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Developments in the Use of ICT in Lifelong Guidance: Implications for Guidance Services and Related Practices



Figure 2: Jaana Kettunen, Finnish Institute for Educational Research of the University of Jyväskylä, Finland

The potential of ICT¹ in career guidance has been recognized already for a long time. Beginning with access to traditional occupational and career information, ICT in career guidance has evolved to include a wide variety of information sources as well as facilitating interaction among clients and guidance professionals. This usage has continued to expand and exploit new technologies to provide distance services.

The past decades have seen an incredible expansion in access to ICT. Most notably, we have seen a significant increase in the use of *mobile technologies and social media*. Individuals are now able to access the internet not only through their personal computers but also through mobile phones and other mobile devices. These technological advances change how individuals explore and acquire information about education, training and work opportunities. The ‘read-only web’ has changed towards a more social, collaborative, interactive and responsive web. There is an acknowledged need to align these new technologies more closely with career guidance services and associated professional practices.

The evolving role of guidance practitioners

With technological developments and changes in society, there has also been a continual expansion of the guidance practitioner’s role. Over much of the past century, guidance professionals’ emphasis was in the career choice model, which focused on helping people make informed, point-in-time occupational choices. Guidance services were driven by the need to match an individual’s traits to job characteristics. In the latter half of the twentieth century, occupational choice came to be seen as part of a larger development process rather than as a singular matching exercise. The emphasis shifted from a choice of occupation as a single

¹ ICT is short for Information and Communication Technologies

point-in-time event to a longitudinal expression of career behaviours, in other words, from vocational development to career development. Today, guidance services have evolved beyond placement and career development into a networking model. This model prepares individuals for employment by focusing on developing networking skills, building relationships with stakeholders and establishing communities that will serve the individual's career and professional needs throughout their lifetime. Within this model, the practitioner's role has expanded to include expertise in managing social spaces. Career practitioners now provide direct services to individual clients seeking educational or vocational opportunities while simultaneously offering consulting services to organizations. They inform policy makers and perform a range of other roles that promote community capacity-building and individual access to employment. In short, guidance services have moved from the private to the public sphere and from individual sessions to collective engagement.

The rise of social media in career guidance

In recent years, social media has gradually gained a firm foothold in the field of career guidance and has become part of daily practice for many career practitioners. However, the profession as a whole remains unsure how to best implement and apply social media in everyday activities and communication. For many, social media refers to collection of online tools that enable communities to communicate, socialise, and share information. More precisely, social media can refer to online services and communal operating cultures that support and build interactions and networking through the active participation and cooperation of users and the communal sharing and production of information. Social media can also be defined as a process involving content, community and Web 2.0 technology through which individuals and groups can build common understandings and meanings. In this light, social media refers not to a particular set of technologies, but to types of practice in which users may either play active, content-producing and interactive roles or engage simply as observers. Social media provides new opportunities for career practitioners, but it also creates a demand in terms of new competencies.

From delivering information to co-careering

Recent research on career practitioners' experiences provides a snapshot of the ways in which social media is currently being used in career guidance. In its narrowest form, social media is simply a tool for distributing information without any opportunities for communication or interaction. In its broadest form, it is used for co-operative knowledge building and meaningful communal discussion on career issues.

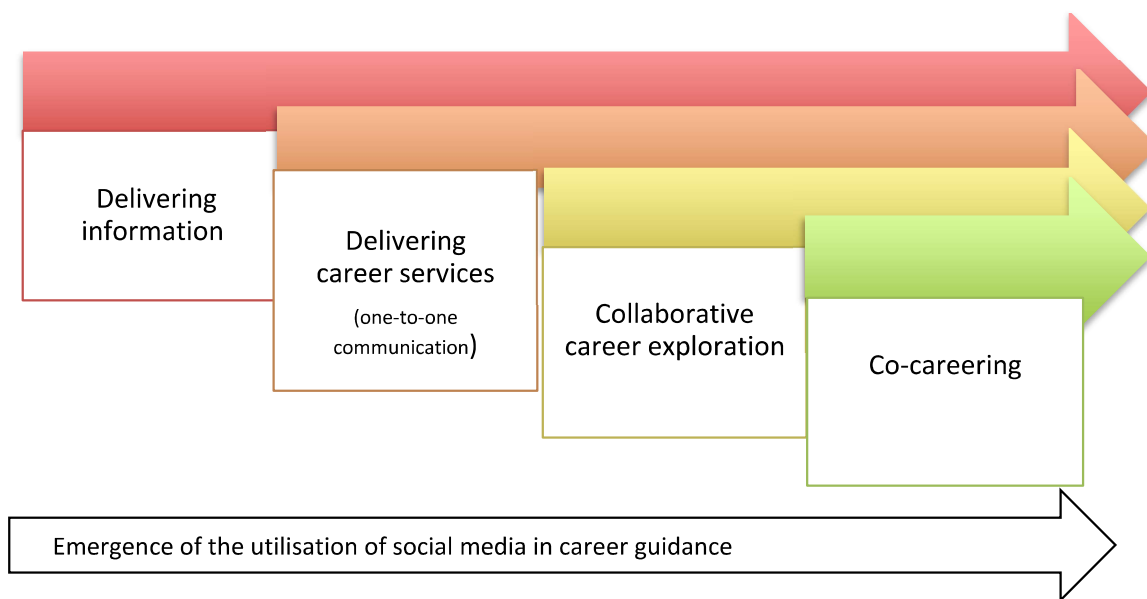


Figure 3: Emergence of the utilisation of social media in career guidance

The most typical - and most limited - purpose of using social media in career services is to *deliver information*. Social media is an effective means for delivering and disseminating information quickly, allowing career practitioners to reach large numbers of people instantaneously. However, the use of social media as an information source for professional purposes is giving cause for concern for some practitioners. Practitioners emphasise that active and safe participation on social media requires honed skills and the ability to seek, choose and evaluate complex online content. The accuracy and recency of information present ethical concerns, especially regarding information that practitioners themselves share online. Furthermore, the ability to support individuals in this area is highlighted. This also has to do with lifelong career management skills.

The second (and broader) purpose of utilising social media is for career services, not just for delivering information but also for *one-to-one communication*. This communication can occur either asynchronously, where there is a delay in the receipt of message, or synchronously, where people communicate simultaneously in real time. The ability to share real time texts, video and audio between individuals has created many new opportunities for interaction and working cooperatively on an individual's questions. In this regard, social media is seen as a functional and readily available alternative to face-to-face career services that allows anonymity. Since most communication on social media takes place in writing, the ability to write online is highlighted. Communicating with different individuals requires versatile and varied writing skills and a readiness to operate in new ways. Questions related to privacy and privacy protection present ethical concerns, particularly in online communication. Importance of knowing and understanding the privacy settings of different applications and services is highlighted.

The third - and even broader - purpose of utilising social media is to use it for collaborative *career exploration*. In this case, social media is no longer seen as an alternative tool but, rather, a workspace that is an integral part of career guidance. When producing information and results with others, the knowledge of methods, techniques and activities that foster collaborative processes in career learning among peer group members are highlighted. The ability to discuss matters online is essential. The practitioners place emphasis on establishing interesting discussions with individuals and groups that facilitate the building of knowledge, which requires structure, active support and guidance. The confidentiality in online communities and group discussions present an ethical challenge and the significance of creating confidential relationships and trust in group interactions and activities is emphasised. It is good to agree upon certain aspects and to go through what kind of collaborative interaction the group is building. This for example means to agree on how others are treated with support and respect.

The fourth and broadest purpose of utilising social media is for *co-careering*, where shared expertise and meaningful co-construction of career issues take place among community members. Creating and maintaining an online presence becomes the central factor and a key skill in this type of social media use. The ability to create a reliable and genuine image of oneself within the communities in which questions are discussed mutually requires a mindful, properly managed and monitored online presence. Maintaining an online presence also requires a practical understanding of the means and methods by which this presence is projected to others online.

Competency for social media in career guidance

As the skills and competencies in career guidance are often considered to be of secondary importance and are therefore poorly developed in training, there is an urgent need to update both pre-service and in-service training curricula. It is increasingly important to support career professionals in their understanding of the various social media tools and the innovative ways in which these tools can be incorporated into existing practices.

Social media challenges traditional interactions and practitioner-client relationships in guidance. The locus of control is shifting from experts to a blend of expert and socially-constructed knowledge. In this way, social media plays a significant role in reforming career practices and related work cultures. Social media provides opportunities to create new practices and paradigms to better reach individuals who need assistance with career exploration and decision-making. The challenge for the profession now is to decide how to use these technologies in the best way.

References

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