

Introduction to the Special Issue

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To commemorate the 90th anniversary of the National Career Development Association and to anticipate its centennial, this special issue presents 9 analyses of the career counseling profession's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). On the basis of SWOT analyses and using the methodology explained in this introductory article, the authors present objectives and strategies for advancing the profession in the next decade. The special issue concludes with an "analysis of the analyses" that reviews and integrates the authors' recommendations and suggestions for constructing the future of the profession.

The year 2003 marks the 90th anniversary of the National Career Development Association (NCDA). To commemorate the occasion and to anticipate NCDA's centennial, the authors in this special issue consider how the profession of career counseling might be advanced in the coming years. The authors systematically construct and consider alternative visions for the career counseling profession in the next decade. The authors were selected from the editorial board for Volume 50 of *The Career Development Quarterly* to constitute a panel of analysts who represent a broad range of experience, expertise, and engagement in career counseling. They examined the internal strengths and weaknesses of the career counseling profession, as well as the external opportunities and threats it faces. These analyses of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) aim to raise awareness of the challenges faced by career counselors and to identify possibilities for advancing the profession. The analysts were asked to use their conclusions to construct a vision for the future of the career counseling profession and a set of objectives and strategies that could move the profession in the direction of that vision. The various futures that they envision can prompt discussion and debate that serve to guide the profession's development. Although SWOT analyses are usually conducted by teams or committees, the authors in this issue worked alone in constructing their visions of what career counseling might become in the next decade. Consequently, the issue concludes with an "analysis of the analyses" that reviews and integrates the objectives and strategies recommended by the authors.

Some readers may be intrigued by the idea of conducting their own SWOT analyses and constructing a strategic plan for the career counseling profession or their role in it. Some professors of counselor education may want their students to perform the same task. These individuals and classes are invited to engage in the process recommended to the authors in this special issue. To make this possible, the following section of this introduction is the request that the authors in this special issue received.

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It offers suggestions and prompts for conducting an analysis and constructing a vision for the future of the career counseling profession.

Conducting a SWOT Analysis for the Career Counseling Profession

The following outline provides a general structure for thinking about the next decade in the profession of career counseling; it need not be an outline for your article. You may not want to include each section or all the information you considered in a particular section. You can, if you wish, identify what you believe have been the greatest accomplishments and disappointments in career counseling during the last 10 years. The overriding goal, however, is to articulate your vision for the next 10 years in career counseling. To help you construct that vision in more detail, you may want to consider the following topics.

Internal Strengths of Career Counseling

A strength is a resource, capacity, skill, or advantage. In this context, a strength is a condition internal to our field that is under our control and can be influenced by us. The following prompts might help you identify strengths.

- Who are we?
- Who do we serve?
- Why do you do what you do?
- What do we do well?
- What are our core competencies?
- How strong is our market?
- Do we have a clear strategic direction?
- What is our culture?
- What are our resources?
- How do we distinguish ourselves from competitors?

Internal Weaknesses of Career Counseling

A weakness is a limitation, fault, defect, or deficiency in resources, skills, and capabilities that seriously impedes the profession. Weaknesses are under our control and can be influenced by us. The following prompts might help you identify weaknesses.

- What can be improved?
- What is done poorly?
- What should be avoided?
- What embarrasses you about our profession?
- What do you want to change?
- What do you want to do better?
- What have clients or institutions asked you to do that you cannot?

External Opportunities for Career Counseling

An opportunity is a favorable situation that has the potential to meet a need consistent with your mission. Opportunities may help us reach our goals. Opportunities are not under our direct control. The following prompts may help you identify opportunities.

- What are interesting trends?
- What good chances are we facing?

- Do changes in technology and markets present any new opportunities?
- Do changes in government policy related to our field present any new opportunities?
- Do changes in social patterns, population profiles, lifestyles present any new opportunities?
- If you take the next step in career counseling, what would that be?
- What ideas have been offered to you?
- What opportunities have been presented?
- Are there new markets?
- What changes do you expect to see in demand over the next 10 years?

✓ **External Threats to Career Counseling**

A threat is an unfavorable situation that may block goal attainment. We must respond to threats in order to grow. It is best to anticipate threats and to respond proactively.

- Who is doing the same thing?
- Are they doing it better?
- What is threatening your client base?
- What do practitioners want?

→ **Analysis of Strategic Issues Facing Career Counseling**

Now it is time to build a list of strategic alternatives. To do so, analyze your SWOT list by thinking about

- What we should grow (concentrate on)?
- Which strength do we build on?
- What should we shrink (restructure)?
- Which new things should we attend to (merge, collaborate, acquire)?
- Which weaknesses should we correct?
- Which threats do we counter?

The following questions may be useful in helping you to develop issue statements that represent the interaction between strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Be specific about and give examples of issues, concerns, and ideas.

- How can strengths be used to take advantage of opportunities? (S-O strategies)
- How can we use strengths to counteract threats? (S-T strategies)
- How can we overcome weaknesses or counteract threats? (W-T analysis)
- How can we overcome weaknesses to take advantage of opportunities? (W-O strategy)
- How can this be considered an opportunity as well as a threat?
- How may this apparent strength turn out to be a weakness?
- How does this weakness really represent a strength?

A Vision or Strategic Plan for Career Counseling

After completing your issue statements, state your vision for career counseling in the next decade, maybe in the form of a strategic plan that includes a mission, objectives, and strategies.

If you write a mission statement, please indicate why career counseling exists, maybe describing its chief products or services, customers served,

and value added. You may want to discuss goals and objectives that specify the kind of results career counseling should seek to achieve. If you do the why (mission) and the what (objectives), you might want to add the how (strategies for achieving the objectives).

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