implementation is strictly connected with the opportunities offered by the organization and group norms.

Finally, recent studies have proposed JA as a tool to stimulate intentionality and facilitate engagement toward the future. Higher attention to changing working contexts, however, emerged only recently with the proposal of a *dynamic and proactive* use of JA aimed at overcoming the limitations due to rapidly changing jobs and rapidly updated work descriptions. JA has been then oriented to *job designing and redesigning* (Morgeson & Diederoff, 2011; Oldham & Fried, 2016; Woods & Hinton, 2017) by focusing on identifying the nature and dynamics of future jobs, on describing work contexts and generating scenarios to be dealt with at some time in the future. Under specific guiding principles, JA can reveal effective support in constructing *future scenarios*, forecasting personal resources, formulating plans and strategies, setting individual goals and behaviors to be personally and actively carried out in the context (Cucina, Vassilopoulos, & Sehgal 2005; Singh, 2008).

What we have summarized in this brief review testifies that JA is an evolving and malleable tool that could be expanded to be used in a career counseling that addresses also global challenges and debates. What seems crucial at this point is to start considering JA as one of the objectives and cornerstones of Agenda 2030 by taking into account not only the individuals with their KSAOs and resources, but also their working and life contexts.

A JOB ANALYSIS INTERVIEW BASED ON SUSTAINABILITY AND WORK CONTEXT: SOME GUIDELINES

Considering recent studies (Ferraro, Pais, & Dos Santos, 2015; Grant, Fried, Parker, & Frese, 2010) and following the suggestions of the 2030 Agenda, in addition to dimensions promoting a decent work, new sensibilities, ethical and inclusive choices and attention to environment should also become part of JA. An innovative and effective JA must give voice to workers' perceptions in describing, and hence designing, sustainable work contexts.

Semi-structured interviews are an effective tool to pursue this goal and to allow respondents to express subjective understandings and meaningful perceptions. We have developed an interview that can be proposed over three different sessions, with feedback to the client in-between. A first preliminary section is devoted to questions exploring work activities, KSAOs and other resources, which are considered as strengths and demands associated with work activities, and to the analysis of their impact on work-family balance. A second section of the interview includes questions addressing new dimensions in work contexts by focusing not only on the presence of given aspects and the extent to which they can be detected, but also on enhancing awareness of strengths and limits of the given context, personal perceptions, satisfaction with the current picture, and possible future personal active roles. The main areas investigated in the second part of the interview are summarized in Table 1. In the analysis which follows we mainly refer to guidelines for this innovative second section.

As shown in Table 1, via a sustainability-based approach, JA moves from the description of the main characteristics of work contexts to issues relevant to any work context, including those interested by changes. More importantly, the focus is shifted toward a more proactive, future-oriented vision with marked attention to personal commitment in designing inclusive and sustainable work contexts. Here the "Triple E's" and "Triple Bottom Line" as

well as the five main domains (people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership) addressed by the 2030 Agenda are echoed in the analysis.

Table 1. Domains and examples of enquiry in the analysis of work contexts in a Job Analysis Interview guided by sustainability.

Interactions and relationships	Number and types of interactions in and outside the organization, their frequency, duration, and direction. Persons involved (e.g., peers, leaders, supervisors, clients, etc.)
Participation in work activities	Autonomy and decision making that can be expressed in the work context (i.e., time to complete the job, autonomy in working methods)
Personal and professional development	Opportunities to participate in activities that involve career development and learning new skills. Impact of activities and demands from the work context on family and social life
Environmental conditions and choices	Safety conditions (exposure to noise, temperature changes, adverse weather conditions, hazardous substances or materials), availability of ergonomic instruments, as well as attention to the environment
Ethical and social choices	Guarantees for diversity in the workplace, safety of people that characterize the specific work context
Financial choices	Care for and attention to resource management, funding management, future investments
Intentionality and proactive behaviors	Possible outcomes suggested by the analysis, changes in attitudes and beliefs, behavioral intentions

Source: own study.

LM: A CASE IN A SUSTAINABILITY-GUIDED AND CONTEXT-BASED JOB ANALYSIS

Some answers to the interview are provided as an example of the potential contribution of a sustainability-guided context-based analysis to enhancing the meaning of exploration, understand-

ing work context and future designing, and supporting career counselors' actions with clients.

LM is a 45 year-old Italian man with 10 years of education. In the past he worked in a factory producing silver objects, then as a driver for a company providing meals to the city hospital. Currently he is a part-time support handyman in a local institution that manages a hotel and a convention center. He would like to reinforce his position moving to a full-time job in the same work context.

LM was required to answer a set of questions related to his typical working days. The first section evidenced that he is more frequently involved in gardening, internal maintenance work of buildings, transportation of goods. These functions are frequently carried out in the same day. He described them as routine and not particularly demanding activities both in terms of physical, cognitive and emotional requirements, following initial training provided by permanent staff. The themes emerged in the second part of the interview are now described in details.

- Interactions and relationships

Types and frequency of interactions and their role in supporting and facilitating activities are underlined. For LM these involve mainly staff members although he has brief contacts with people from diverse backgrounds. Some satisfaction is revealed in his words:

It is a very diverse environment. I can interact with other workers but sometimes, not often, also with the managers, who actually meet us from time to time. Many people participate in the activities at the convention center. I often go and "spy" to hear what they are talking about, important discoveries but also the paranoia of certain researchers. It satisfies my curiosity even if the people I more often relate to are few and always the same.

- Participation in work activities

Participation in work context activities can be highlighted by autonomy and decision making in a work context, the time given to complete the job, and the autonomy in choosing working methods. Strengths and weaknesses are reported by LM:

With colleagues, I have little chance of deciding who to work with and how to organize my work, partly because I work part-time. The rhythm is not stressful because during the day you do lots of things in different places, and moving from one place to another is like having breaks. What I certainly miss is the possibility to manage the things I do in most of my activities.

- Personal and professional development

The presence and awareness of opportunities for professional development emerge. LM reports limited incentives to creativity or to those individual elements that allow people to make a difference in the involvement of their professional activities:

As it is carried out here, work does not require training courses or regular updating. Once you have learned what to do, you do not have many things to 'invent' or other things to learn to do. This worries me a little because I don't know if I'll ever be able to have a full-time job here to support my family more adequately.

The impact of activities and demands of the work context on his family and on his social life is not seen as a concern by LM:

At the moment I don't have any problems in organizing my personal life because I have a part-time job. And I'm required to work only a few weekends in a year because our guests usually leave on Saturdays. I don't know what exactly could change with a full-time job; in any case I would like to have one.

- Environmental conditions and choices

The questions address safety conditions such as exposure to noise, temperature changes, adverse weather conditions, hazardous substances or materials, availability of ergonomic instruments.

Sometimes I happen to work inside but I also work outside and this can be either in summer or in winter although not for long periods. I love to be in the fresh air, so I don't complain with this aspect of my work. When I worked in a factory the building was small and crowded and I frequently breathed dangerous fumes. This place is well equipped with working tools.

- Ethical and social choices

The attention then focuses on choices made within the context with respect to sustainability, and ethical choices supporting sustainability are addressed, namely guarantees for diversity in the workplace, safety of the people that live in the specific work context. Economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainability are also addressed.

LM did not complain for the ethical code of conduct, promotion of inclusion of people who differed for age, ethnic origin, nationality or gender. However, he reported there was little attention to the global and local environment:

Persons from Veneto [close surroundings] work here but there are also people from other parts of Italy. Some migrant boys occasionally lend a hand but only at certain times of the year. They are treated like everyone else, even if occasionally someone makes a joke, which I don't think particularly bad, about their habits. There is not so much interaction between people of different gender and nobody "bothers" the ladies but I would like more exchanges with them. It seems to me that there isn't so much attention to the organization of the work. Some people work hard while others do not.

There are two persons with disability working with us. One is a lady who had a car accident long ago and has a part-time job like me. She is slow, and it is difficult for her to carry weights and climb the stairs. I don't know the other one.

Besides these critical notes on economic and social sustainability, an even less satisfactory picture comes out when he answers questions on environmental sustainability:

.... there isn't so much attention to energy saving, to the greenery and its survival in the future. Even the annual plants positioned in the huge garden of the center could be cared for in a different way. Conference and hotel guests walk around the park and they can find no notices giving the names of plants and saying where they come from. And the children the guests bring with them! Sometimes I must be their 'warden' to stop them from walking on the flowerbeds. It is not rare for them to touch the seedlings and for me to replace them. If we could find something for them to do while their parents are busy...

- Intentionality and proactive behaviors

Finally, the respondent is asked to reflect on all the different aspects of his/her work context and on possible actions that could derive from those reflections.

LM reported an increased awareness of his role in the context, of aspects he was or wasn't satisfied with. He also showed surprise at some of the questions, namely those related to sustainability. He was then provided more information on sustainability and the Sustainable Goals of the 2030 Agenda and ended up with these reflections and proposals:

...I could ask for an interview with the personnel manager and propose some activities to put the park to better use. I could take care of them by working extra hours and getting paid for them. I can volunteer to keep an eye on the use of water and energy and introduce possible

changes to monitor it. Maybe I can find a course to learn how to do it. By making these activities regular and not just occasional, I could at least make more money, although not reaching my goal of being hired full-time. And this could become useful not only for me. The lady with disabilities could earn something by doing a nicer and less demanding job with kids, rather than making physically heavy efforts.

The JA activity carried out contributed to developing LM's reflexivity and critical thinking. In terms of Life Design, LM was supported in co-constructing new meanings, which, as evidenced by the actions proposed for a member of the staff, also deal with the issues proposed in the 2030 Agenda. They echo partnership, environmental sustainability, as emerged in his plans, but also support prosperity. The activity also stimulated changes in attitudes toward the work context and a positive mindset toward the future. More particularly, and using Sen's words, with increased knowledge of and attention to sustainability characterizing his work context LM could envisage new opportunities and possibilities to maximize his capabilities, thus increasing the likelihood of commitment to changes in behaviors and proposals for proactive actions for his personal advantage, but also for that of the community.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The conceptual paradigm –the guidelines proposed and translated into concrete application, as shown in the interview briefly presented above– underlines a shift in JA from a tool used for understanding work as it is actually performed (Gibson, 2014) to a professional resource for designing, together with clients, a future where environmental, social and economic considerations are taken into account in the pursuit of development and of improved quality of life for both the individual and the community.

KSAOs and resources introduced later on, both in terms of strengths or potentially stressful demands, together with a sustainability-guided analysis of the context are designed to develop opportunities and, as happened with LM, to identify possible actions and overcome some of the transitions and barriers experienced in personal career designing.

A sustainability-guided and context-based JA can be then usefully adopted by counselors to

- develop *critical thinking, reflexivity and exploration behavior* in clients,
- promote awareness of what should characterize *work of quality and respectful of human dignity*,
- identify *opportunities, threats and possible changes* in one's current personal situation and facilitate the acquisition of abilities,
- adopt a *proactive and future-oriented perspective* for themselves and others,
- *stimulate diverse possible proactive behaviors at work and envisage multiple and dynamic future scenarios that could meet sustainability goals.*

Expanding Guichard's (2018) proposal, it is time for career counselors to find new meanings and goals in their own job and bravely assume a sustainable perspective. Working every day for an economic and human development based on dignified work that places people at the center, even when they struggle with vulnerabilities and are pressed by the urgency of finding a job, inevitably requires career counselors to have a positive mindset and a strong sense of professional calling (Ferrari, Sgaramella, & Soresi, 2018). A sustainability-guided and context-based approach to JA can help career counselors successfully fulfill this goal.

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