

## **Research on Techniques for Career Counseling**

### **Summary**

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#### **Research Period**

Fiscal 2003 to fiscal 2006

#### **Objective of the Research**

This study proposes a model and research method focusing on the “Development of a System for Preparing and Analyzing Transcripts on Career Counseling and Job Placement (hereinafter referred to as “Careetalk”)” that analyzes the characteristics and processes of career counseling from the perspective of counseling technique. Additionally, this study utilizes Careetalk to analyze actual cases of career counseling at Hello Work offices (the public employment security office) and examines what ingenuity career counselors can make to provide better counseling for job seekers.

#### **1. Composition of this Report**

From October 2003 to March 2007, the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training conducted a project entitled “Research on Re-Employment Support for the Unemployed White-Collar Middle-Aged and Older Persons” as part of its efforts to respond to issues of implementing mid- and long-term labor policies.

“Research on Technique for Career Counseling” was one of the sub-themes of the project. The objective of the research was to understand the characteristics and processes of career counseling for middle-aged and older persons seeking employment at Hello Work offices. For that purpose, we developed a prototype version (Ver.1.60) of the “System for Preparing and Analyzing Transcripts on Career Counseling and Job Placement (hereinafter referred to as “Careetalk”),” a software program that analyzes

the characteristics and processes of career counseling using word-for-word transcription<sup>1</sup> from the perspective of counseling technique (Kayano, 2006a).

In 2007, the results of the project were compiled by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training into the book “Support for Re-Employment for the Mid-Career Age Group – Development of New Guidance Tool (The First Mid-Term Plan Project Research Series No.8).”

Part 1 of this report explains the career-counseling models that led to the development of the Careetalk but were not included in the book. Next, we report the result of analyzing (using the Careetalk) actual career counseling cases at Hello Work offices. Then, based on those results, we examine what ingenuity career counselors can make to provide better counseling for job seekers.

Development of a training program that takes advantage of Careetalk had been considered from the time Careetalk was developed. In fiscal 2005, the Labour College of the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training started having trainees (Hello Work counselors) use Careetalk to analyze their actual career counseling sessions to improve their counseling skills in the “Case Study,” a program of the “Professional Training Course for Career Counselor Development” (Kayano, 2006b). We also discuss this effort to supplement our argument in this report.

Part 2 is the “Coding Manual Ver.1.1,” which categorizes communication during career counseling sessions. We hope that our readers will find this manual useful.

## **2. Theory of Career Counseling**

At Hello Work offices, career counseling precedes job placement and the significance of career counseling is that it enhances the chance of concluding an employment relationship through job placement (Employment Security Bureau, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2004).

An employment relationship is a human relationship based on an employment agreement. Employment is the state of being hired by another person to contribute labor, and an employee works for rewards such as wages and allowances (Suwa, 1999). The rewards are important sources of income for the job seeker while they are a cost for the employer (Shirai, 1992). It is not easy for people with such different positions to conclude an employment agreement and form a human relationship. This is where

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<sup>1</sup> Word-for-word transcription: Actual dialogue during career counseling was recorded and, following a predetermined procedure, every single word was transcribed from the recorded dictation. Not only verbal communication but also non-verbal communication (including facial expressions, gestures, and posture) was transcribed.

career counselors can play a role by bridging differences between the job seeker and the employer.

Career counseling can be categorized into three types depending on from which perspective career counselors bridge such differences: (1) job placement type, (2) active listening type, and (3) catalytic agent type (Table 1).

**Table 1. Career Counseling Types and Theoretical Background**

<b>Career Counseling Types</b>		<b>Theoretical Background</b>
<b>Job Placement Type</b>	The career counselor takes a neutral position between the job seeker and the employer and introduces an appropriate job offer to the job seeker from an objective perspective.	Trait and Factor Theory
<b>Active Listening Type</b>	The career counselor takes the job seeker's position and tries to understand the job seeker empathetically. The career counselor supports the job seeker so that the job seeker can take the initiative in finding a job.	Vocational Development Theory
<b>Catalytic Agent Type</b>	The career counselor acts as intermediary between the job seeker and the employer and provides support so that the two parties can constructively talk with each other.	Constructivist Approach

The three types of career counseling differ in their choice of which reality to look at. The job placement type considers objective fact to be reality. Thus, the role of the career counselor is to introduce an appropriate job to the job seeker from an objective perspective as a specialist.

The active listening type sees that reality is in the job seeker's subjective sentiments and ideas. The career counselor provides support to the job seeker by respecting his/her sentiments and ideas and trying to understand the job seeker empathetically so that he/she can take the initiative in finding a job.

The catalytic agent type thinks that the job seeker and the employer can share an image of reality (though not actual reality) through verbal communication. Thus, the career counselor talks with the job seeker and cooperates in recreating the job seeker's image of reality and helps him/her have constructive talks with the employer.

The different perspective taken in each type of career counseling arises from its theoretical foundation. The job placement type is based on the trait and factor theory founded by Parsons (Parsons, F., 1909; Williamson, E.G., 1964). The active listening type is based on the vocational development theory proposed by Super (Super, D. E.,

1953). The catalytic agent type is based on the constructionist approach by Savickas (Savickas, M. L., 1993), Peavy (Peavy, V., 1996), and Cochran (Cochran, L., 1997) among others.

### **3. Constructionist Approach and Career Counseling**

Madsen suggests that vocational guidance targeting young people is affected by changes in the structure of society. This refers to the shift from the selection of the labor force to occupational choice during the transitional period from school to work, the shift of evaluation standard from social attributes (such as gender, education, and race) to individual abilities, and the shift from being a passive object of selection to an active subject making the choice (Madsen, B., 1986).

Career counseling at Hello Work offices can also be affected by similar changes. The support given to the job seeker will shift from emphasizing job placement to emphasizing creating purpose and value through work, allowing the job seeker to take the initiative in choosing his/her own work. This also indicates that there will be a shift of theory which constitutes the core of career counseling, from the trait and factor theory to the constructivist approach by way of the vocational development theory.

The constructivist approach places emphasis on the narrative; that is to say, the client telling the story of his/her own career. Specifically, a career story outlining what that person has done up to the current point, what he/she is doing now, and what he/she will do in the future.

McAdams states that the present direction can be plotted from the past through the client's narrative, and like observing the future from the present, the client creates his/her own direction and consistency; that is, his/her own identity (McAdams, D. P., 1995). The narrative also serves as a means for sharing one's reality with others. Collin suggests that many people are losing the concept of sharing time and life space in modern society. Thus, narrating one's career to another person is an effective means of sharing the concept of time and life space with another person (Collin, A., 2000).

Applying these ideas to career counseling at Hello Work offices, the following three benefits arise when the job seeker narrates the story of his/her own career: 1) the job seeker can share his/her image of reality with the counselor, 2) through an integrated story, the job seeker can find meaning from a chain of events and can be conscious of his/her integrated being, and 3) through 2), the job seeker can talk about his/her career with the employer, thereby sharing the job seeker's image of reality.

#### **4. Catalytic Agent Type Model for Career Counseling**

Unlike the job placement type and the active listening type, the catalytic agent type theoretically based on the constructivist approach has never been proposed as a model for career counseling. This report proposes the catalytic agent type taking into consideration the following three questions: (1) what do the counselor and the job seeker talk about? (2) how do they talk? , and (3) what kind of effects does the dialogue have?

##### **(1) What do the counselor and the job seeker talk about?**

To establish an employment relationship, the job seeker needs to convey to the employer what kind of person he/she is and the employer needs to explain to the job seeker what kind of work they want the job seeker to do and how they want the job seeker to work. In the case of career counseling, the image of reality means a shared image of the job seeker between the job seeker and the employer.

McAdams suggests that there are three different levels to describe individual personalities. Level I is personal traits, indicating the job seeker's coherent behavioral tendency that is not limited to certain circumstances. Level II indicates the job seeker's coherent behavioral tendency that is limited to certain circumstances such as the workplace and the job seeker's relationships with other people. At Level III, the job seeker narrates his/her own experiences and events at the workplace and express his/her coherent integrated being through the narrative.

Normally, Level III applies when the counselor and the job seeker talk about the image of the job seeker during career counseling. Specifically, the job seeker talks about his/her career story: what the job seeker has done up to the current point, what he/she is doing now, and what he/she will do in the future.

For example, when the job seeker is trying to choose a job out of several offers, the career counselor tends to ask about the job seeker's employment history, the reason why the job seeker quit his/her previous job, and the job seeker's current job-hunting activities. That is because the counselor is thinking the following:

What the job seeker has done in the past indicates what the job seeker can do (occupational capability). The reason why the job seeker quit his/her previous job and the job seeker's current job-hunting activities suggest what kind of companies the job seeker is looking for and how he/she wants to work there (future direction).

The career counselor tries to understand the job seeker, taking into consideration that the past leads to the present and the present leads to the future.

The employer also tries to understand the job seeker in the same way. The employer looks at the continuity from the job seeker’s past to the present to the future when reviewing the job seeker’s curriculum vitae and interviewing him/her and compares the job seeker to the image of a job seeker that the employer wants to hire.

Thus, when the job seeker and the career counselor talk about such continuity during career counseling sessions, the job seeker reconstructs his/her career story so that it can be retold to an employer.

**(2) How do the job seeker and the career counselor talk?**

The job seeker and the career counselor share topics in career counseling. The story of the job seeker’s career is reconstructed as the job seeker and the career counselor create and organize relationships between topics. As shown in **Table 2**, there are five types of topics in career counseling in Hello Work.

**Table 2. Topics of Career Counseling**

<b>Event</b>	<b>Future Activity</b>	Future events
	<b>Present Situation</b>	Present events
	<b>Past Experience</b>	Past events
<b>Interpretation</b>		Understanding and inspiration of events
<b>Society</b>		The social framework such as institutions, social norms, and the labor market

When the career counselor understands the job seeker’s story and concludes that the job seeker is seeking appropriate terms and conditions and selecting suitable job-opening information, the career counselor moves on from the career counseling stage to the job placement stage. If it does not work out that way, the career counselor, working with the job seeker, takes the following steps and examines the story:

- 1) The career counselor examines relationships among the topics from the perspective of plot and depth. Plot is the flow of a story and reveals relationships in time, from past experience to present situation to future activities, among topics. Depth is the extent of a story and is a social relationship among topics such as the speaker’s interpretation of events and society which stands behind them...

- 2) Taking a perspective different from the job seeker's, the career counselor proposes a new plot or depth. This means that the job seeker's story gets rewritten. The job seeker takes into consideration the career counselor's proposal and reconstructs the story. This process is repeated until both the job seeker and the career counselor are satisfied with the story and then they move on from the career counseling stage to the job placement stage.
- 3) The story now leaves the career counseling and the job placement stages for the actual job-hunting stage. Just like in the career counseling session, both the job seeker and the employer examine and reconstruct the job seeker's story until they are satisfied. The story has an impact on the employer's decision on whether to form an employment relationship with the job seeker.

### **(3) What kind of effects does the dialogue have?**

The following three effects can be expected when the job seeker talks about his/her story with the career counselor.

- 1) By telling the story, the job seeker places events on a time axis and, by giving a meaning to the chain of events and creating a plot, the job seeker becomes conscious of his or herself as a purposeful, integrated being, that is to say his/her identity.
- 2) When the job seeker becomes aware of his/her identity, the job seeker can have clear image of his/her future activities and can understand what kind of information in the present situation are required. The job seeker can also decide which experiences from the past will be most necessary to use in future activities.
- 3) Once the story is constructed, the job seeker can find meaning in other ambiguous events and integrate them into the story. As a result, he/she becomes very conscious of the story and, at the same time, he/she starts bringing a wider variety of events into the story and strengthening the connections between the story and society.

## **5. Development of Careetalk**

Previously, a method to analyze dialogue between the job seeker and the career counselor in career counseling did not exist and we could not examine the processes of career counseling. Therefore, we created a standard to categorize such dialogue based on the catalytic agent type from the career-counseling model and from the perspective

of way of linguistic expression (Kayano and Matsumoto, 2006). Furthermore, based on the categorizing standard, we developed a proto-type version (Ver.1.60) of Careetalk, a software program that analyzes the characteristics and processes of career counseling utilizing word-for-word transcription (Kayano, 2006).

### (1) Units of Categorization

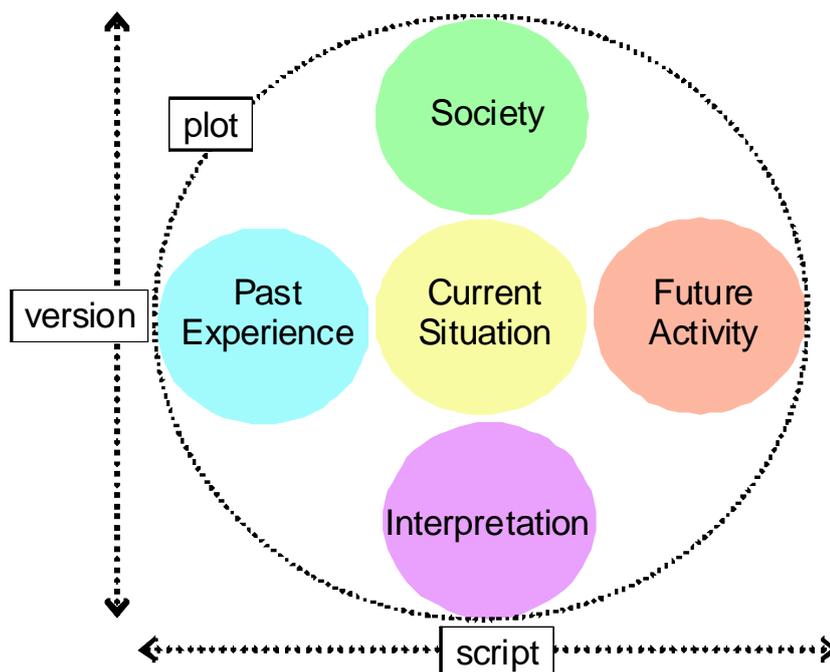
Careetalk categorizes, using units of utterance, word-for-word transcript of dialogue between the job seeker and the career counselor and attaches a code to each of the utterance. Utterance is a set of words that contain a certain organized meaning. It is considered an utterance when any of the following 1), 2), and 3) applies: 1) when there is a period [.] or a question mark [?], 2) when the speaker changes and 3) when there is a certain length of silence or an interruption.

### (2) Elements to Construct a Story

Three elements (version, plot, and script) are required to construct a story from topics. Version expresses the perspective of the story being told. Plot expresses the main topic and the theme of the story. Script expresses the events on a time axis (past, present, future).

In career counseling the job seeker and the career counselor cooperate to create relationships among topics and organize these relationships from the perspective of Version, Plot, and Script (**Figure 1**).

**Figure 1. Construction of a Story and Relationships among Topics**



### (3) Expressional Techniques

Creating relationships among topics and organizing them requires certain skills in linguistic expression. We have termed the skills “expressional techniques.” They are defined as “techniques constructed from multiple linguistic expressional methods used to express the career counseling processes or one’s career that enable one to select and carry out an appropriate method of expression in response to the status and flow of the counseling between the job seeker and the career counselor.” There are four kinds of expressional techniques (Table 3) and they can be divided into two main types: the process and career expressions. Process expression enables smooth communication between the job seeker and the career counselor and career expression enables one to create relationships among topics and organize them.

**Table 3. Expressional Techniques**

Expressional technique		Definition
Process	Processing	The technique of expression on the influence from a speaker to a listener
	Tools	The sub technique of processing
	Direction	The technique of expression on the direction and distance from a speaker
Career	Subject	The technique of expression on the subject such as sentiment , matter
	Tense	The technique of expression on tense such as past, present and future.

The process expression consists of Processing (which expresses the approach from the speaker to the listener) and its sub-technique, Tool. The career expression consists of three expressional techniques: Direction, Subject, and Tense. These techniques are closely related to the construction of a story and correspond to Plot, Version, and Script.

### (4) Categorization of Utterances

Each expressional technique is divided into three expressional categories (Table 4). The categories are mutually exclusive, and in principle, each utterance falls under one of these three expressional categories.

**Table 4. Criteria for Categorization of Utterances**

Expressional Technique \ Expressional Category	Priority ←————→ High								
	Low			High			High		
Processing	Explanation			Answer			Question		
Tool	Non- directive	Repeated	Directive	neUtral	Negative	Positive	Open -ended	Why	Closed
Direction	Outer			General			Inner		
Subject	Matter			Sentiment			Reasoning		
Tense	Now			Past			Future		

## 6. Analysis of Career Counseling Cases

### (1) Procedure

The Labour College teaches the “Professional Training Course for Career Counselor” for Hello Work counselors and the trainees are asked to submit recordings and word-for-word transcripts from their actual career counseling sessions.

We used their course materials to collect case examples of career counseling and acquired 33 recordings<sup>2</sup> and 35 transcripts from the 36 trainees who participated in the 2005 training course. Based on these transcripts we examined the recordings and modified them filling in missing words. Of the 33 recordings, four were excluded because of poor sound quality that rendered them inaudible, and the remaining 29 case examples were analyzed taking advantage of Careetalk.

### (2) Results and Discussion

Using Careetalk, we calculated, for each expressional technique, what percentage each expressional category accounts for out of the total number of utterances. Additionally, we performed a similar analysis on the roles of the job seeker and the career counselor and on different points along the time axis such as the first, the middle, and the last part of the counseling. The results suggested the following trends in the dialogues between the job seekers and the career counselors.

<sup>2</sup> The career counselors explained to the job seekers the purpose of the recordings and how their privacy would be protected and obtained job seeker approval.

**Processing:** Among the utterances by the job seekers, Answer constituted an average of close to 30% compared to Question with less than 10%. Among the utterances by the career counselors, Answer constituted an average of close to 4% (an almost negligible number) compared to Question with less than 20%. With regard to Tool, most Questions were Closed Questions. Question demonstrates a tendency to control what the other person says and to lead the counseling. This is especially true of Closed Question, which, in comparison with Open-ended Question, requires the other person to answer “yes” or “no.” In essence, there is a strong tendency for the career counselor to control what the job seeker says and to take the initiative in moving the counseling forward.

**Direction:** Inner is defined as expression of ideas, opinions, and sentiments. The average percentage of Inner was a little over 10% for the job seekers and 10% for the career counselors. The focus of the dialogues tends to be on explaining situations and events rather than speaking of one’s own ideas, opinions, and feelings. Examining this on a timeline revealed that there were hardly any changes for the career counselors, but for the job seekers the average percentage increased during the last half of the counseling session. It’s possible that the job seekers need more time before they talk about their ideas, opinions, and feelings.

**Subject:** The average percentage of utterances that combine Reasoning and Sentiment fell short of 10%, a very low number, for both the job seekers and the career counselors. There were no major changes in this tendency over the course of the interviews. Generally, in psychotherapy and counseling, priority is given to the emotional expressions of the client. Comparatively, emotional expressions in the career counseling sessions examined in this research were not given as much priority.

**Tense:** The average percentage of Now accounts for 90%. There were almost no conversations expressing Future or Past. However, in examining the timeline, the average percentage of Past shows a characteristic change. It is higher for both the job seekers and the career counselors in the first half of the sessions and decreases in the last half. Since there were many first-time counseling sessions during this research, it can be said that the first halves of the sessions were dedicated to verifying job-hunting application forms, resulting in an increased percentage of Past.

## 7. Future Issues

Because of the limited sample size of career counseling (29 cases), we were not able to apply statistical analysis to the results. However, if we can understand the relationship among the expressional techniques between the dialogues of the job seekers and the

career counselors, career counselors may be able to better control the flow of counseling and the construction of a story, by consciously utilizing the expressional techniques.

According to the results, there was a tendency for the career counselors to talk more than the job seekers and Outer (in the Direction category), Matter (in Subject), and Now (in Tense) constituted the majority of the dialogue. This suggests that in career-counseling cases, little time is devoted to the construction of the job seeker's story.

The results may have been affected by the fact that it was the first session for the job seeker in approximately 80% of the cases, and career counselors spent most of the time providing information, including information on Hello Work services and basic knowledge about job-hunting activities.

Finally, by clarifying how the processes of career counseling affect the job seeker's job-hunting activities and employment performance afterwards, we believe that we can examine whether the catalytic agent type is appropriate for career counseling and improve the model.