Paradigm Shuffle

Bill Law, Senior Fellow, NICEC

'The times they were a-changin'!'; as it turned out, more than Bob Dylan could have known. Economic changes on a global scale, and in the technology which made them possible, have dominated the last several decades. They are well documented in policy and in careers-education-and-guidance. What have been less well documented are the consequences for both the way people now seek to deal with change (cf. Galbraith, 1992) and what that means for local communities (cf. Davies, 1997). More important, and yet even more neglected are cultural changes - in the way people arrive at their beliefs and values, and the way they see themselves in the communities they inhabit (cf. Eagleton, 2003). We might, in careers work, try to argue that such socio-emotional stuff is none of our business; but it is.

Not that careers education and guidance is ducking the issue of change. A lot can be said: there is no more need for guidance-as-we-know-it in the 'de-jobbed' world (Bridges, 1999); well, if not that, it is certainly a time for transformation in what we do (Bezanson, 2004); and not adjusting entails a severe risk of marginalisation (Bolam, 2004); because we are facing no less than a paradigm shift (Jarvis, 2003). We'll see.

Supporters of careers education and guidance have always been ready to talk about the technological and economic side of change. It has sustained our case among policy makers. But there has been a turn-round in policy. Policy increasingly points to what is happening in the ways that people deal with economic and technological change. Indeed social and cultural changes are increasingly starting points for what government now urges (DfES, 2005a, cf. 2005b).

But, however we choose to see it, what is going on now is cumulative and accelerating – and may well be irreversible. It is not so much the facts of change that are important, it is the dynamics. And that is so whether we think of change politically, technologically, economically, social or culturally.

But there is also this: in careers work we need most to think about how people learn for action. Since that is the case, then the place to start is social and cultural attitudes. The authors of those policy documents are right about that.

Careers-work conversations

This edition of the journal focuses on economic change – what's happening in the labour market? Nothing wrong with that. But the question can be asked in at least three different careers-work conversations.

1. Career-development - 'What's going on in working life?'
Identifies influences on career and how those dynamics flow.

2. Career-management - 'What is people's experience of that?'
Looks at how people try to resolve the dilemmas and solve the problems.

3. Careers-work - 'How can anybody help?'
Suggests who can do what to help - in IAG, careers education and other versions of careers work.

These conversations are three clear focuses for our attention, spread across two hard-to-miss separations: some careers develop *without* having been particularly managed; and some people manage their careers *without* any particular help.

Information about economic change is part of labour-market information (LMI): LMI relies on research for the first of these conversations. But LMI is also a basic provision in the third: people need to know what is going on in the working world, what it offers and demands and how that is changing.

But people do not just inhabit the labour market, they participate; and question two asks how. The answers are an account not so much of LMI as labour-market experience (LME). LMI is a tool; and we use it in the contexts of LME.

That should make a difference to how we talk about help: what advisers do in IAG; and, maybe more so, what teachers do in curriculum.

Information, experience and help

Careers education and guidance people talk a lot about information. Much is made of 'impartial information'. And 'information' appears first in the dominant analysis of face-to-face help – 'IAG'.

This journal reports research to feed into LMI. It suggests that the extent of change is exaggerated (Keep and Brown, this journal); and that this is partly because losses of opportunity in some sectors and organisations are accompanied by gains in others (White, this journal). It argues that, anyway, no trend is irreversible: society has choices about change and continuity, for example in the way managers manage (Williams, this journal).

But few deny that change is occurring. Some of the elements in the process are detectable in the way (in an earlier NICEC project) Wendy Hirsh and her colleagues (1998) set out how job titles and their associated skill-sets are changing.

From all of this, labour market words and phrases useful to LMI include:

'demands and incentives',
'structures and outsourcing',
'global off-shoring and new technologies', '
'industrial- and organisation-bases',
'sectors, organisations and skill-sets',
'competitiveness and trends',
'meritocracy, gender-distributions and recruitment.

Learners need to have it organised into useful form; but this is pretty much a vocabulary of labour economics.

The list could also include a feature of recruitment - 'stratification'. It refers to how people's social backgrounds influence the way they gain entry to the labour economy. It occurs where origins predict destinies. Where that happens careers develop differently. And there is no dispute that social stratification in the UK is an intensifying factor in recruitment (Giddens and Diamond, 2005).

In thinking about how to help, it is an open question just how impartial LMI can be. But LMI provides a lot of the 'I' in 'IAG'; and the jump straight from the 'I' to the 'A and G' may seem, at the first attempt, not so hard to make. There are easy-to-make links between the fact of 'change' and the need for 'flexibility', and between the fact of 'competitiveness' and the need for 'self reliance'. Other words deriving from how we see the contemporary labour-economy include 'choice', 'enterprise' and 'employability. The organisation of that kind of information for the enablement of that kind of learning has become a marker of our expertise.

But it mustn't leave out experience.

For, when it comes to planning for action people attend to both expertise and experience. Indeed, in careers work, it seems that learners may well place greater trust in experience. Sara Bosley finds that learners value 'insider knowledge', based on direct involvement in the working world; they also value helpers who are able to talk in terms which 'resonate' with their own experience (Bosley, 2004; and in preparation).

LMI does not always conjure up accounts of experience. Its narrative is not of lives, but of structures and trends: it is a *meta-narrative*. That is not to deny that people have experiences which have to do with 'skills', 'competitiveness' and 'stratification'. But that experience is not of structures and trends, but of up-close-and-personal events and encounters: it is a *biographical narrative*.

For that kind of account of the labour market we need other sources. And there are some: in parallel with the literature informing LMI there is a literature informing LME. Some get a mention in this NICEC collection. But there is more.

And what does it say? It speaks of recruitment which may be both careful and arbitrary (Warhurst and Nickson, 2001). It points to consequences in people's lives of stratified recruitment (Wilkinson, 2005). It shows how the labour market poses quality-of-life issues, which bring both stress and fulfillment (Bunting, 2004). It sets out how work both rewards and exploits (Toynbee, 2004). It shows how emerging work patterns both offer a role, and re-shape attitudes (Sennett, 1998). It describes how a changing labour economy brings individual prosperity for some and social decay for others (Davies, 1998). It indicates how structures and trends vary in the way they support meaningful lives (Lindsey and McQaid, 2004). It illustrates how economic activity is not all that 'work' can mean (Terkel, 2005).

These are sources for LME rather than LMI. Although they are all carefully documented, they are as likely to declare a point-of-view as claim impartiality. They are as much social commentary as academic literature. Where they are academic, they come from both sociology and economics. They rest on observations which are more difficult to verify and harder to replicate. But their credibility is not lessened on any count. The point about insisting on verifiable impartiality is that it enables learners to act with their eyes open; and do we best serve that purpose by leaving experience out, or by bringing it in?

The two vocabularies are different; but the vocabulary of LME is no less about the labour economy:

'selection and rejection',
'work fulfilment. and quality-of-life',
'over- and under-employment',

'employment and other work roles',
'using skills and dealing with conflict',
'earning and owing',
'promotion and casualisation'.
'consequences for self, others and communities'.

Engaging that kind of 'insider knowledge' and 'resonating' with such learner experience enlarges the basis for help - for:

'being flexible' and 'coping with stress',
'making choices' and 'finding meaning'.
'holding on' and 'moving on',
'being enterprising' and 'realising values',
'achieving employability' and 'work-life balance',
'fulfilling functions' and 'realising identity'
being 'self-reliant' and 'examining alternatives'.

It is a learning agenda for curriculum at least as much as for IAG. Well-managed work experience could be an important resource; work-life mentoring another. Neither denies the authority of professional expertise, both look for the authority of experience – both in the learners and among other-than-professionals. But there are no quick-and-easy ways to doing this. Aware and astute programme management will be critical.

Paradigm shift?

And so are we shifting, shuffling or just drifting about? In Kuhn's (1962) coinage of the term, a paradigm shift is not change in the way things are 'out there'; we shift paradigms by allowing ourselves to see familiar things in unfamiliar ways. Aha! the sun does not revolve around us. Aha! there is more to light than a wave in the ether! And on we go. It's how we change the world: equipping ourselves with fuller accounts of how things are; developing better explanations of how they got that way; thinking up more ideas about what we can do about them.

If any careers-work paradigms are to be shifted, we must shift them. We might do that by tumbling to the fact that what we thought was one thing is more than one thing. Or we might realise that what we formerly thought was at the centre of everything isn't. And on we go.

You catch my drift.

This argument will be developed in *Re-positioning Careers Education and Guidance* - to be published by Canterbury Christ Church University later this year. It will also feature an article by Tony Watts.

Bill will shortly upload an examination of more of the practical implications of this position at www.hihohiho.com. You can be updated on this by emailing 'yes' to bill@hihohiho.com.

References

Bezanson, L. (2004). *Career Development: A Time for Transformation*. Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies.

Bosley, S. (2004). *Careers Helpers and Careers Hinderers: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Role of Others in Shaping Individual's Careers*. Loughborough: University of Loughborough.

Bosely, S. (in preparation). 'An anatomy of credibility: a conceptual framework of valued careers helper characteristics and qualities'.

Bolam, D. (2004). 'Are careers professionals contributing to their own demise?' *Newscheck*, December-January, pp.8-10.

Bridges, W. (1998). 'The end of Guidance as we know it?' (Lecture to the Institute for Career Guidance). Website: www.careerworld.net.

Bunting, M. (2004) *Willing Slaves: How the Overwork Culture is Ruling Our Lives*. London: Harper Collins.

Davies, N. (1998). *Dark Heart*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Department for Education and Skills. (2005a). *Youth Matters: Creating Opportunities, Releasing Potential and Achieving Excellence*. London: DfES.

Department for Education and Skills. (2005b). *Report of the End-to-end Review of Careers Education and Guidance*. Website: www.cegnet.co.uk

Hirsh, W., Kidd, J. and Watts, A. G. (1998). *Constructs of Work Used in Careers Guidance*. Cambridge: National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling.

Eagleton, T. (2003). *After Theory*. London: Penguin.

Galbraith, J. K. (1992). *The Culture of Contentment*. London: Sinclair-Stevenson.

Giddens, A. and Diamond, P. (eds.) (2005). *The New Egalitarianism*. London: Policy Network.

Jarvis, P. (2003). *Career Management Paradigm Shift – Prosperity for Citizens, Windfall for Government*. Ottawa: National Life-Work Centre (mimeo).

Kuhn, T. (1962). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Lindsey, C. and McQuaid, R. W. (2004). 'Avoiding McJobs: unemployed job seekers and attitudes to service work'. *Work Employment and Society* 18 (2) pp.297-319

Sennett, R. (1998). *The Corrosion of Character – the Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism.* London: W.W. Norton.

Terkel, S. (2005). *Hope Dies Last – Making a Difference in an Indifferent World*. Cambridge: Granta.

Toynbee, P. (2004). *Hard Labour – Life in Low-Paid Britain*. London: Bloomsbury.

Warhurst, C. and Nickson, D. (2001). *Looking Good, Sounding Right*, London: The Industrial Society.

Wilkinson, R. G. (2005). *The Impact of Inequality: How to Make Sick Societies Healthier*. London: Routledge.

For correspondence

Dr Bill Law
2 Brook Street, Elsworth
Cambridge, CB3 8HX
Tel. 01954 267619
Email: bill@hihohiho.com

NICEC Network members

Senior Fellows
Ruth Hawthorn, Acting Director
Dr Bill Law, Founding Senior Fellow
Professor Tony Watts, Life President

Fellows
David Andrews
Lyn Barham
Anthony Barnes
Val Butcher
Helen Colley
Geoff Ford
Lesley Haughton
Dr Wendy Hirsh
Dr Charles Jackson
Barbara McGowan
Dr Rachel Mulvey
Marcus Offer
Rob Ward

Associate Fellows
Heather Jackson
Mary Munro

Associates
Cole Davis
Leigh Henderson
Dr Jenny Kidd
Ewan Munro
Tricia Sharpe
Sylvia Thomson

Overseas Fellows
Lynne Bezanson
Col McCowan
Professor Edwin L Herr
Dr Peter Plant
John McCarthy
Professor James P Sampson Jr

Administrator
Julia Jones