

Career Development

The Role of Guidance and Counselling in Fostering an Increased Range of Educational and Career Alternatives*

(December 2010)

Article for TVETipedia

by

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A Context for Career-Life Planning

Career Development refers to a life-long process of managing learning, work, and transitions in order to move toward a personally determined and evolving preferred future. Some people naturally develop ability to manage their careers in a meaningful way, but others need assistance, especially as the rate of economic, occupational, and social change escalates. In order for appropriate assistance to be available, policy makers and service providers need the basic knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are inherent in helping people develop meaningful lifelong learning plans that interface with their career paths.

People's careers develop over time regardless of whether they are planful about the process or leave it to chance. People are more likely to acquire meaningful and satisfying work if they are planful about the opportunities they pursue and the education and training they take. When people have a vision for what they want to do with their lives, they tend to be more focused, better able to spot opportunities, and be more persistent in pursuit of those opportunities.

Why Career Guidance and Counselling?

There are tangible benefits associated with the provision of guidance services. For example, research in North America tells us that when schools implement comprehensive guidance and counselling programs in a manner that involves student as partners in their learning experiences, they experience the following benefits:

- Greater academic achievement
- Reduced drop-out rate
- Lower absenteeism
- Reduced student alienation
- Reduced exposure to bullying and harassment
- Reduced incidence of smoking and drinking
- More positive school climate
- Greater satisfaction with school
- Greater student participation in school programs
- Students report their school experiences as more relevant and better at preparing them for the future
- Students indicate that the quality of their education is better.

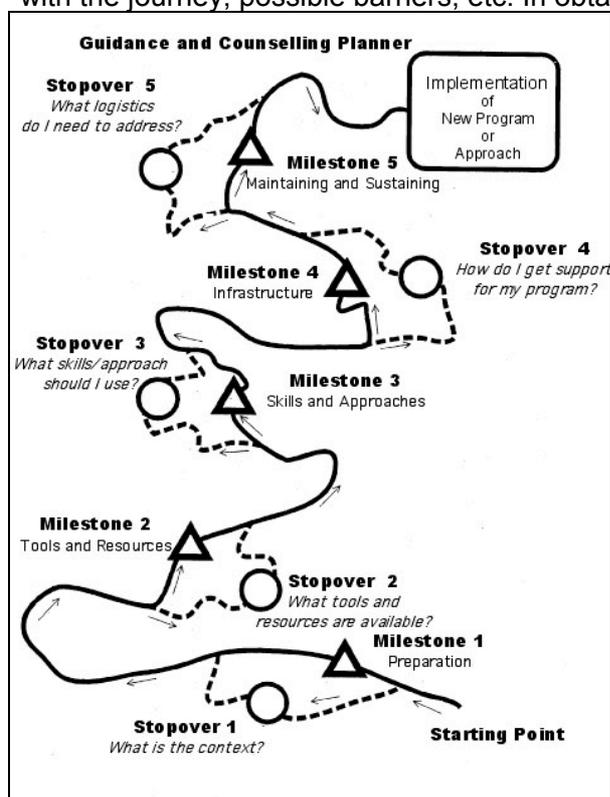
In Finland, as well as other countries, the introduction of a compulsory course in career guidance in polytechnical institutions was followed by a reduction in the time it took students to complete their programs and also a reduction in the number of students changing programs.

Certainly, the need for guidance and counselling programs is great. In Nigeria, 40% of students graduating from polytechnical institutions end up being employed in jobs that are not connected to their training. In Canada, over 75% of secondary school students expect to pursue university, college, or technical education after they finish secondary school. Furthermore, 80% of parents expect their sons and daughters to finish high school and continue on to some form of formal post-secondary education. In reality, about 25% of high school students in Canada do not finish secondary school and only about 30% enroll in formal post-secondary education. In Nigeria, 1.3 million young people aspire to pursuing formal post-secondary education, a number that far exceeds the number of spaces available at post-secondary institutions.

Surveys of Canadian secondary school students consistently report that career-life planning needs are among the most frequently expressed needs of students. A study of adolescents in 12 countries, conducted under the auspices of the International Association for Counselling, found that adolescents most frequently reported: employment-related concerns which were accompanied by concerns about dealing with pressure to achieve academically, family issues (a concern especially for girls), and worries about developing their concept of self. These clearly are situations that are not addressed in academic subjects and are ideally suited for guidance and counselling interventions.

Purposeful Career Planning

Career-life planning can be seen as a journey having five main components, or milestones: (1) Preparation, (2) Tools and Resources, (3) Skills and Approaches, (4) Infrastructure, and (5) Maintaining and Sustaining the Journey. At each milestone, people may need to stop and take stock, in some cases to re-establish a sense of direction, in other cases to address potential barriers, and in still other cases to obtain additional information, skills, or other resources needed to continue the journey. For example, to be well prepared, we need to understand the context of the journey, i.e., the terrain, direction of the path, others involved with the journey, possible barriers, etc. In obtaining the necessary tools and resources to



make the journey successful, people need to know what tools and resources are available for the type of journey being undertaken. Some journeys may require special skills or approaches and people need to have a process for determining which specific skills or approaches are best suited for that journey. At any milestone, people may already possess the knowledge, skills, and support needed to continue successfully. However, others may need to stop over and gain additional knowledge, skills, or resources in order to continue. These components are all important for us to understand and for policy makers and practitioners to cultivate. The road map metaphor is at the same time a model for working with people using guidance and counselling services and a model for helping policy makers and practitioners understand their own career development. It also pertains to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to implement new programs.

Basic Career Development Principles

In order to become more effective in addressing the career-life planning needs of youth and adults, it is important that policy makers and practitioners understand some basic principles.

1. **Multi-potentiality.** Typically, people have a variety of talents and most jobs require a broad range of competencies. Thus, most people have a broad range of jobs in which they could experience success. It most often is not productive to seek the perfect match between an individual's characteristics and the requirements of a job.

2. **Career self-concept.** Personal values, beliefs, abilities, the activities one finds meaningful or enjoyable, the tools and techniques a person feels comfortable, all interact to form a person's self-concept. Self-concepts change over time and thus people's career preferences change over time. Without job satisfaction, it is difficult to achieve life satisfaction. Career satisfaction results from integrating work roles with a person's self-concept.
3. **Planned happenstance.** Many things that happen to people look like accidents. However, closer examination reveals that people position themselves in ways that help them capitalize on unplanned events. Planned happenstance involves opportunity awareness to identify potentially productive events as they unfold, plus willingness to risk taking action when the result is unpredictable, and flexibility to adjust one's plans as events unfold.
4. **Career education.** Career education plays an important role in the career paths of children, youth, young adults, and older adults. At its heart, career education involves developing an attitude that encourages the belief that it is OK, or even preferred, to plan one's career. Developing this kind of attitude is best done in small doses, beginning when children are young, in order that the attitudes can be personalized. Career education is life education. The skills needed to make meaningful career choices are the skills needed to make meaningful life choices. Thus, the process is referred to as *career-life planning*.
5. **Career-life planning for girls and women.** Research suggests that the career development of girls and women does not parallel that of men and boys. Women face additional and different career-related issues than do men. There is a need to pay attention to individual differences and not generalize from one sub-segment of society to another when working in the career-life planning area.

Tailoring Services to Differing Needs

People have differing needs and the same individual may have different needs at different points in time. For some, information and advice is all that is needed. Practitioners provide information, and those who receive it process the information, and take action. Other people need career guidance, tailored to their concerns or goals and designed to give them greater opportunity for personal development and satisfaction from work. Others require career counselling, that creates a climate where people can explore, examine, and clarify their own thoughts, feelings, and actions, to arrive at answers that are best for them.

Advising is most appropriate for people who are seeking information, know how to use it, and are open to the advice they receive. Guidance can assist people to consider their suitability for different career and educational opportunities, explore alternatives they may not have considered previously, and engage in appropriate decision-making about their future career-life path. Counselling is required when people need to explore their views and attitudes related to career and educational opportunities, their personal level of readiness to pursue various options, their cultural and societal contexts, and the need to include others who may be important in the decision making process for that person.

In many countries, advising is readily available. Guidance services often are available in basic education, but are frequently not available for those outside the school system. Counselling services are more rare, especially outside the school system, even in so-called more developed countries. What is required to replace these fragmented services is an integrated and holistic approach that begins with a needs assessment to determine whether

advising, guidance, or counselling services would be most appropriate. This approach would also represent a more cost effective way of delivering career-life planning assistance to individuals across the lifespan.

Career Development – Public Policy Dimension

In the last decade, an increasing number of organizations and countries have recognized the need for career guidance and counselling services. In 2002 - 2004, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), European Commission (EC), and World Bank (WB), collaborated to complete a study of career guidance in 36 countries. The range of countries spanned developing countries (WB), Eastern European countries (EC), and more developed countries (OECD). One conclusion reached in all countries was that career guidance is a private as well as a public good, explicitly linked to: life long learning, labour market insertion, social equity, and sustained employment. The studies concluded that career guidance needs to be available to individuals at any age and at any point in life, in order to assist them in making educational, training, and occupational choices, and to better manage their careers (link and footnote)¹.

The OECD and the European Union agreed on a common definition of career guidance which covers a wide range of activities supporting individuals in their career planning throughout their lives. The definition states:

“Career Guidance refers to services intended to assist people, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training, and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Career guidance helps people to reflect on their ambitions, interests, qualifications, and abilities. It helps them to understand the labour market and education systems, and to relate this to what they know about themselves.”

Consistent with this common understanding, a number of policy initiatives have been undertaken:

- Starting in 1999 the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance together with OECD, World Bank and the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF – Link) agreed to organize biannual International Symposia on Career Development and Public Policy where policy makers, guidance providers, and researchers discuss future perspectives, challenges, and requirements in guidance policies and practices. One result arising from these symposia was the creation of an International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy established in 2003. [Link to <http://www.iccdpp.org>]The 2009 International Symposium in Wellington, New Zealand issued a Communique which was addressed to policy makers around the world [Link to the Communique 2009 <http://www.iccdpp.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=imVTaCVuFPE%3d&tabid=249&mid=816>].
- The Council of the European Union adopted two resolutions on lifelong guidance in 2004 and 2008. The resolutions contained recommendations to European member states to strengthen guidance policies and practices and to establish an action plan for creating better integration between lifelong guidance and lifelong learning policies (link to EU-Resolutions).²
- In order to support the member states in developing their guidance policies and systems the European Union established in 2007 a “European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network” (ELGPN) for mutual leaning and policy sharing (<http://elgpn.eu>). The work program of the network focuses on four priorities which were agreed to in the 2008 EU-Resolution:

¹ OECD, Career Guidance and Public Policy – Bridging the Gap
CEDEFOP, Career Guidance – Systems and Practices, Synthesis Report, Luxembourg 2004
[Link to http://www.oecd.org/document/20/0,3343,en_2649_39263294_32474452_1_1_1_1,00.html]

² Title of EU-Resolutions

1. Developing **Career Management Skills (CMS)** in schools, TVET and adult education
2. Securing free and easy **Access** to guidance services for all citizens including the improvement of acknowledgement of prior learning
3. Implementing **Quality Assurance and Evidence Base** for guidance policy and systems development
4. Establishing **Coordination and Cooperation Mechanisms** on national, regional and local level (e.g., National Guidance Forum or Networks) to work towards a coherent lifelong guidance strategy.

Policy Makers and Practitioners Working Together

Policy makers and practitioners both agree that, in times of rapid and ongoing economic and societal change, people have an increased need for assistance. However, each group sometimes sees the other as interfering with their ability to provide that assistance to people who need it. An integrated, holistic, lifelong approach to guidance and counselling services will be achieved most effectively when policy makers and practitioners work together towards common, or at least complimentary, goals. For example, services can be operating within a holistic model, but can face limitations because of funding restrictions. On the other hand, policy supporting holistic, one-stop, integrated services can be in place, but not operationalized because practitioners have out-dated beliefs or false assumptions about TVET or other education and training alternatives. Thus, policy makers and service providers need to have a shared, and expanded view of the nature of services and resources available for career exploration, such as: work experience, job shadowing, co-op education, take your child to work, formal or informal conversations with people who are already employed, and personal networks, etc.

In some countries, there will need to be substantial infrastructure expansion in order to support guidance and counselling services and promote TVET. In other countries, there will be substantial barriers to address, such as massive unemployment, HIV/AIDS, and social disintegration. Policy will be needed to create and maintain adequate support resources such as: public health service, labour market information system, job posting service, job bank, career information resources, as well as public education about the availability and use of these services. For the system to work well, practitioners, agencies, funding authorities, and policy makers will need to be partners in a larger consortium that represents the entire community; linking community development, capacity building, and community economic development; and working together to more adequately address the needs of the people they serve. Addressing policy issues through dialogue helps to ensure that policies are realistic and useful for maximizing career-life planning support for those who need it.

Expanding the Alternatives

In many countries, an anomalous situation exists: There is a bias towards university education and a career path in the so called "professions" while jobs in technical fields, and jobs labeled "vocational" go unfilled, or are filled by workers from other countries. Policy makers and practitioners need training to develop an attitude, and learn the knowledge and skills needed, to use counselling and guidance processes for assisting adolescents and adults to consider a broader range of educational and career alternatives and to make more informed decisions about those alternatives. We advocate a training program that models what policy makers and practitioners need to provide to people using guidance and counselling services, while teaching the knowledge, skills, and attitude required to provide enhanced services. The approach needs to be one that advocates Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) opportunities as legitimate first choices for people to pursue in planning their career paths.

Summary

The world is changing rapidly. People today face numerous challenges achieving integration into the workforce. In many countries, there are enormous systemic barriers to address, such as: massive unemployment, HIV/AIDS, social disintegration, and inadequate infrastructure. One job for life is over. For many it never existed. Old metaphors and old models of career development no longer apply. New ways of thinking about careers are necessary. People need a vision for their life that will drive a purposeful approach to career/life planning and avoid floundering. People's career/life paths will contain many branching paths, barriers and obstacles, but also allies and sources of assistance. Flexibility is important, as is keeping options open and making sure the journey is meaningful. Career development training needs to begin early to develop the attitudes that are important to enable people to take charge of their own career paths. Helping people achieve direction in their lives can be most effectively accomplished when policy makers and practitioners work together to ensure that effective and accessible services are available for those who need them.