

Career Coaching in Asia and the Middle East

The following material is the first article of a 2-part series on career coaching around the world. The information is not a comprehensive survey of existing practices but reflects the information obtained from a limited number of professionals involved in what is a nascent industry responding to current globalization and outsourcing trends. Some of the resources are listed below; others asked not to be listed. Other areas of the world will be included in the second article in the next issue of the Bulletin.

On a hot humid morning, Jiang Chang paces in front of her small apartment in Hong Kong. The 650 square feet of space is home to five, including her siblings and parents. The bathroom down the hall is shared with two other families. Jiang is the first in her family to obtain a higher-level degree and is under intense pressure to make money and support the family. Today, she will interview with two financial institutions. Unlike her counterparts in other parts of the world, she has no one to guide her, to explain the dos and don'ts of interviewing, or help with her resumé. She is alone and terrified of failing.

Several hundred miles to the North, career coach Cheng Gong rises to face another busy day to meet the demand in China. "While not widely available, career counseling is a growing industry," he notes through a translator. The complexities of a booming economy have made people both more anxious and more aware of its importance.

Three kinds of institutions currently deliver the service: 1) The government provides free career coaching to the ordinary worker. Those who deliver it must

have a special licensing qualification provided by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. 2) Private counseling firms serve white-collar workers and undergraduates. Here no special licensing requirements are needed. 3) Finally, career centers in universities serve the college population, usually in group lectures provided by teachers who are also part-time counselors. Many of these schools, states Gong, use career assessment including the MBTI® tool, but with poor results since they provide little interpretation with the assessments.

Gong's firm was started in 2002 and remains one of a handful of private sector firms dealing with this market. He has coached 1,300 people. His service fees are typically paid for by the client - with free services after the first year. Commonly used assessments are the MBTI and Holland career orientation assessments. Other private firms, he notes, have added email and online counseling services for low salaried workers and students.

Japan, home to the world's 10th largest population (128 million people), is capitalizing on robust demand. Per capita income is \$38,300. According to consultants, over 50,000 career counselors certified by seven private organizations provide services mainly to people choosing or changing their career. The fact that each group has its own standards, however, has caused problems and there is now a move to standardize certification. The most widely used assessments are CPS-J, VIP, Holland, and the MBTI instrument. The nation's declining birth rate is, in a strange way, also heightening activity as universities provide more career counseling services to attract high school students to their respective institutions. Services are typically paid for by corporations (for outplacement and career development), the government, and educational institutions. Rarely does the individual have to pay.

Hundreds of miles south, Andrew Bell of Hemisphere Consulting starts another busy day. Coaching in Singapore is thriving. Since its independence in 1965, this small nation of 4.6 million people with four official languages and a per capita income of \$40,000 has prospered based on a highly focused state-led industrialization drive. The MBTI tool is widely



careers and
occupations



Shoya Zichy, MA (ENFP), is a career coach, seminar leader, and the author of *Career Match: Connecting Who You Are With What You'll Love To Do* and *Women and the Leadership Q*, now also available in Chinese and Korean. zichy@earthlink.net

used for clients (age 16 and up), along with other instruments like the Strong Interest Inventory®, Holland, and the Occupational Interest Profile (OIP). Career coaching is provided by the government, large companies, schools, and independent consultants. Although there are no special licensing requirements outside of those dictated by the instruments themselves, Singapore has always invested significantly in human capital development, notes Bell, who typically conducts up to 10 sessions with a client. The difference is that today, career paths are no longer as stable as they were 10 years ago; hence, the demand for services is on the rise.

Bell also covers Indonesia and Malaysia, both of which offer far fewer services than Singapore. Indonesia has a complex population of 234 million living on 17,500 islands made up of distinct ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups. With an average annual income of \$1,812, however, there is little professional counseling

available outside of major companies. A limited number of occupational psychologists advise members of upper class families. Malaysia, home to 27 million people, falls somewhere between its two neighbors. With an average income of \$6,648, the career counseling field is more developed and an increasing number of people are getting trained as coaches (executive, life, and career) through international accreditation programs run by organizations such as ICF, the International Coaching Federation.

The Philippines in Southeast Asia is an archipelagic nation of over 7,000 islands with a population of 90 million – and a whopping 11% work outside of their country. Though per capita income is a modest \$1,352, career counseling is widely available for high school and university students. The country has strong historic ties to U.S. educational traditions and English is one of its two primary languages. Mid-career changers tend to be guided by the human resources personnel in their companies and, more recently, by outside consultants. Christabel Garcia-Chao of Philippine Psychological Corp. is a consultant who provides assessments and coaching, usually in two sessions. The most popular assessments are the MBTI, Strong, Differential Aptitude Tests, and Career Interest Inventory.

Historically, career choices have been guided by parents whose opinions were highly respected. The elders, in turn, were influenced by the demands of the market, often directing their children to careers such as nursing and computer science because of high local and overseas demand. Today, career coaching is no longer considered a luxury service, and it is now embraced by the middle class families with college-bound children. Also, with access to the Internet, students are becoming more independent of family views and landing in fields outside their courses of study. This forebodes a growth in the coaching field and the government is taking note. A counseling qualification bill requiring a Masters degree in Guidance and Counseling is now being vigorously implemented and coaches are becoming more sensitive to the need for higher levels of professionalism in their industry.

We now turn to India, the hotbed of



today's global outsourcing activities. Long known for its high level of poverty with per capita income of \$977 per year, it is the second most populous country in the world and, according to Wikipedia, it is the second fastest growing large economy. The potential for career coaching is enormous. However, according to Purvi Sheth, CEO of Shilputsi Consultants, personalized career counseling is not widely available except for senior managers within corporations. Mid-level employees use the human resources departments in their companies and search for mentors, but few have access to formal career counseling.

Young people typically use the family network for guidance. Schools have psychologists who may test aptitudes but often spend most of their time "resolving mindset conflicts between parents and children on career perceptions," says Purvi. These counselors also provide information on different professions and guidelines on how to pursue them. Otherwise, the general attitude is one of skepticism; a somewhat negative aura surrounds the field, so people may hesitate to access these services.

Assessments most commonly used by coaches within the corporate framework include the MBTI, Johari Window, and Firo B/F. Typically a coach will provide 8-12 sessions over a 4 to 6 month period. Companies usually pick up the tab, but there is a growing demand for premium services paid for by the executives themselves. The supply of good coaches remains low and there is an absence of sufficient templates and assessment tools. Fundamentally, careers are dictated by the unique socio-cultural conditions of India; how much this will change in the face of an unprecedented job boom from foreign companies remains to be seen.

In the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula nestles a federation of seven states known as the United Arab Emirates or UAE for short. These include Dubai and Abu Dhabi, prosperous principalities whose per capita income of \$42,270 per year is only slightly below that of the U.S. (\$45,840). I checked in with Bruncha Milaszewski of Capita-Global who advises that career counseling is still in a nascent stage and generally seen as a service provided to university students. The reason is twofold: first, the area is developing so rapidly that views of what is acceptable work are under revision. Second, although the UAE has one of the world's largest expatriate populations, until recently it was legally difficult for foreigners to switch corporate sponsors. Legislative changes have made job switches easier and outplacement is on the rise. This will encourage mid-career exploration and create new demand for coaching services, but at the mo-

ment there are only a handful of professionals like Bruncha who provide it. No specific credentials are required, although most have advanced degrees. "Being Dr. So-and-So," he adds, "does provide immediate acceptance, though credibility can be achieved in other ways." Psychometric testing in general is a trend right now. The MBTI has been used, though many lean towards UK based instruments like the OIP and the variety of tools provided by JIST. Bruncha typically sees a client 3-4 times, and most of his clients are young people whose parents pay for the service.

In Saudi Arabia, career coaching is now mostly limited to 15- to 18-year-old students in both public and private schools. The discussion is conducted by teachers who transfer to become counselors. About 5%, like school advisor Mobarak Aldosari, has a Master's degree in counseling. The problem, notes Aldosari, is the lack of assessments and resources available in Arabic. Also, career scales determined in other countries do not fit the Arab culture and this is a major stumbling block in using outside materials. For the most part, counseling is conducted in group sessions offered each semester and includes activities such as interviewing skills, resume writing, job function outlines, and programs for students with special needs.

Despite a high estimated per capita income of \$21,200, coaching for adults is rare and offered to expatriates by HR professionals within their companies. Other types of career development may be found within specific institutions sponsored by a member of the royal family. For example, notes another consultant, a women's hospital conducted leadership training for its female doctors and technicians several years ago to ensure that each was on the appropriate career path. This underground layer of activity quietly promises further advances in human development.

In summary, career coaching activity is uneven but seems to be on the rise worldwide, fueled by the need to navigate and make sense of the unprecedented forces shaping today's global world of work.

Resources

China: Cheng Gong, Ienjoyjob Career Coaching Center, ienjoyjob@163.com

India: Purvi Sheth, Shilputsi Consultants-India. purvi@shilputsi.com, www.shilputsi.com

Indonesia, Malaysia, & Singapore: Andrew Bell, Hemisphere Consulting Pte, andrewbell@hc.com.sg, www.hc.com.sg

Philippines: Christabel Garcia-Chao, Philippine Psychological Corp., info@philpsycor.com

United Arab Emirates: Bruncha M. Milaszewski, Capita-Global FZE, bruncha@capita-global.com ■