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## TEMPORALITY AND TRANSITIONS

### **Temporality: A Fruitful Concept for Understanding, Studying, and Supporting People in Transition**

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### **Abstract**

The specific processes of transitions or turning points have been studied in different fields, notably vocational psychology, career development, sociology, and the life-course approach. However, little work has brought together these different strands of research. To fill this gap, we explore the issue of temporality, raised to varying degrees by each approach, with the aim of showing its heuristic value in the study of career transitions. After clarifying a number of concepts, we describe research methodologies that can be used to identify temporality and suggest keys of comprehension to understand transitions from a temporal angle. Finally, we describe intervention avenues that take temporality into account to support people in career transition. Covering the past, the present, and the future, they aim to stimulate self-reflection in order to give meaning to the most significant biographical experiences and, hence, make the present clearer and anticipation of the future easier.

*Keywords:* transitions, turning points, life course, temporality, career counseling

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### Introduction

The process of moving between two career situations is commonly understood in terms of transitions, which was originally a psychosocial concept and is one that is widely applied in work and vocational psychology and career development (Baubion-Broye & Hajjar, 1998; Masdonati & Zittoun, 2012; Olry-Louis et al., 2017; Schlossberg, 2011). Associated with the idea of discontinuity, linked to or concomitant on developmental stages, or brought about by more or less predictable life events, transitions create changes that lead to a reorganization of relations with the self, with others, and with the social environment. Moreover, these changes or discontinuities occur in contexts that are both proximal (e.g., family) and distal (e.g., labor market), acting as either constraints or resources (McMahon & Patton, 2006; Young & Valach, 2008). Individuals participate actively in their career construction by interpreting their past and present experiences and aspirations for the future in order to create what they perceive as a coherent whole (Peavy, 1993, 2004; Savickas, 2005). Finally, the career is constructed within a broader life project that encompasses all domains of the individual's activities and their contexts (Collin & Young, 2000; Savickas et al., 2009).

Alongside these psychological approaches that are centered on individual transitional processes, other conceptualizations have been developed based on the life course and socio-professional trajectories. While some of these concepts are more specifically sociological, as in the biographical approach (Bessin et al., 2010; Denave, 2015; Grossetti, 2006; Négroni, 2005), and others are presented as interdisciplinary, as in the life-course approach (Elder et al., 2003; Sapin et al., 2007), they all take into account the social conditions and temporal configurations in which these changes occur. The biographical approach centers on the chain of situations and the meaning given to what often constitutes a veritable turning point in the

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individual's life (Abott, 2010). This is seen as part of a dynamic process, with a past history, future implications and multiple causal factors (Bidard, 2006; Demazières, 2007). The life-course approach derives from health and social sciences and focuses on temporal analysis of how individual lives unfold, establishing links between factual and reflective aspects and the socio-historical contexts in which they occur (Heinz et al., 2009). By recognizing individuals as having effective agency, this approach takes a life-span view, observing interactions between the past, the present and the future, with reference to the interweaving spheres of life (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014; Laborde et al., 2007).

Although the theoretical models based on notions of transition, professional bifurcations or life course overlap in terms of their consideration of phenomena at the interface of the individual and the context that involve multiple temporal frames, there has been little dialogue between them. And yet, the processes involved in the dynamic links between individuals and social structures are difficult to model if the temporal frames within which they occur are not taken into account (Hitlin & Kwon, 2016). The goal of this article is to place the notion of temporality at the center of the analysis of transitions and life course, for the purposes of research and counseling. To this end, it adopts an integrative approach that is fruitful for three main reasons. First, a process-based approach that involves a long-term perspective and covers the different spheres of life can shed light on the adaptive, retrospective, and anticipatory processes specific to transitions. Second, at the methodological level, seeking to understand individual mindsets that are embodied in complex temporal frames within different contexts broadens the qualitative analysis of transitions and life courses. Third, this approach can be adopted in career counseling through interventions that stimulate clients' reflections about their past, present, and future life course.

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The first part of the article provides theoretical clarifications on the notions of time and temporal processes, as well as on the notion of temporality in the field of career development. The second part presents four keys of comprehension that could enhance understanding of transitional processes, both in a research context and in a counseling support context. The third part describes research methods that can identify and throw light on the temporal aspects at work when the individual experiences major professional transitions. In a fourth and final part, we present counseling interventions and methods that can help people in transition explore, analyze and give meaning to their past, present and future lives.

### **Understanding and Studying Temporality**

#### **Time**

As the notion of temporality refers to the state of existing in time, it is useful to look briefly at the concept of time. Between an objective measure and subjective perception, at the intersection of an individual and reality, time can be understood either as an external or as an internal phenomenon, the former involving chronological, linear time, and the latter an experience or event that can change the course of a person's life or collective history. Thus, a distinction is generally made between *chronos*, or universal time that is identical for all because it segments duration into objective, measurable units of hours and ages, and *kairos*, which refers to a fleeting moment that is seized and is a decisive point in time. With its suggestion of timeliness, the right moment, and propitious opportunity, *kairos* has a more qualitative, pragmatic and complex meaning than does *chronos*; rather than "how much," it concerns "how," "when" and "why" (Bessin, 1997). Using the notion of *kairos* to understand career development means giving less importance to the temporal norms imposed by society (e.g., predictable life stages based on age), focusing instead on the strategies the individual

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uses, through analysis of all aspects of the situation including ethical dimensions, and on how events and experiences are ordered and actions are organized in time (Ogien & Quéré, 2005).

### **Temporality, Temporal Processes**

While time is generally considered in the singular, temporality has a plural connotation, encompassing everything that relates to time, whether it is the perception of simultaneity, succession or duration, of past/present/future, or how the individual experiences specific moments of time. Associated with processes, temporality implies the development of something that, by definition, includes ideas of time, movement, rhythm, duration, transformation, and usually change. With regard to life course and transitions, temporal processes are not limited to the existence of linear, predictable and causal links between events but leave considerable space for contingencies, the unexpected, chance and fluctuations, as well as for recurring or regular events and opportunities that make each life course unique. These processes refer not only to individual but also to social and historical dimensions, depending on whether they highlight events experienced personally, collectively or marked by a particular historical period. Shared collective history imposes on individuals a form of “overarching temporality” as an operating norm (Mercure, 1995). Thus, psychological temporal frames can be considered as lying at the intersection of experienced time, which concerns perception and is rooted in the individual’s personal history, and social time, which refers to both objectified and internalized categories (Dubar, 2014). Temporality is marked by strong interactions between these levels.

The awareness of time as past, present and future implies introspection and the construction of self-identity. Past events are recalled and reconstructed, while future events are expected, anticipated and prepared with a view to immediate and more distant action

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(Buser & Debru, 2011). Present events are evaluated in the light of personal rhythm and timing. Rhythm, seen either as stable and permanent or as transitory and alternating, refers to the pace of events and actions initiated by the individual. Thus, people make decisions based on this rhythm as well as on the specific timing of the event, and more precisely on indicators that converge to show the right time to act. Having defined temporality and its associated processes, we now need to examine how they can be investigated in research on transitions.

### **Temporality and Career Development**

In the field of guidance and counseling, several theories have contributed to a better understanding of transitional processes, incorporating temporality in their study. The earliest theories, which took a developmental standpoint, were concerned with the changes and developments that occur throughout the individual's life. For example, these theories have associated activities and developmental tasks with life stages: school in childhood and adolescence, work in adulthood, and retirement in old age. To this end, authors introduced the notions of periods, phases and stages of life, which are seen as being relatively predictable and age dependent (Ginzberg et al., 1951; Ginzberg, 1972, 1984; Osipow, 1983; Riverin-Simard, 1984; Super, 1980), such as young adults' transition from school to work. More recently, several theories have been developed to take into account the unpredictability of contemporary careers and the importance of transitional processes, such as the experience of adults returning to school. These include the theory of life career development (Gysbers, 1988, 1996), career construction theory (Savickas, 2005), and self-construction (Guichard, 2009).

While these theories address the need to understand careers as developing throughout life, they do not analyze them using time frames as such when studying transitions.



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### **Understanding Transitions from the Angle of Temporality**

The lessons learned from career development and life-course theories can shed light, in particular, on the way that dynamic links are constructed by individuals in transition between significant events in the past, what is happening in the present and what is anticipated in the future. We describe below four keys to comprehension of this construction “work” and, more generally, the temporal dimensions of transitions. These keys, partially inspired by those proposed in a professional career paths analysis framework (Fournier et al., 2016), are useful not only for researchers when analyzing transitions but also for practitioners who support people in transition.

### **Linking Long-Term Temporal Perspectives and Biographical Continuity**

This key to comprehension has two complementary components. The first suggests that the analysis of a transition cannot be limited to the present time of the situation in which it occurs but should be situated within the temporality of the individual’s biography as a whole (Heinz et al., 2009), based on a life-span perspective that covers the past, the present and the future. The links between these three temporal frames are close but not deterministic or mechanical, and their interactions are systemic rather than linear or causal (Elder & O’Rand, 2009; Savickas, 2005). The way that the transition is experienced and given meaning should be interpreted not only in light of previous transitions or anticipations of the future but also in relation to the way they were subjectively experienced and construed. The second component concerns more specifically the way the individuals manage to (re-)establish biographical continuity, to bring together elements of their story (events, transitions) that could appear unrelated or unusual in order to give them intelligible and coherent form. It

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encourages the process of self-reflection that is particularly marked during transitions (Guichard, 2009; Masdonati & Zittoun, 2012). This process notably aims to develop the person's perception of self-sameness and continuity in time (Grote & Raeder, 2009, p. 222) between past experiences, the new situation, and future plans (Boutinet, 2007). Where the transitions cause more profound identity ruptures, this process also seeks to restore coherence (Bessin et al., 2010) and achieve self-transformation (Negroni, 2005). Subjectivity is at the heart of this reflective work. In particular, it reveals whether the transition is perceived as an opportunity or a threat as well as the individual's perceived capacity to act and make life-course choices. For example, in a study with workers who had lost their jobs, we observed that this transition led to an unprecedented identity crisis in some, while for others in fairly similar situations, it was an opportunity for a positive redefinition of their identity (Fournier et al., 2018).

### **Taking into Account Personal and Social-Historical Timing**

The second key to comprehension more specifically concerns the notion of timing, which can be understood on at least two complementary levels, forming in some way the contexts in which the transition occurs: (1) the person's biological and psychological development and (2) the social and historical context (Elder & O'Rand, 2009). The first level refers mainly to the perception of the time or stage of life in which the transition occurs, irrespective of chronological age. For example, in a study of professional careers, some 50-year-olds felt they were at the peak of their career, while others of a similar age and with similar experience felt they were "old," approaching retirement and at the end of their professional lives (Fournier et al., 2018). This indicates that when a transition occurs, subjective age and the associated perception of the professional life stage could be seen either

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as opportune timing, or by contrast as being detrimental to action. The first level also refers to the temporal dimension of a transition in one life domain in relation to that of other domains, as well as to the opportunities or constraints that arise (Cocandeau-Bellanger, 2011). For example, losing one's job at a stage of life when one is free of family responsibilities could be experienced as an opportunity in that it can be a propitious moment for thinking about the future. By contrast, losing one's job just after having a child could be experienced as a serious constraint as the timing of the transition is likely to restrict possible actions. The second level, concerning the social and historical context in which the transition occurs, also entails limits and constraints, as well as opportunities and openings. An event, here a transition, always occurs at a specific moment in the flow of social time (Perrin-Joly & Kushtanina, 2018). Thus, the socio-economic (e.g., labor shortage), historical (e.g., pandemic), or regional (e.g., closure of the main factory in the region) context in which a professional transition occurs influences the perception of the timing of the transition in the individual's life, either as advantageous or disadvantageous, and also colors the meaning of the transition in relation to their personal development (Elder, 2007; Savickas, 2005; Vondracek & Porfeli, 2008).

### **Examining the Processual Dynamics Involved in the Career Path**

This key to comprehension concerns the processual dynamics involved in the career path and the way it is constructed from a long-term perspective. It identifies the dynamic aspect of recurrences, regularities, and opportunities, and the changes, transformations, patterns, contingencies, unexpected events, fluctuations, and sometimes even latent processes that give each career a particular pattern and a specific overall slant (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017; De Vos et al., 2018; Van der Heijden, & De Vos, 2015). Thus, the process-based reasoning involved in the career, and the ensuing resources or handicaps that accumulate,

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color the perception of being able to confront the transition and whether or not the outcome and consequences for the professional career can be, in any way, controlled (e.g., Denave, 2015; O’Rand, 2009; Raeder & Grote, 2007; Reitzle et al., 2009). Finally, this notion of process-based reasoning constructed over time and within a long temporal frame resembles the “Matthew Effect” (Rigney, 2010), defined as the result of a process of cumulative advantages and disadvantages that eventually create a chain effect. These cumulative processes reveal patterns of continuity and persistence (resources or handicaps) across temporal frames rather than patterns of change. For example, in a study with unemployed people, job loss that occurred in a career that was already on a downward slope due to a process of long-term cumulative failures was found to contribute to a heightened sense of decline and to make it difficult for the person to envisage possible actions and anticipate the future (Fournier et al., 2018).

### **Examining Temporality from the Perspective of the Interdependence of Life-Spaces and Life-Times**

This fourth key to comprehension focuses on the plurality of roles, identities, and trajectories (e.g., family life, professional life) at different times of life. More concretely, this key involves taking into account the way that events, transitions or turning points in the professional career and other spheres of life coexist and interfere with each other; for example, professional, family, and leisure activities may compete for time (Savickas et al., 2009). This principle of interdependence of life-space and time indicates the importance of paying particular attention to the effects of significant career transitions on projects in non-work spheres of life and, reciprocally, to the effects of major events in non-work spheres of life on the professional career. These reciprocal effects or interferences can constitute

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resources and opportunities as well as constraints or barriers (Baubion-Broye & Hajjar, 1998; Cocandeau-Bellanger, 2008; Nolan, 2002; Bengtson et al., 2005). In some of our work on professional retraining, we observed that failure to find work after training can be particularly detrimental to the balance between parental, family, and community life. Thus, the career transition becomes an obstacle to these non-work life spaces and times. By contrast, what happens in several non-work life spaces and times can also constitute resources and palliatives for coping with difficult transitions in the professional sphere (Fournier et al., 2017).

Having exposed, in the first part of the paper, our theoretical background on the notions of time and temporal processes, as well as on the notion of temporality in the field of career development and, in the second part, four keys to comprehension for analyzing transitions, we now examine how these notions and keys to comprehension can be investigated in research.

### **Studying Temporalities Within Transitions**

Studying transitions from the point of view of temporalities implies adopting and implementing research methods that capture the historical and dynamic aspects of transitions. Transitions also need to be situated within participants' life spheres and apprehended as a complex process rather than from a causal logic. In addition, these methodologies should capture the articulation between individual and contextual perspectives. This means considering both the subjective experience of a given transition and its sometimes unpredictable situational and social contingencies. Without claiming to be exhaustive, we focus here on three methodological avenues along these lines: (a) assessment and analysis of

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interindividual differences related to temporality; (b) collection and analysis of biographical interviews; and (c) longitudinal follow-up.

### **A Focus on Interindividual Differences Related to Temporality**

Researchers can assess interindividual differences through objective questionnaires or describe them through the analysis of responses to open questions. In both cases, the theoretical perspectives adopted should give prominence not only to the personal dimension being assessed but also to the context.

The subjective experience of time is understood in psychology from the notion of *temporal perspectives*. To reveal the cognitive and affective “presence” of time in individuals, five measurable dimensions were defined: 1) preferential orientation towards the past, present or future when thinking and acting; 2) consistent tendency to give positive or negative valence to each of these temporal registers; 3) temporal extension, corresponding to the perceived distance of past and future events; 4) the coherence between the three temporal registers, which refers to the capacity to realize future aspirations in relation to the past and the present; and 5) temporal density, relating to the precision and wealth of the contents of representations for each temporal register (Demarque et al., 2010; Hoornaert, 1973; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). There are several coexisting conceptions of temporal perspectives. They are sometimes defined as stable and trans-situational personal dimensions, sometimes as the result of a cognitive process of socially regulated representation that provides a sense of the past, present and future in the individual’s life-space at a given moment and is dependent on the context (Demarque & Le Blanc, 2016, p. 324). By adopting the latter approach, we consider, on the one hand, that temporal perspectives can direct the way that individuals perceive their professional environment and, particularly, the opportunities that arise. On the other hand,

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they depend on the characteristics of the transition in which they occur and the perceived personal and social issues. For example, in the entertainment sector, a highly insecure employment sector, discourse analysis of performers identified three main “lexical worlds,” depending on whether the narrative accounts were directed towards (a) the past (e.g., describing early socialization, predestination, and a sense of continuity), (b) the future (e.g., focusing particularly on its hypothetical and difficult aspects), or (c) the present (e.g., insistence on recurring difficulties that limit future possibilities) (Beder et al., 2020).

More closely linked to decisions and actions in the present, the *propensity to seize opportunities* also gives rise to concepts that are sometimes related to personality and sometimes to interactions between the individual and the context. While some authors consider the capacity to explore professional possibilities and to examine the opportunities that arise to be a psychological trait (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), others have developed theories about the notion of opportunity and the underlying processes (Heslon, 2019). While career development today increasingly requires the ability to make do with what is available and to capitalize on chance events (Krumboltz, 2009), this attitude depends on the degree to which the professional environment is capacitating, making certain career actions possible for people with this ability. This is related to the notion of affordance, developed by Gibson (1977) and Norman (2016) and highlighted by Vondracek and Porfeli (2004) in the field of career development, which refers to the property of an object to show a given individual how it can be used for career purposes. This perception of opportunities that can be seized can represent the individual’s readiness or openness to change. For example, discourse analysis revealed considerable variability in the responses of students interviewed about the main events or discourses that had an impact on their academic careers. Some students showed

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resistance to modifying their initial choices, irrespective of the opportunities that arose or conversations with others, as indicated by certain lexical and syntactic markers, for example, use of the first person “I” and reflexive “me,” adverbials such as “always” or reference to permanent personal characteristics (Olry-Louis & Soidet, 2020).

### **Collection and Analysis of Biographical Accounts Based on Temporality**

The collection of biographical accounts can take several forms: biographical interview, life story (Bertaux, 1997), career interview (Robin, 2006), or life-line interview (Fournier et al., 2017). For a given transition, this method makes it possible to observe the sequence of jobs and experiences in different areas of life. When reported in an interview, the past brings into play two levels of reality, one based on facts and the other on subjective interpretations, giving rise to reconstructions that crystallize the occurrence of certain events or episodes. While retrospective accounts are almost always presented in inverse chronological order, the past is “seen from the focal point of the present, which in turn leads to rethinking the future” (Negroni, 2005, p. 314), reinterpreted on the basis of “what could happen, what is desired, what is feared...” (Demazières, 2007, p. 11-12, personal translation). Putting one’s own life into a story highlights crucial events and moments of transition and pause, as well as significant people (Boutinet, 2004), requiring the production of a temporal frame that can give coherence and perspective.

After collecting biographical data, it is then necessary to adopt methods of analysis to take into account the temporal dimensions underlying their expression. Specific temporal indicators can be systematically investigated to reveal the internal logic of the accounts, which are “powerful operators of synthesis between the individual’s past, present, and future” (Delory-Momberger, 2010, p. 103). Three such indicators seem to be particularly relevant.



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The first concerns verb tenses, which express the experience of time; this is one of the formal linguistic markers indicating the speaker's presence in the utterance, according to theories of enunciation concerning the way that language (*langue* in French) is expressed in speech (*parole*) in an enunciative act (Benveniste, 1974; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1999). Thus, shifting from one tense to another in a biographical interview is particularly informative about the meaning that the person gives to these events, the way they are linked, and the emotions generated by talking about them (Olry-Louis et al., 2012; Olry-Louis, 2018). This occurs, for example, when an individual makes an unexpected connection (but marked by the concomitant use of the past and present) between current events or transitions and others, often emotionally charged, that occurred in the past.

A second type of relevant indicator for analysis is the use of markers of continuity, rupture, and regression to link events in the narrative sequence and create coherence. For example, some accounts are organized around a contrast between a set of markers of the past ("before," "up to then," "it was") and the future ("after," "since then," "after that"). A third type of indicator is found in the temporal outcome given to the account, which can either open up prospects of new horizons and opportunities or, in contrast, conclude with constraints that thwart future plans and make anticipation difficult (Demazière, 2007).

In addition to this search for specific indicators in the accounts, some analytical strategies can be employed systematically. Demazière and Dubar (1997) suggested using structural analysis of life stories to ascertain the meaning given to past, present, and anticipated experiences. To this end, they described a coding system associating three descriptive elements with each segment of the discourse: sequences (events experienced by the speaker), the agents (actors in the story and their relationships), and the reasoning

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(judgments or assessment of a specific episode or agent). For example, by comparing the links between the main sequence of events in the person's life, the agents involved and the reasoning behind the decisions made in relation to the three temporal dimensions, it was possible to identify the turning points and the processes leading to starting or leaving artistic careers (Olry-Louis, 2019). The semantic categories based on these three levels with the most significant utterances can be summarized in the form of individual and/or collective patterns.

### **Longitudinal Follow-up**

Longitudinal follow-up makes it possible to observe individuals at different moments in their life and thus collect dynamic data involving information from different moments on a given temporal scale. For example, from a series of interviews conducted during career transitions, such as training leave or redundancy, authors have shown how meaning is created and reconstructed throughout the transition period (Arnoux-Nicolas & Olry-Louis, 2019). In another ongoing study of young people going through the process of choosing higher education courses on the French *Parcoursup* platform, data is collected at three time points to elucidate their emotions related to (a) their strategies for formulating their initial choice, (b) the responses received from the educational establishments, and (c) their coping strategies six months later.

By collecting data that focus simultaneously on retrospective and prospective aspects of the life course, it is possible to study continuity and development in the individual's career (Livson, 1973; Zittoun, 2009). For example, the seminal work by Riverin-Simard (1984) highlighted the events and stages of adults' career construction. In that study, "the use of the prospective and the retrospective also makes it possible to pay more attention to the analysis of the sequential details of the interaction between the environment and the organism, and

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thereby to reduce the static aspect of the cross-sectional approach” (Riverin-Simard, 1984, p. 204).

The research methodology adopted to take into consideration the temporality of transitions determines how this dimension should be observed. Several recommendations can also be outlined in terms of career intervention practices.

### **Career Counseling Based on the Temporality of Transitions**

Focusing on the temporal dimensions of transitions in career counseling includes taking into account the past, the present, the future, and how these temporal frames interrelate. The goal is to help clients introspectively examine and give meaning to their experiences, transitions, and the most significant events in their lives in order to clarify the present and look ahead to the future. In other words, the client is encouraged to look at different ways of interpreting “what happened,” “what is happening” and “what could happen.”

#### **(Re)thinking the Past**

Career counseling can be conceived here as work to “biographize” (Boutinet, 2007) and reconstruct the client’s story in light of the current situation. This involves helping clients analyze their subjective life-course, both professional and private, in order to identify and give meaning to three elements of the past: recurrences, ruptures, and what has been learned. First, identifying recurrences leads to the identification of life themes (Savickas, 2005). Certain experiences, choices, decisions, actions, and transitions may recur, and it is important to identify these anchoring points that occur throughout the person’s history and give shape to it, helping construct their identity and determining how they meet current challenges and prepare for future actions. Beyond general life themes, the analysis of past experiences in terms of successes and failures might be fruitful avenues for working on counselees’

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confidence (Rossier, 2015; Savickas & Porfeld, 2012) and self-efficacy beliefs (Sheu & Lent, 2015) in the present. For example, successful adaptation to previous transitions can increase confidence when faced with a present or future transition; by contrast, a failure in the past may lead to fear of failing again, due to perceived similarities between the past and current situations. In the former case, past success can provide inspiration for adapting previously used strategies to the current situation; in the latter case, any fatalistic attitude or sense of helplessness and anticipation of further failure will need to be deconstructed.

Second, it is crucial to identify the *ruptures*, turning points, or changes of direction in the life course. Whether they are positive or negative, desired or endured, these changes have disrupted the pattern of the life course and produced a sort of shock-wave of destabilizing certainties, either opening up hitherto unimagined choices and possibilities or, in contrast, leading to shutting down and withdrawal. Analysis of these moments has several potentials for counseling. First, it makes it possible to examine in depth what triggered the events, for example, in relation to the decision-making strategies that were used and the role played by other people involved in these events. It also creates the possibility of thinking about alternative scenarios, about what one would have become if things had happened differently. The alternative self and “forgone self” (Obodaru, 2017) or thwarted callings (Négroni, 2007) can thus be used as themes to think about possible selves.

Finally, an analysis of the past can focus more specifically on what clients have learned about themselves, their way of functioning, being, thinking, and acting, their values, as well as their life and its meaning (Bernaud, 2016; Krumboltz, 2009). Reflection about what has been learned will also help them understand what made it possible to bounce back from adversity, to identify the skills they have developed, as well as the problem-solving strategies

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that worked well in the past and could be used again in the present situation. Implicitly, this also helps identify the skills and strategies that still need to be developed to overcome the transition challenges. In sum, it is a question of thinking about what the story that is told reveals about oneself and one's ability to act.

### **Clarifying the Present and its Challenges**

Working on the present involves understanding and mobilizing the client's perceived ability to act in response to the transition and future project while examining the possible barriers and the resources that can be used to overcome them. It thus involves understanding the existing constraints and strengths—individual, environmental and contextual—as well as specific aspects of when the transition occurs (or is prevented).

Four questions can guide this work. First, *at what life stage* does the transition occur? This question leads to an investigation of identity issues raised by the transition because it encourages the person to think about who they are and what they have become and to take stock of their life, both professional and private. In this way, it can be used to assess projects and dreams that have been achieved, could be achieved, or that the person had to or wanted to give up (i.e., “Is there still time, or is it too late?”) (Delory-Momberger, 2010; Masdonati et al., 2019).

Second, *what is the timing* of the transition? This question helps the client think in terms of “good” or “bad” timing, hence the personal and contextual elements and events occurring at the same time as the transition that make the moment more or less opportune for change. These elements and events may be biographical (e.g., other challenges and events in the person's life) or systemic (e.g., the extent to which it fits with the patterns of life and issues of other people) (Fournier et al., 2016; Fournier et al., 2017).

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Third, *what are the barriers or drivers of change?* When a transition is anticipated, the person may feel more or less ready and supported for change (Heppner, 1998). Moreover, in all transitions, some factors motivate and others that discourage change, and taking stock of all these factors can facilitate decision-making (Mullet et al., 2000; Soidet & Raussin, 2019). Another issue to be addressed is the need to escape the discomfort of this liminal betwixt-and-between state (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016), whose components are both objective (material possibilities and limitations) and subjective (the degree of tolerance of uncertainty).

Fourth, *what meaning is given to the transition and work?* Subjectivity is at the heart of this question, which involves understanding what the transition represents (the emotions it arouses, its valence, its personal meaning, and social significance) and also the person's relationship with work (values and purpose of work in life, work expectations and professional aspirations, importance of work, etc.). Moreover, discussing the meaning of the transition and work can give rise to thinking more generally about the direction the person wishes their life to take and the contribution that the transition can make (Bernaud, 2016).

### **Imagining the Future**

Counseling centered on the future entails anticipation of a “fictional career” (Boutinet, 2007). This requires first understanding the client's attitude towards the future in general (optimism or pessimism) and when faced with uncertainty. It can then be useful to differentiate between the short and the long term. In the *short term*, this involves focusing on “what to do,” for example, in the coming months or years, and on the concrete aspects of a potential project. This should reveal how the person would like to see their life unfolding; the “next chapter” of this story may thus involve continuity, or in contrast, a break with the past.

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In some more complex situations, the short term is perceived as constraining. In these cases, it may be preferable to organize the future temporal frame starting with the *long term*, and to concentrate on what the person would like to become in the next five or ten years for example. Counseling would then focus on identity and existential questions, looking at “who I want to become” rather than “what I want to do” (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). One possible approach for counseling is to focus on “possible selves” (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Markus & Nurius, 1986) or on types of anticipated subjective identity (Guichard, 2009). This involves identifying, analyzing, and differentiating between ideal and desired selves (both dreams and more “realistic” aspirations) and probable selves (adding a principle of reality), as well as “ought” or feared selves (what is expected of us and the person we are afraid of becoming). Based on that, strategies and actions can be considered to turn anticipation into reality and reconcile what is desirable and what is possible.

To apply these intervention approaches in practice, career practitioners must adapt them to their specific counseling contexts. For example, it would be important to think further about how these principles precisely translate into each phase of the counseling process, whether it be exploration, insight, or action (Hill, 2014). Finally, interventions that focus on temporality are not automatically relevant for all people in transition. At a given point of the counseling process, some counselees might indeed be unable or unwilling to revisit their past experiences because they were too difficult or even traumatic. In these cases, a premature focus on the past could be counterproductive, reducing counselees’ agency and limiting future plans.

### **Conclusion**

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The aim of this paper was to bring together different theoretical perspectives addressing the issue of transitions and turning points, but with each perspective remaining grounded in its disciplinary field and methodologies. The notion of temporality appears to be a fruitful approach to establishing a bridge between vocational psychology and career counseling, the sociology of biographical trajectories, and the more interdisciplinary life-course approach, for several reasons. First, understanding the temporal aspect of transitions considerably broadens the framework of analysis. Second, centering counseling on reflective analysis of the temporal processes involved in the transition gives the client a greater role in interpreting what has happened and in anticipating what could happen. Career counselors aim to help clients develop the skills they need to learn to live with uncertainty by thinking about the hypothetical, to consider the effect of chance, to imagine alternatives, and to reinterpret the same story from a different angle.

However, awareness of time as past, present and future encourages reflexivity and the construction of self-identity. Past events must be recalled and reconstructed, while future events must be anticipated and prepared with a view to immediate or more distant action (Buser & Debru, 2011). Providing this type of support requires that each of the people involved—the client and the counselor—makes use of the same basis of awareness and is able to question it through dialogue with the other. In any event, recall of painful episodes, anxiety-inducing exposure to uncertainty, and the profoundly intimate nature of identity questions and meaning cannot be addressed without ensuring that the client is ready to engage in this line of action and without having negotiated a way of doing so. However delicate it may seem to pursue such activities, they are crucial in contemporary society, in which urgency, immediacy (Boutinet, 2004), and acceleration of time (Rosa, 2010) are the order of



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the day. Their aim is to help the individual adapt rapidly and regularly to the environment, in contrast to earlier approaches that were based on anticipation and projection and aimed at achieving a better future. From this perspective, the key moments of professional life, their sequence, links, and salience occur within a social and historical context that gives them meaning (Cocandea-Bellanger, 2011). They are also dependent on experiences and events in other spheres of life (family, social, personal), with links between the times of life, marked by movement and action, and their areas of life (Gysbers et al., 2000).

In addition to the “time” of the transition, it is thus important to understand the type of “space” that channels it, whether it be in terms of the sphere of life, proximal and distal environments, internal and personal spaces, areas of intervention or socio-historical context. We believe that vocational psychology and career counseling can make use of the theoretical, methodological, and practical possibilities opened up by these integrative perspectives.

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