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CHAPTER 13.

Enhancing practitioners' skills to work in the digital context

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13.1. Introduction

The role that digital technologies can play has come under the spotlight during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even prior to the pandemic, the use of digital technologies was an emerging, strategic priority within the field. The growing consensus around the increasingly essential role of information and communication technology (ICT) in the career service sector is evidenced in a number of policy documents, case studies and reviews (Cedefop, 2011; Cedefop et al., 2020; Council of the European Union, 2004, 2008; Data Europa, 2014; OECD, 2004a, 2004b). As demand for services continues to grow, we need continually to review and improve our service delivery modes and mechanisms in a cost-effective manner. Technology provides opportunities to extend services, especially services aimed to reach those in remote locations or homebound due to disabilities. Individuals who prefer written, rather than spoken communication, or those having limiting disabilities, may also benefit from online services. To maximise these opportunities and support for those with weak digital skills or less experience with digital guidance services, it is important to ensure that career practitioners are equipped with the requisite ICT competences.

'Digitalisation' is a generic term for the digital transformation of all sectors based on large-scale adoption of existing and emerging digital technologies; these technologies are the tools through which digitalisation will occur (Randall and Berlina, 2019). Some of these technologies already exist and have been adopted to varying degrees; others exist but are yet to be adopted at large scale. In this article, ICT refers to the products, infrastructure and electronic content that support lifelong guidance policy and service delivery. These interactive services, resources and tools are designed and developed for citizens, and their use, in turn, informs their design. ICT also refers to the digital competency required to use technology in a career development context (ELGPN, 2015). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the skills and competences required for the use of ICT

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(including social media) in guidance were often considered secondary and are therefore poorly developed in initial and continuing training (Barnes et al., 2020; Kettunen, & Vuorinen, 2020; Cedefop, 2009, 2018; European Commission, 2014). It has become evident that, within professional training programmes, the role and use of ICT in guidance and counselling are dealt with very differently. A closer look at this issue has shown that most programmes do not teach the use of ICT in a professional context.

To contribute to the current discussion and improve the training of career professionals, this chapter describes the design and content of an international, jointly developed ICT training programme for guidance and counselling practitioners. Content development for the course drew on the latest phenomenographic research exploring career practitioner conceptions of social media and 'competency' (⁶⁴) for social media in career services (Kettunen, 2017). Phenomenographic studies help to improve practice by exploring variations in participants' experiences of the phenomenon in question, which are revealed by the dimensions of variations that highlight the differences between the conceptions (Akerlind, 2008). From an educational point of view, such studies also reveal what is needed to gain a more complex understanding of the topic in question.

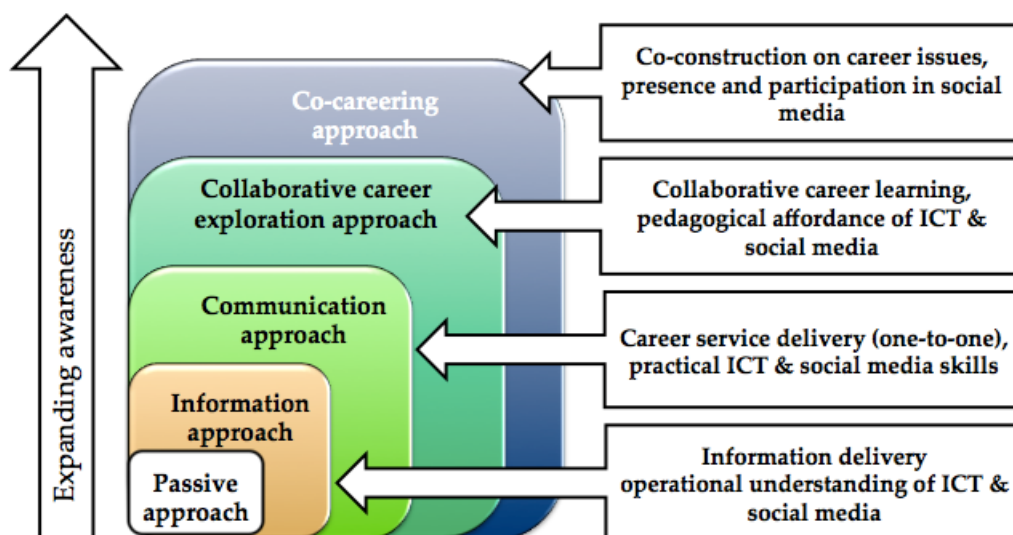
The training programme described was jointly designed and delivered by the Finnish Institute for Educational Research (FI), Malmö University (SE), eVejledning (DK) and the University of Iceland (IS). The partners involved have extensive experience in training and research in the use of ICT in the guidance and counselling field, and they support and work with practitioners both in Nordic countries and internationally. Their complementary competences, experience, knowledge, and skills encompass higher education (SE/IS), practical applications (DK), research (FI) and private practice (SE) specifically within career guidance. The course is open to degree-seeking students and experienced practitioners from various settings, as it exposes them to situations that challenge them to see and reflect on the variation in the potential uses of technology in career guidance and counselling. Those who *successfully complete the course are awarded five ECTS credits*.

⁶⁴) While competence is the ability to do a particular task, competency concerns the underlying characteristics which allow a person to perform well in a variety of situations (e.g. Trotter & Ellison, 2001, p. 36). The term competency is used throughout the text to refer to the combination of relevant attributes that underpin successful professional performance (Moore, Cheng, & Dainty, 2002; Woodruffe, 1991).

13.2. From information delivery to co-careering

Kettunen (2017) established an empirically derived evidence-based foundation for the development of international training programmes for guidance and counselling practitioners. This foundation considers the fact that ICT is used both on a self-help basis (e.g. self-directed use of career resources and service) and as part of face-to-face service in physical settings and distance service delivery via ICT. The results revealed five general approaches to social media and competency for social media (for details about the study results, see Kettunen, 2017). These encompass a passive approach and information-centred, communication-centred, collaborative career exploration and co-careering approaches (see Figure 1). Co-careering refers to the shared expertise and meaningful construction on career issues among community members (Kettunen, 2017, p. 41). This foundation offers a basis and establishes a continuum on which to work, resulting in the provision of training and opportunities to experiment more broadly and practice with ICT and social media. Specific practitioner competences addressed during the course include proficiency in locating, evaluating and using online content; being a versatile and thoughtful writer; being able to generate and sustain engaging and constructive online discussion; and creating a visible and trusted online presence (Kettunen et al., 2020; Kettunen; Sampson and Vuorinen, 2015).

Figure 1. **Five general approaches to ICT and social media in guidance**



Source: Based on J. Kettunen et al., 2017, p.48.

Emphasis was also placed on interventions that foster collaborative learning among peer group members (Kettunen; Sampson and Vuorinen, 2015) to support career learning and development. Throughout the course, the use of ICT in guidance and counselling was linked to ethical issues (such as accuracy and validity of recourses, confidentiality, and user privacy). Peterson and colleagues (2008) cognitive information-processing approach was used to illustrate how theory can be deployed to guide ICT-based career counselling and guidance practice.

The course underlying teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in social constructivist (Brown; Collins and Duguid, 1989) and sociocultural theories (Säljö, 1975). These concepts informed decisions on how to organise the training and the employment of a student-centred approach and problem-based or case-based 21st century learning principles for professional education. In this view, learning is a situated process within a community of mutually supportive learners, and research-based knowledge is linked to practice through hands-on training and empirical examples provided by instructors and participants. The course assigned great importance to experimentation and collaboration in interactive workshops to increase knowhow, adopting a goal-oriented approach based on the sequence theory/application discussion. Building on this idea, teaching invokes the central idea of constructivism: learners as constructors of meaning (Mason and Watson, 2005).

To demonstrate how the course was implemented based on the continuum from information delivery to co-careering, each of these approaches is described in the next sections. Compared to the other more proactive stances in the model, the term 'passive approach' implies that successful integration of ICT in guidance services depends not only on the skills or technical facilities available but also on practitioners' willingness to accept the changes that new technology may bring to service delivery.

13.3. Delivering information

The most common use of ICT in guidance is the dissemination of career information. The course seeks to augment students' ability to identify and evaluate online career information and resources and to teach them how to use these tools creatively to meet client needs. To improve information delivery capability, the teaching focused on media and information literacy: proficiency in locating, evaluating and using online content. Participants shared career information and online resources and described how these are used (or could best be used) in professional practice. Using real-world examples, the goal of

these exercises was to illustrate how the multiple types and sources of available information could be utilised to enhance career services. Participants also worked with case examples to develop their awareness of potential sources of invalidity in social media-based career information, specifically the occupational, educational, training and employment information developed and disseminated by users of that information (Sampson et al., 2018). Potential sources of invalidity include intentional bias (with or without profit motive), unintentional bias, restricted range of experience, out-of-date information, popularity bias, similarity bias, and context deficiency (for more detailed information, see Sampson et al., 2018). Examples of software evaluation criteria (NCDA, 1991) were distributed and discussed in small groups. Participants reviewed and shared their observations regarding the assigned sections under the following headings: programme information, career development process, interaction, technical aspects of the software and materials, and support. These activities were designed to increase participant awareness of existing criteria, as well as their ability to identify and evaluate online career information and resources.

13.4. One-to-one communication

The course aimed to expand students' ability to use ICT for one-to-one communication. This communication can be synchronous (in real time) or asynchronous (involving a delay). Training was provided in text-based communication using email and chat, as these are the most commonly used forms of communication in guidance service provision. The training focused on online writing; examples of authentic and anonymised text-based email cases were distributed, and participants analysed these in groups, discussing the emotions expressed in the written material and the questions raised. After discussing how best to address the case, they worked together to formulate a written response. The aim of these exercises was to highlight the potential for empathetic responses and summarisation in a written context. The exercises also afforded opportunities for participants to develop their understanding and skills in providing guidance and counselling in written form. For instance, to convey their intentions and engage the client, practitioners must be able to draw on guidance and counselling skills that include paraphrasing, clarifying, summarising, empathising, sharing observations, supporting, open-ended questioning and reassuring (Amundson, 2003).

To broaden their knowledge and use of chat (synchronous communication in written form) in professional practice, the course included an introduction to Danish eGuidance and the associated 4C model of communication, which

involves four phases: contact, contract, communication, and conclusion. The contact phase seeks to establish and maintain a good relationship with the client. The contract phase seeks to define together the focal issue of the virtual guidance session in collaboration with the client. In the communication phase, the counsellor processes the information received from the client and attempts to put the issue in perspective. Finally, in the conclusion phase, the counsellor provides information and/or instructions regarding the focal issue as defined during the contract phase and assesses the client's readiness to act.

The course activities encouraged participants to reflect on chat as a medium for guidance and counselling and on any possible differences in how chat is used across various countries. Based on examples of authentic and anonymised chat, they also used the 4C model to identify the different phases, noting parts that functioned well and less well and how chat functions in a guidance and counselling context. Participants also gained direct experience in chatting; working in pairs, one played the client and contacted the other student (as the counsellor) with a personal dilemma. In each phase, the 4C model was used to equip the eGuidance practitioner with concrete questions and phrases. By switching roles, participants gained experience in experimenting with chat as both a counsellor and a client in a professional context.

13.5. Collaborative career exploration

In collaborative career exploration, knowledge is shared in purposefully designed online spaces among individuals and practitioners as they work towards common learning goals, such as understanding the question at hand or solving a problem. The teaching addressed participants' skills and knowledge in devising interventions to foster collaborative career exploration through online discourse. This focused on practitioners' ability to design a space that integrates self-directed materials with interactive communication and knowledge of methods, techniques and activities to improve participation and interaction in online discourse and to foster peer group collaboration in career learning (Kettunen, 2017). A five-stage model of structured learning activities (Salmon, 2011) was introduced as a means of building interaction and participation. The model includes social interaction, motivation and learning by using digital tools. The first two stages of Salmon's model seek to acclimatise the learner to the online environment and to develop a supportive social context. In the third stage (information exchange), learners interact with course materials and online activities and exchange further resources. In the fourth stage (knowledge construction), learners work collaboratively, sharing ideas, posing problems, and

challenging each other in the spirit of inquiry. Here, the practitioner facilitates the continuing learning process by asking questions, enhancing discussion, and motivating and encouraging learners. The final stage (development) invites participants to take responsibility for and reflect on their own learning.

Throughout the course, learners used an online learning platform based on this model to gain experience of collaborative career exploration and to develop a practical understanding of methods for improving participation and interaction in online discourse. Participants gained direct experience in instructor-facilitated as well as peer-facilitated online discourse through activities such as virtual meetings: addressing a case scenario involving an ethical dilemma by defining key issues, identifying ideal resolutions, and brainstorming practical strategies in small groups. Discussion and group reflection processes were audio- and video-recorded and shared among participants, allowing everyone to have access to their own and peer group reflections to encourage whole group discussion. In addition to its collaborative aspect, the exercise allowed participants to experience using video conferencing/communication, which is gradually becoming the new normal in shaping the way we communicate, learn and work.

13.6. Co-careering

Social media use has become a daily practice for many career practitioners in facilitating co-careering which refers to the shared expertise and meaningful construction on career issues among community members (Kettunen, 2017, p. 41). To develop relevant student co-careering skills and understanding, the training focused on how to create and express a visible and trusted online presence, as well as questions of ethical practice in social media, including accuracy and validity of resources, professional boundaries and issues of confidentiality and privacy. To begin, the concept of co-careering was introduced and discussed, and examples were provided of how different clients might use social media to explore occupational, educational and employment issues with others, including friends, personal acquaintances and even individuals with whom no personal relationship exists. Participants worked through the examples, identifying the phases in which co-careering occurred. Emphasis was placed on more conscious engagement with online communities where meanings and understandings are co-constructed, and empirical examples referred to strategies for operationalising a visible and trusted online presence in professional practice.

The key to success in social media is to establish clear goals and ensure that actions work to achieve them (Rutledge, 2010). Building a reliable and authentic image within relevant communities requires a mindful online presence

and monitoring and actively updating one's online profiles, grounded in a practical understanding of how this presence is conveyed to others. Strategies to operationalise a visible and trusted online presence (Sampson, Kettunen, and Vuorinen, 2020) were explored and discussed in terms of practitioner need to monitor social media posts within their organisations to:

- (a) respond to requests for information or services;
- (b) recommend resources and services that fit individual characteristics and needs, following up as appropriate;
- (c) exploit opportunities for co-careering among community members that their organisation serves, identifying and responding to teachable moments;
- (d) participate in social media sites maintained by their organisation by answering questions or requests, recommending resources and services as appropriate, marketing their organisation and other sources of assistance, and engaging in co-careering as opportunities emerge.

In exploring social media engagement tactics, participants crafted social media posts that would encourage interaction. The aim was to illustrate co-careering and to reflect on one's own future practice in this regard.

13.7. Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about new needs for digital services and increased the demand for existing ones. New methods of access to guidance services are offering opportunities to address people's needs and expectations. However, one of the issues facing policy-makers is the increased need to develop the skills and competences of the practitioners and managers of guidance centres/services. Career practitioners' capacity building is crucial for the successful integration of ICT in careers practice, and there is an urgent need for both the pre-service and in-service training curricula to be updated to include this knowledge. This jointly developed international course provides a concrete model for bridging the skills gap in career practitioners' initial and continuing training using a research-based framework (Kettunen, 2017) for ICT competence development. This training will raise the professional profile and standards of career practitioners and other staff involved in guidance activities by enabling them to respond more effectively to the needs and expectations of both citizens and policy-makers (Council of the European Union, 2008). This would likely lead to improved coordination and cooperation between stakeholders in the use of new and emerging technologies for easier access to lifelong guidance and information through diverse and innovative service delivery.

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