

Careers Services: Engaging ‘disengaged’ young people in multicultural contexts

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ABSTRACT

Young people in multicultural contexts are often under the influence of multiple social and cultural factors when they begin to consider career development. What is often expressed as ‘boredom’ is in effect a reflection of their disengagement from ‘prescribed’ modes of career development. Further more, multicultural societies increase the likelihood of the counsellor and counsellee coming from differing social-cognitive environments, each influenced and guided by their own career beliefs. It is essential in such situations that counsellors are particularly sensitive to deeper processes of social change and their own attitudes that could influence the career counselling process. The impact of career guidance may be maximised when techniques that address underlying cognitions about career development are incorporated into the counselling process. This symposium is presented in three parts. It begins with the notion of cultural preparedness as a theoretical framework within which the relevance of careers services could be examined. It goes on to considering the narrative approach as a method for culture-sensitive career counselling. The symposium concludes with case studies from India and the Maldives that illustrate the development and implementation of careers services in a culture-centred manner.

Paper 1: Cultural Preparedness: A framework for career counselling

Gideon Arulmani

Work: What are young people saying?

Over the ages our attribution of meaning to work has been moulded by ideologies, shaped by the tenets of a variety of philosophies and transformed by revolutions. Traditionally, prosperity was achieved by engaging with work in a specifically defined manner. The individual was expected to obtain the necessary educational qualifications, apply for a job and go through recruitment procedures to obtain a job. Career progress was related to performance on the job and to effectively discharging job responsibilities. People usually stayed committed to a particular career path for a life time. Working hard, loyalty to one’s company, persisting toward career goals and making sacrifices demanded by one’s work life, were values espoused by an earlier work ethic.

Today, attitudes to work have undergone dramatic changes and young people approach work in a manner that is quite different from their older counterparts. Commitment to specific career path for a long duration of time seems to be giving way to a “let me wait and see”, attitude. Preoccupied by “what else might be available”, an

increasing number of young workers prefer to “hang loose” and tend to shy away from long term commitments. The following statements reflect some of these attitudes:

- “I don’t want to be like my mum. Thinks she’s liberated. Works so hard. But she’s dead when she gets home. Irritable. Not fun anymore. I would find her life boring. But it’s my life.” *14 year old girl, Portsmouth (UK).*
- “Everything is changing. I don’t know if what I study will be relevant to the job market. It is better just to wait and see.” *18 year old girl, Hanoi (Vietnam).*
- “There are high paying jobs available in the BPO sector for which you must know only how to speak English. So that’s what I’m going to do... and I will stop going to college.” *18 year old boy, Bangalore, India.*
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- “My dad? He's on a short fuse. Hates his job... don't want that. I'll do my thing. And one job...for a LIFE time... no way!” *16 year old boy, Portsmouth (UK).*

The multicultural context:

Another issue that confronts the delivery of careers services is that work today occurs within a context that is populated by individuals from varied cultural, socio-economic and religious backgrounds. Patterns of immigration over many decades and the forces globalisation over the recent past have led to multicultural societies becoming a strongly present reality today. In the contemporary situation, work has to be understood within the framework of diversity and multicultural social contexts. Today, there is a higher likelihood of counsellor and counselee coming from differing cultural backgrounds, each influenced and guided by their own career beliefs. It is essential in such situations that counsellors are particularly sensitive to cultural factors (their own as well, as those of their clients), that could influence the career counselling process.

Cultural preparedness:

It is at this point that I would like to introduce the notion of *cultural preparedness*. Methods of counselling that emerged in the West were created by members of this culture in response to needs expressed from within this culture. The approaches were in effect developed by a people, for a people with certain orientations. One of the reasons for the success of these approaches could be that both the creators of the service as well as the consumers of the service were culturally prepared in a closely similar manner to offer and partake of the service. They share a similar vocabulary of values and cherish a particular approach to life. At a very fundamental level, the counsellor and counselee, in the West, have the same cultural heritage: a heritage that has *prepared* them over a period of time to engage with each other in a mutually compatible manner. It is against this background of cultural preparedness, that conditions could be created for a particular approach to counselling that were necessary and sufficient for that context. The key point to be noted is that the same conditions may be neither necessary nor sufficient for a people who have different cultural heritage. A counselling approach that is empirical and individualistic in its orientation, for example, may not find resonance amongst a people whose culture has prepared them over the ages to approach their existence in an intuitive, experiential and community oriented manner. To flourish in the contemporary, globalised context, counselling psychology cannot be

viewed primarily as a Western specialty rooted in logical positivism (Savikas, 2007). If these critiques are to be addressed it would be necessary to examine subjectivist versus objectivist epistemologies with the view to building bridges that would allow counsellors from different persuasions to function in tandem (Laungani, 2005).

The universal and the particular: Finding a balance

Approaches to delivering careers services within a culturally diverse context could be categorised between two extreme positions: universalism and particularism.

The Universalist position would look for the *common ground*, shared across cultures. All-embracing *principles* that describe as wide a range of observations as possible would be identified. The attempt would be to *generalize* rather than focusing on specific characteristics. The approach lends itself to data generation and analysis based on which nomothetic trends and commonalities can be understood.

The Particularist approach rests on the assumption that human experience is mediated not only by universal structures, but by particular cultural characteristics as well. The focus is on culturally learned perspectives that are unique to a particular culture. It is emphasised that beliefs and activities should be interpreted in terms of one's own culture. The approach provides detailed and comprehensive descriptions of particular situations.

The universalist approach could foster dominance by the more powerful majority culture at the expense of minority cultures. It could homogenise and destroy diversity. On the other hand, the particularist approach could result in a list ever-expanding constituent groups that perceive themselves as being, different, special, disenfranchised. One could be left finally with nothing more than individual differences. Therefore while the universalist could miss the trees for the forest, the particularist could miss the forest for the trees!

Pedersen and Ivey (1993) suggest that counsellors adopt a "culture-centered" perspective. A culture-centered careers service provider would be sensitive to the broad spectrum of similarities and differences which characterise a society as well as be able to take client diversity in consideration. Culture-centred career counselling would require a conceptual framework that recognizes: culture-*particular* characteristics that distinguish one from the other as well as culture-*universal* characteristics that unite and bridge differences.

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Paper 2: The Narrative Approach to career guidance in an uncertain world

Dr Hazel Reid,

Abstract: The paper presents a narrative-based approach as a method for career guidance work. Drawing on a current project, the usefulness of this approach for helping young people explore the links between work lives and personal lives is discussed.

Introduction

This paper is set within the debate about the purpose, values and methods of career guidance within an uncertain world in which notions of predictable career trajectories are difficult to sustain. The emotional and intellectual demands made on individuals in present times can be considerable and the situation for many young people living in economically marginalized communities can be dire. The career guidance community operates in a hard economic environment dominated by the market, by targets, prescribed outcomes and the pressure to ‘persuade’ people into education, training or work. The reality of market pressures and work intensification can mean that targets have to be met for individual but also commercial survival. There may be scepticism about the possibility of meaningful client-centredness in such a climate: best get on with what can be done, in realistic ways. On the other hand, many practitioners are concerned about the inadequacy of traditional responses to the complex requirements of clients living in multicultural and diverse communities. There is a need then to question the established and often ‘prescribed’ intervention models when responding to the guidance needs of a variety of young people. When evaluating the effectiveness of any career guidance intervention, judgements cannot be made without reference to culture, context and the specific social circumstances in which young people live. Given the variations with regard to the processes of social change, and the dominance of cultural beliefs both within and across different communities, it is not sensible to advocate for a single ‘best fit’ model of guidance intervention. Established models, associated with outcome-driven thinking based on lists of personality traits and job factors, or ideas based on linear development through education to a lifetime career, may be useful for some but are unlikely to engage all young people (Reid, 2008). This seminar holds that other approaches are needed that recognise the personal, social and cultural locations of those seeking guidance.

Narrative career counselling is one alternative approach and is the focus of this paper. The intention of such an approach is to explore notions of identity, in the broadest life-wide sense, encompassing personal values and motivators, desire and resistance. More is involved here than fitting young people into available educational courses, training schemes and jobs: the approach locates context, meaning and action in the foreground. A narrative approach questions the taken-for-granted views of the purpose, process and outcomes of career guidance. In other words, the key concept of who owns the story: who determines the sense of a story and who makes decisions about the development of career goals and career action (Reid, 2006). Issues related to power are at the heart of such an approach.

Usefulness of the narrative approach

Moving on, this section of the paper will draw on a current project that the author is undertaking with a colleague, Dr Linden West, and eight career guidance practitioners.

The project is discussed in greater detail in another paper presented at the conference, where the model is also outlined (Reid and West, 2009) – here, the benefits of adopting a narrative approach will be discussed. The group did consider a number of ‘new’ approaches, but decided to adopt and adapt the Savickas (2005, 2006) narrative career counselling model. In brief this consists of a *beginning* which negotiates a contract, a *middle* which uses Savickas’ six favourite questions and explores stories from childhood; followed by an interpretation stage. After a period of reflection, the *ending* includes a follow up action and review phase.

Our project is a work in progress. The work is challenging because it requires the practitioner to move from the comfort of their familiar model, not least when time pressures can constrain innovative practice. A piecemeal approach rooted in the desire for narrative thinking could be a starting point: in other words trying the approach to see what works. Flexibility not rigidity is required: paying time and attention to the story and providing a creative space for interpretation should drive the process, not the model. Practitioners found that staying with the story and asking follow up questions opened up the opportunity for the young person to think at a deeper level, developed confidence and rapport, and resulted in ‘richer’ thinking. Being listened to in this way inspired participation from shy, reluctant or withdrawn clients and more considered engagement from others.

A concern at the start of the project was how to deal with any difficult stories that might emerge, but it is still possible to listen and contain these and stay within the boundaries of a guidance (rather than therapeutic counselling) context. The other significant issue was how to approach the interpretation of the discussion. When watching the Savickas DVD, practitioners were uneasy about this aspect of the model. Our practitioners did not see themselves as ‘expert enough’ to lead on the interpretation of the material in the same way. The solution for them was to use questions that facilitated the client to lead on this. What worked particularly well was preceding this phase with an explanatory introduction; for example, ‘The theory goes that the stories that come to your mind are connected to the decisions that you are trying to make’. This links to the concept of exploring their *pre-occupations*: indeed one practitioner used the Savickas concept of *rehearsing the problem* in their introduction to this phase of the interview.

Another point emphasised in facilitating storytelling, was to assure the client that this was not ‘tell me about your childhood’, but ‘tell me about the first story that you think of’: otherwise the client may search for a ‘good’ story to please the listener or put them in a ‘good light’. And to clarify, practitioners decided where and with whom they would use the approach, guided by their assessment of the model’s potential usefulness with particular clients. Finally, feedback from both practitioners and clients has been positive. Perhaps the most powerful comment came from a young person: ‘Wow, I’ve never thought of that before – and **it all came from me!**’

Conclusion

Within career guidance a multicultural awareness, in its widest sense (Reid, 2005), is essential in order to avoid a ‘western’ approach that fails to recognise the

importance of culture, community and family in the decision making process. Taking time to build rapport through listening to client stories, and demonstrating respectful and culturally sensitive curiosity, is more likely to lead to young people engaging in an effective career development process. When a young person appears bored and says, 'I don't know' they probably mean, 'I don't trust you enough to tell you'.

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Paper 3: Yes! Because I can: Social marketing as technique to influence attitudes toward career planning

Mariyam Nazima

Background

This paper is a case study from the Republic of Maldives. A social marketing strategy was developed to increase public awareness of employment opportunities and the merits of employment in a diverse range of occupations. A review of existing reports and earlier studies indicated the following. Arulmani (2004) found that while a high value was placed on education, young people in the Maldives tended to demonstrate a lower orientation to exercising control over the trajectory of their lives and that their motivation to create opportunities for themselves and engage with career development tasks was weak

Target Groups

a. Young people: School students who are currently studying in Grades 7-12; young people who have completed school or left school from Grade 7 and above, and are

currently unemployed; young people who are currently employed but require career planning skills.

b. Parents of the identified young people:

Sometimes even though young people may be open to the idea of skills training and entry level jobs, their parents may not accept this idea as they may have higher aspirations for their kids. Therefore, great importance was given to address the parents of target group 1 to reach the objectives of the campaign.

c. Training Providers

The training providers are the link between the young people and the employers. They are the people that provide the young people with the appropriate training for the job opportunities in the market. This group is also very important for the young people for the reason that they offer them the opportunity to climb up the career ladder.

d. Employers

This group of people have the final say! They have the power to decide whom they employ. They were an important group in the social marketing strategy.

Marketing Plan

In order to influence the identified negative attitudes and behaviour of the target audiences, a strong identity and an original concept had to be created. It had to be something that the young target group could relate to and at the same time something which the older and more traditional target groups would accept. The core objective therefore, was to 'brand' work and career development with a spirit of freshness and affirmative action. To achieve this, the name of the existing government sponsored skills development programme, namely, Youth Employment Skills was adapted. A brand 'Yes', which is an acronym for Youth Employment Skills was created that embodied the values and beliefs that this social marketing campaign advocated (Arulmani and Abdulla, 2007). In creating the brand 'attitude branding' was given the highest priority. 'Yes' was branded as a positive attitude towards life and of empowerment. The phrase '*Because I can*' was added to 'Yes'. The slogan '*Yes because I can*' embodied the 'Yes' campaign. This is a positive and empowering statement that encourages young people including young women to take control of their lives and to do what they choose to be.

Marketing Communications

All marketing communications were made interactive as much as possible to get all the target groups, involved in the process. 'Yes' was introduced, by creating a 'cool' character. 'Yes' embodied the characteristics of a teenager so that the target group 'youth' could identify with 'Yes'. It is important that 'Yes' is gender neutral so that both male and female can relate to the campaign.

'Yes' is: 'cool', young, a bit rebellious, a bit confused at times, believes in himself/herself, reliable and can be counted upon by friends, gender neutral.

Various youth friendly media were used to draw the target audiences to the 'Yes' website and the toll free number. Careers information was provided to all website visitors and callers. This initial input was followed up with systematic career counselling workshops conducted by counsellors trained in the 'Yes' methodology.

Target Group 2: Parents of young people

Awareness programmes were held for parents. The workshops focused on parents' mindsets towards entry level jobs for their children. Parental role to encourage young people to develop skills that would make them ready for the world of work and to be independent together with encouraging parents to give young people confidence in themselves and their potential to choose a career path for themselves were addressed.

To achieve this, success stories of people who started small and made something of themselves, stories of young people working at 'ordinary' jobs and how it has changed their life for the better were created. These material became a part of the 'Yes' careers workshops.

Target Groups 3 and 4: Training Providers and Employers

This group was addressed by taking steps to ensure the training providers and the employers worked together to train a work force for the requirements of the labor market. Training providers were brought into the circle through seminars and workshops and regular news bulletins from the ministry. Training providers were kept well informed about the training needs and requirements of the employers. Links were established between training providers and employers so that training providers and employers are partners in training a work force that will get employment after the training is completed

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that, in the case of Maldives Social Marketing played a major role in changing the mindsets related to work and employment. More and more youth, both out of school and in school and parents are registering themselves for the 'Yes' career guidance programs. While the actual impact would be seen after running such a program for three to five years, initial trends indicate that in the Maldives a significant change was seen from all the target groups.

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Paper 4: The Jiva approach to career counselling: A case study from India

Gideon Arulmani

The word Jiva means 'life' in most of the Indian languages. The Jiva approach to career counselling is based on the premise that a healthy career is integrally connected to one's life. Jiva is based on five career development principles that have been interpreted from Indian culture.

The Jiva Spiral: A non linear approach to career development

Ancient Indian philosophy presents a cyclical approach to life. Jiva uses the image of a spiral to describe development. Nature is full of examples of spirals ranging from the structure of galaxies, to the shell of a snail and the blossoming of a rose bud. Rarely does a career develop in a linear and sequential manner. It has its ups and downs and grows with the individual. Over time, one returns to where one started, but in a qualitatively different manner: one is older and more mature. One moves from the path that one was a part of, onto a related, but different path. A healthy career develops upon previous development, whereby one constantly learns from the past and looks to the future, all through one's life.

The Jiva Tick Mark: Assess before you accept

Indian philosophy exhorts the individual to exercise objectivity and practice dispassion (*nishkama*) when making decisions. Jiva interprets this to point out that the nature of economic development today, presents the Indian young person with innumerable opportunities in the labour market. This does not mean that just because an opportunity exists it should be taken. Career development requires the skill to weigh up pros and cons and then accept or reject. How relevant is an opportunity to one's interests and aptitudes? Is an opportunity merely a job offering or is it an opening into a real career? Finding answers to such questions are examples of career development skills fostered by Jiva workshops.

Green and blue: A healthy career is green and blue

Sensitivity to the 'other' is a deeply valued Indian concept. Jiva interprets this into a career development principle that challenges the young person's sensitivity to the environment. Global warming, biodiversity, conservation of water and energy, renewable energy, waste management, transportation alternatives, affordable housing, environmental health and social justice are examples of issues that today impact all careers. The survival of our planet is directly linked to manner in which we practice our careers. Green and blue are the Jiva colours and Jiva workshops provoke young career choosers to consider the question: "When you set the sky as your limit are you also turning the earth brown?"

The Changing and the Unchanged: Coping with unpredictability

Indian philosophers describe the cosmos as a paradox of change and constancy. Jiva sensitises the young person to the fact that the individual is growing and changing, while the world of work is also changing with new opportunities constantly emerging. A career develops in finding the balance between what changes and what does not change.

Personal interests for example, are liable to change while aptitudes are deeper traits and therefore are more stable. Jobs are tied to the boom and bust of the labour market. But a career, composed as it is of a collection of jobs, does not go out of demand as easily.

Give, in order to get: A principle for life long development

Indian philosophy describes life to play out in clearly definable stages (ashramas) and each stage is described to have its being in the dynamic interaction between the garnering of personal gain and services rendered to society. Jiva uses this concept to highlight that career development suffers or even grinds to a halt when the dynamic tension between this 'giving' and 'receiving' is disturbed. The nature of work today is such that skill-sets become quickly redundant. The post industrial labour market requires educational and occupational planning not just at the end of school, but throughout one's life. This Jiva principle focuses on skills to build a career, keeping a *life long* perspective in mind.

The Jiva approach uses these culturally embedded symbols and beliefs as the scaffolding upon which career development workshops are conducted.

Conclusion: Engaging 'disengaged' youth

The cultural preparedness approach blends universal principles with particular needs. In both the case studies above, career counselling activities such as promoting self-understanding, learning about the world of work, developing career alternatives and career path planning are executed as they would have been in any other career counselling context. However the methods used and the interpretation of career development aligns itself thematically with the local culture. The narrative is a powerful medium to that could allow a careers service begin from where the young person is, rather than attempt to push the young person to where he or she 'ought to be'.

The cultural preparedness approach gives a careers programme a contextually relevant identity and thereby integrates into the fabric of the way in which a people live their lives. We suggest that it is more likely that young people would engage with a careers intervention when the universal principles of guidance are interpreted into their particular cultural contexts.