

New Realities in the Work World : the Impact on Workers and on the Professional Practice of Career Counsellors

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This article starts out by describing the main changes that have occurred in the work world from the middle of the last century till today. The authors then discuss the results of recently conducted research into new types of employment, the diversity of career paths, the growing complexity of career choices, the difficulty of work-family balance, and new social representations of work. Finally, they briefly analyze how these changes are affecting the professional practice of career counsellors.

Once associated with difficult situations and largely reserved for the poor, paid work began to serve, starting in the 1940s, as the main safety net social risks and as a clear sign that a person was participating in the development of society (Castel, 1995). Modernity, which accompanied the effects of the industrial revolution, started out as a period of collective fulfillment in which paid work played an important role as a regulator of social order (Chalifour, 1997). In the last twenty years however, the work world has undergone considerable change at the economic, social, and technological levels. These changes have led to the emergence of new forms of work that are more demanding, flexible and nonstandard, and to the appearance of new issues in socio-occupational integration.

The reconfiguration of the work world is reducing, for a large segment of the work force, the chances of finding a lasting and satisfying job. Workers now have to make several transitions in this evolving, uncertain context where career paths are no longer straight, up-ward-bound, and lifelong.