Consideration of potential change is important for clients for several reasons. Adolescents who are making tentative choices may be several years removed from actual entry into the world of work. They probably should be more concerned about the status of possible occupations at that future date than about today's job market. Individuals at every stage of career development must be able to assess future conditions in their occupation if they are to evaluate correctly and plan effectively for the impact of change or constancy on their lives and lifestyles.

Some changes occur slowly and often can be anticipated or identified long before they exert influence. The transformation that results is usually great—if not permanent, at least long-lasting. Other changes take place more abruptly, and usually are briefer and less drastic in total impact. Some are one-time events and others are cyclical. Prediction of the future is still very inexact; unexpected events sometimes bring dramatic change with great suddenness, and at other times a change that has been widely anticipated and expected fails to occur. Nevertheless, we can be relatively confident that residents in temperate zones will need heavier clothing in the winter, and more ice cream and air conditioning in the summer. Similarly, we can be quite sure that an aging population will require more dentures, medical care, leisure activities, and retirement homes, but a sudden spurt in the birthrate will increase demand for baby food, diapers, and childcare centers.

Long-term Trends

Changes that occur gradually, over long periods of time and with great impact, can be classified into at least four broad groups. Some are interrelated, that is, one factor may instigate or retard a different kind of change. Some can be properly classified under more than one heading. For our brief discussion here we will consider long-term trends that can be placed in one of the following groups:

1. Population factors
2. Sociological factors
3. Economic factors
4. Technological factors

Population factor: The most obvious population factors are those that increase, decrease, or otherwise influence the nature of the population. The impact of the declining birth rate of the last two decades clearly emphasizes the influence of this type of change. Declining school enrollments have caused decreased need for teachers, classroom space and equipment, and school buses. Because fewer babies are being born, the average age of the total population moves upward, focusing the production of goods and services toward an older group.

Improved access to medical care, better nutrition and other life-extending factors have also changed the death rate so that people tend to live longer than previously. Older people create a different set of demands for goods and services. The two trends of decreased births and increased longevity compound the rate at which the average age of our population increases.

As the average age of the population moves upward, there is an impact on the availability of workers. One of the most difficult employment problems in recent years has been helping the large number of teenagers find beginning jobs. As that pool of prospective workers declines, the number available for beginning jobs decreases and some jobs that are usually filled by this age group may remain unfilled or may necessitate competitive activities to attract potential workers. As the post-World-War-II baby boom moves through the working years, one can expect to see greater competition for desirable positions with fewer opportunities for advancement. Another aspect of the population factor is the average age of workers in a specific occupation. Vacancies occur in occupations because of growth or increased jobs and because of replacement of workers who leave the work because of resignation, retirement, or death. If the average age is high, the replacement rate is also likely to be higher.
Sociological factors: Those influences that derive from the way we live and the values we support or oppose can be considered sociological in nature. Sometimes these aspects are expressed through legislation or by repealing or amending earlier legislation. For example, the efforts to improve the quality of air have increased demand for development, manufacture, and application of pollution-control devices. As those regulations are relaxed the need for the devices will possibly decrease, but the need for different services for those individuals whose health will not tolerate exposure to greater pollution will increase. Shorter working hours and increased emphasis on recreational activities have created demands for camping equipment, boats, travel trailers, and the development of facilities where these items can be used. Increased employment of married women has changed living patterns for many families, affecting housing, transportation, food, and other factors.

Access to training through educational opportunities has a heavy influence on the quality of workers. Many writers have emphasized that those individuals with the least education are usually the least skilled and most frequently unemployed. If access to education is enhanced, the quality and skill of workers is upgraded; if educational opportunities are withdrawn, the process is reversed.

The existence of adequate retirement programs or alternative support systems for older workers influences the number of workers who stay at work. The recent rise in mandatory retirement age from sixty-five to seventy will gradually increase the number of workers who continue beyond the traditional retirement age. Raising the age at which a worker qualifies for full retirement benefits will similarly keep workers on the job, as also will reductions in retirement benefits made available to workers.

Economic factors: In a totally free market, the supply and demand of workers and raw materials would greatly influence the number and nature of available jobs. In most societies, numerous controls have been developed that interfere with the free operation of the market. Many of these came into existence to regulate what had been seen as disruptive surges in that market. Although controls have subdued drastic and sudden fluctuations, there are still discernable trends that suggest upward or downward movements in the marketplace that bear on occupational opportunity.

Changes in capitalization requirements also influence jobs. Undoubtedly, one cause of the consistent decline in employment in agriculture relates to this factor. Farming of almost every type now requires such an extensive investment in land and equipment that efficiency becomes the determining factor between success and failure. In other businesses, the constant search for mergers is often related to economic factors that are fundamentally based on productive efficiency, creating more goods with fewer workers.

Access to new markets or the loss of existing markets may increase or decrease available jobs. Sometimes these factors may involve international relations and may be influenced by national rivalries. Also, access or loss of access to sources of supply is other aspects of the effects of international relations.

Technological factors: The unrelenting search for new and better ways to do things clearly creates entirely new industries and also sometimes wipes out others. One invention often leads to others that change our way of life and the things or services that we use in that life. One startling development in recent years has been the dramatic reduction of the time span between the discovery or invention of something new and the time that its benefits are available to the general public. It would be almost folly to attempt to enumerate here the many devices that we use routinely each day that did not exist a decade or two ago.

Closely related to invention and discovery is access to natural resources. The sudden recognition in the United States of our dependence on outside sources for such crucial items as petroleum has produced and is still producing vast changes in our lives and in occupational opportunities. The automobile industry has undergone a metamorphosis that in turn has affected the production of steel and other supplies. The search for oil has been accelerated, as has the search for alternate sources of energy. There are many other examples.

Short-term Trend

Several examples of factors producing short-term trends can be identified. Viewed from an objective perspective, these usually have less effect on long-term trends. Nevertheless, to individuals who are caught in the crunch produced by transitory factors, the impact can be
devastating. Some influences have a generalized effect across almost the entire economy, while others may be more specific.

One of the most obvious causes of short-term trends is various types of calamities, either man-made or natural. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, or volcanic eruptions can disrupt and change occupational patterns in the area for extended periods of time. For example, the 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens has required considerable occupational readjustment in a very large region.

Man-made disasters can be just as disruptive. War or the threat of war diverts large numbers of workers from civilian occupations to military assignments. It further affects others by switching manufacturing and other sectors to the production of military goods. It may create serious shortages of workers in fields that are considered less essential to the national welfare.

Fads, new directions in fashion, recreation and other activities, or similar caprices can also distort the occupational structure by creating new demands or reducing old ones. Changes in men's hair styles in recent years have eliminated many barber shops. Imitation of movie idols, popular athletes, or television stars can create demands where none previously existed. Some technological developments occasionally start in the area of fads, for example, videodiscs and home computers.

Seasonal variations are also influential. Summer tends to increase demand for goods and services in mountain and seaside resorts, while winter has the same effect on resorts located in warm areas. "Back-to-school" days include buying in retail stores for which manufacturers have previously been preparing. Planting time and harvest time change typical patterns in agricultural areas. The annual Christmas shopping season creates demand for temporary sales workers, letter carriers, transportation workers, and other types of workers.

There also are short-term economic factors that exert influence. Although the general business trend over long periods is either upward or downward, small segments of that larger trend will show considerable variation. Factors that create these short-term zigzags include strikes, unexpected surpluses or shortages of raw materials or processed goods, temporary market disruptions, fluctuations in access to short-term capital caused by changes in interest rates, inflationary pressures, changing tax laws, and sometimes even the anticipation of possible events.

In most situations, the client's consideration of possible career fields includes an expectation of a lengthy involvement. It is necessary, then, to look beyond the immediate job market status and, by evaluating both short-term and long-term trends, help the client make predictions about future circumstances that are as accurately based as possible.