NICEC
NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CAREER EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING

CDI CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

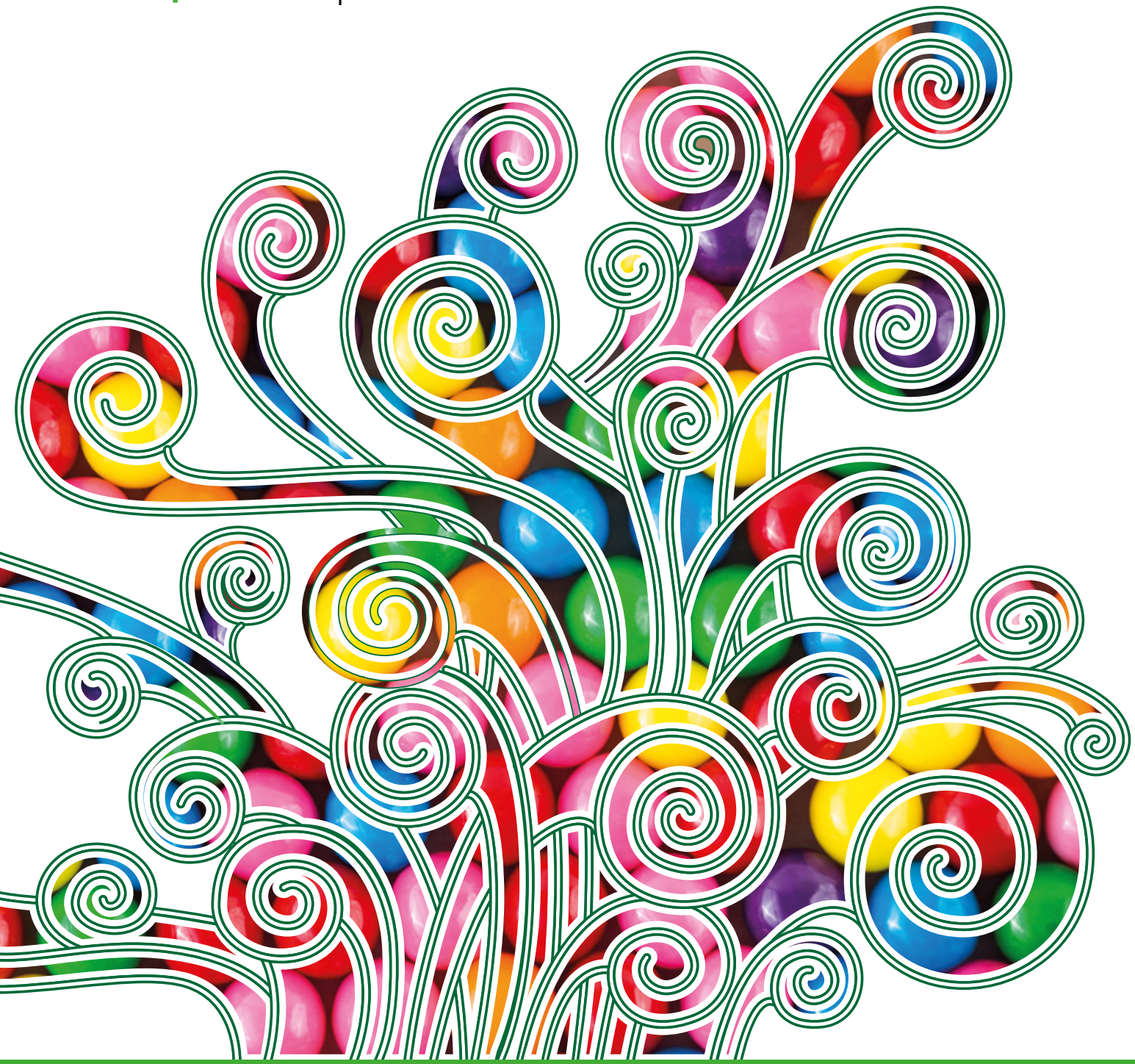
Published in partnership with the CDI

Online: ISSN 2059-4879

JOURNAL OF THE

National Institute for Career Education and Counselling

April 2025 | Issue 54



Promoting research and reflective practice in career development

NICEC

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CAREER EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING

NICEC STATEMENT

The Fellows of NICEC agreed the following statement in 2010.

'The National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC) was originally founded as a research institute in 1975. It now plays the role of a learned society for reflective practitioners in the broad field of career education, career guidance/counselling and career development. This includes individuals whose primary role relates to research, policy, consultancy, scholarship, service delivery or management. NICEC seeks to foster dialogue and innovation between these areas through events, networking, publications and projects.

NICEC is distinctive as a boundary-crossing network devoted to career education and counselling in education, in the workplace, and in the wider community. It seeks to integrate theory and practice in career development, stimulate intellectual diversity and encourage transdisciplinary dialogue. Through these activities, NICEC aims to develop research, inform policy and enhance service delivery.

Membership and fellowship are committed to serious thinking and innovation in career development work. Membership is open to all individuals and organisations connected with career education and counselling. Fellowship is an honour conferred by peer election and signals distinctive contribution to the field and commitment to the development of NICEC's work. Members and Fellows receive the NICEC journal and are invited to participate in all NICEC events.

NICEC does not operate as a professional association or commercial research institute, nor is it organisationally aligned with any specific institution. Although based in the UK, there is a strong international dimension to the work of NICEC and it seeks to support reflective practice in career education and counselling globally.'

NICEC FELLOWS

Rosie Alexander, David Andrews, Jane Artess, Charlie Ball, Anthony Barnes, Cathy Brown, Anne Chant, Fiona Christie, Martin Edmondson, Sarah Finnegan-Dehn, Gilly Freedman, Gill Frigerio, Russell George, Bob Gilworth, Keith Hermann, Wendy Hirsh, Tristram Hooley, Oliver Jenkin, Claire Johnson, Elnaz Kashefpakdel, Michael Larbalestier, John Lees, Rosemary McLean, Kate Mansfield, Nicki Moore, Marian Morris, Siobhan Neary, Claire Nix, Rachel Pearson, Emma Pollard, Peter Robertson, Janet Sheath, Michelle Stewart, Nalayini Thambar, David Winter, Julia Yates.

Emeritus Fellows: Lyn Barham, Anthony Barnes, Lesley Haughton, Ruth Hawthorn, Leigh Henderson, Charles Jackson, Jennifer Kidd, Allister McGowan, Barbara McGowan, Stephen McNair, Hazel Reid, Jackie Sadler, Tony Watts.

International Fellows: Michael Arthur, Lynne Bezanson, Tibor Bors Borbely-Pecze, Jim Bright, Lucy Hearne, Sareena Hopkins, John McCarthy, David McCormack, Col McCowan, Peter McIlveen, Mary McMahon, Annemarie Oomen, Peter Plant, James P. Sampson Jr, Maximus Sefotho, Rie Thomson, Raimo Vuorinen, Nuala Whelan.

EDITORIAL BOARD

TITLE

The official title of the journal for citation purposes is *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling* (Print *ISSN 2046-1348; online* ISSN 2059-4879). It is widely and informally referred to as 'the NICEC journal'. Its former title was *Career Research and Development: the NICEC Journal*, ISSN 1472-6564, published by CRAC, and the final edition under this title was issue 25. To avoid confusion we have retained the numbering of editions used under the previous title.

AIMS AND SCOPE

The NICEC journal publishes articles on the broad theme of career development in any context including:

- Career development in the workplace: private and public sector, small, medium and large organisations, private practitioners.
- Career development in education: schools, colleges, universities, adult education, public career services.
- Career development in the community: third age, voluntary, charity, social organisations, independent contexts, public career services.

It is designed to be read by individuals who are involved in career development-related work in a wide range of settings including information, advice, counselling, guidance, advocacy, coaching, mentoring, psychotherapy, education, teaching, training, scholarship, research, consultancy, human resources, management or policy. The journal has a national and international readership.

Designed & typeset by J. G. Wilkinson.

JOURNAL OF THE
National Institute for Career Education and Counselling
April 2025, Issue 54

Contents

EDITORIAL

ARTICLES

NEWS

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Manuscripts are welcomed focusing on any form of scholarship that can be related to the NICEC Statement. This could include, but is not confined to, papers focused on policy, theory-building, professional ethics, values, reflexivity, innovative practice, management issues and/or empirical research. Articles for the journal should be accessible and stimulating to an interested and wide readership across all areas of career development work. Innovative, analytical and/or evaluative contributions from both experienced contributors and first-time writers are welcomed. Full length articles (4000-6000 words) will be expected to include strong academic content. To encourage contributions from practitioners and research students, the Journal is now accepting short article contributions (1,200- 2,500 words), with some flexibility around their format. Submissions can be made on the Journal online open access platform: www.nicecjournal.co.uk. Final decisions on inclusion are made following full manuscript submission and a process of peer review.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership of NICEC is also available (£75 pa or £50 pa for full-time students). Members receive free attendance at NICEC events and other benefits.

For information on membership, please contact: membership@nicec.org

COPYRIGHT AND DISCLAIMER

PUBLISHER

The *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling* is published in partnership with the CDI by: National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC), The Lodge, Cheerbrook Road, Willaston, Nantwich CW5 7EN.

www.nicec.org

Editorial

Overview of the issue

10.20856/jnicec.5401

Fiona Christie

Editor, NICEC Fellow

An open call issue brings to the fore topics which are attracting the interest of career development scholars and practitioners. The research and writing in this issue reflect a variety of concerns and include articles that focus on diverse applications of theory, concepts and approaches to practice. As the journal becomes more widely read internationally it is encouraging to see three articles from outside the UK (Canada, Ireland and Romania).

The issue begins with three articles about Higher Education in the UK. Researching career development and employability practices in this sector is relatively strong in comparison to research in other Education Spheres. These three articles contribute to a growing body of work informed by theory, research and practice.

Brammar and her co-authors introduce a Career Stage Framework that the University of London Careers Service has used to categorise students 'Career Starters, Careers Developers, and Career Changers'. They argue for the value of having a clearly segmented approach to students, outlining how careers professionals utilise this framework strategically and operationally with students, institutional partners, employers and alumni.

In their work from the University of Southampton, **Port and Hracs**, present detailed insights about recent experience of designing and delivering a credit bearing employability module. They describe a rewards and punishments (carrots and sticks) approach to enhance student engagement. Their detailed article is helpful in offering practical solutions which can be scaled and transferred across different learning contexts.

Finally, in this trio of Higher Education articles, **Yates** presents two empirically derived models of the career decision-making processes of students and graduates in the UK, based on research with university careers advisers and graduates. She argues for a recognition of emotional, cognitive and behavioural career development difficulties which impact decision-making processes. Her research also has implications for practice in guiding career decision-making processes.

Articles from **Moore** and **Iacob** address concerns about the growth of 'digital' for both career learners and practitioners. Using the notion of 'career echo chambers' **Moore's** review article asks searching questions about the role of algorithms and how these lead to echo chambers. She considers the effect of virtual echo chambers on career learning, highlighting how they may limit diversity and inclusion and questions how they may be similar or different to traditional physical social networks.

In an article which uses LaTour's actor-network theory, **Iacob** reports on ethnographic research with school career counsellors in Romania. The article discusses the

transformation of practice using digital tools (amplified by the pandemic). Using the concept of 'controversy' he argues that an uncritical adoption of such tools can risk ignoring important agendas and contribute to the vulnerability of counsellors and the counselling system.

Writing from Canada and addressing an important and sensitive topic, **Chen and Wong** explore career counselling with Women Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). They illuminate how practitioners can work with vulnerable clients, for whom career ambitions may be adversely affected by circumstances. Their article helpfully applies Krumboltz's social learning theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory and leads to theoretically framed proposals for how counselling interventions can empower women survivors of IPV.

Reporting on evaluative research about career coaching for employed adults, **Hirsh and Carter** examine the practical challenges of evaluating the impact of career development interventions with employed adults. They draw on a specific case study about a one-to-one career coaching programme offered to individuals working in primary healthcare in England. In a context in which evaluation of such services is routinely expected to justify cost, they present the development of an evaluation logic model and the choice and design of data collection tools as well as findings.

Also addressing practice in the adult career guidance sector, in her article **McSweeney** describes a process of narrative self-inquiry which she undertook after a period of intense and challenging change within the Irish guidance system. She argues that such processes helped her to reconnect with her practice and reauthor a new narrative in which she had some agency.

Finally, **Anwuzia's** article bridges psychological theory around hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing to argue for a more integrated framework of career wellbeing that can be of value to practice.

The issue also includes two book reviews which readers will find useful about recent publications. **Stewart** reviews Liz Painter's STEM Careers book and **Neary** reviews the History of Careers Services volume recently edited by Michelle Stewart. Both expert reviews will assist readers who are scholars and practitioners to understand better whether either book is relevant to current practice or studies.

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5402

The Career Stage Framework: Facilitating enhanced engagement with students, institutional partners, employers, and alumni

Laura Brammar
Associate Director, University of London Careers Service – Online, Distance and Flexible Learners, UK

Victoria Wade
Director, University of London Careers Service, UK

James Weaver
Associate Director, University of London Career Service – Engagement and Insights, UK

For correspondence
Laura Brammar: laura.brammar@careers.lon.ac.uk

To cite this article:
Brammar, L., Wade, V. & Weaver, J. (2025). The Career Stage Framework: Facilitating enhanced engagement with students, institutional partners, employers, and alumni. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *54*(1), 5-18. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5402

Abstract

Segmenting higher education students into three distinct groups based on their career stage can significantly boost engagement by providing relevant career learning. This approach allows career professionals to tailor the employability curriculum to meet the diverse needs of their students. It also benefits institutional stakeholders by offering a nuanced understanding of impact measures and national metrics. Moreover, segmenting by career stage enhances employer engagement beyond the narrow focus on the graduate labour market and fosters more meaningful and diverse connections with alumni.

Keywords: career education, employability, student engagement, employer engagement, institutional engagement, higher education

Introduction

Graduate employability can be conceptualised in terms of the different forms of capital (e.g. social capital, cultural capital) that enable an individual to be successful in their career (Donald, Baruch, & Ashleigh, 2023). As a result, there are many potential approaches to career and employability education for undergraduate and postgraduate students (Artess, Mellors-Bourne, & Hooley, 2017; Dalrymple, Macrae, Pal, & Shipman, 2021).

Despite this, Holmes (2013) characterises the dominant approach to employability development in UK higher education as 'possessive', focusing on the identification and acquisition of skills and attributes sought by the labour market. This is based on a presumption that learners have limited work experience and are at the start of their careers. These assumptions steer the learning content, with employability curricula designed as an introductory offer to the professional workplace. Across the sector, with an increased emphasis on providing placements, internships, and other experiential learning activities as a way to develop employability skills (Winter & Yates, 2021), the assumption is that students do not already have professional experience.

The risk of these assumptions is that they can limit the effectiveness and relevance of career and employability learning for more diverse student bodies. By mistakenly presuming all students require employability learning designed for individuals with limited experience of the labour market, career educators can miss opportunities to provide students with the chance to learn from each other's diverse range of workplace experience, resulting in career and employability curricula that do not meet the needs of all the participants.

Adopting a 'one size fits all' approach that fails to contextualise graduate employability within the diversity of student experiences, drivers and social capital can lead to students disengaging from career education (Jorre de St Jorre & Oliver, 2018). There may even be evidence that basing one's approach to career and employability learning on the dominant skills discourse can disadvantage non-traditional, mature and international students (Rodríguez, González-Monteagudo, & Padilla-Carmona, 2021; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Lavender, 2020; Luzzo, 1999; Pham & Jackson, 2020).

For example, an increasing number of students work alongside their studies and are increasing their hours of paid work (Neves, Freeman, Stephenson, & Sotiropoulou, 2024), with a significant proportion of distance and flexible learning students working full-time whilst studying, often alongside various caring responsibilities (Winter, 2023a). This provides significant pressures on student engagement, with students needing to make challenging decisions regarding what they can and cannot dedicate their time to, in addition to their compulsory academic and employment commitments.

As such, career educators need to be especially mindful that their students have often limited time and need career education that is going to be targeted and relevant to their individual circumstances.

Our experience in the University of London Careers Service (UoLCS) for Online, Distance and Flexible Learners (ODFL) made us challenge the applicability of this assumption not only for our institution, but also the wider sector. Distance learners tend to differ from traditional students in terms of age, gender, range of cultural backgrounds and locations,

disability status, life roles, employment status, motivation, and risk-taking propensity (Cao, 2002; Latanich, Nonis, & Hudson, 2001).

To enable all learners to benefit from the career education provided within Higher Education (HE) institutions, we must address this potential disconnect between our assumptions about students' experience and their actual, often substantial, professional and life experience.

Our response to this challenge is the development of the Career Stage Framework, which enables us to categorise the background and learning motivations of a diverse student cohort. The Career Stage Framework works on the basis that learning results from the interplay of emotion, motivation, and cognition (Dumont, Istance, & Benavides, 2010).

There have been a number of attempts to categorise the career-related motivations and employability development needs of different groups of students (Masdonati, Fournier, & Lahrizi, 2017; Pyvis & Chapman, 2007; Monteiro, Almeida, Gomes, & Sinval, 2022; Ng, 2018). However, many of these frameworks categorise the students from the perspective of the educational institution, emphasising likely demands on resources or potential learning strategies using language which students might find hard to identify with when considering their own motivations and needs. Our priority was to develop categories that could be communicated directly to students and would have immediate validity.

What is the Career Stage Framework (CSF)?

The Career Stage Framework (CSF) was developed in 2018 (Brammar & Wilkinson, 2022) after textual analysis of 108 career guidance conversations with individual distance and flexible learners, based internationally. Through this analysis of individual student voices and by creating a meta-analysis, it became clear that that the actual experiences, motivations and needs of students in relation to career and employability learning were more diverse than was presumed by the institution.

While some students had very limited amounts of work experience, others had been working for a few years, and others had significant amounts of experience in the workplace. Equally, it became clear that the actual experiences, motivations, and needs of students in relation to career and employability learning were more diverse than presumed by the institution. Students had different motivations for undertaking their academic programme of study in relation to their career development.

This resulted in an understanding that higher education career and employability services must tailor their career education to meet the *actual* experience of their diverse student body, rather than what institutions *presume* the needs of those learners to be.

Through our analysis we discovered the students could broadly be divided into three main groups which reflected these three different stages of experience and motivation:

Career Starters, Careers Developers, and Career Changers

Career Starters were defined as having limited experience, or were working in comparatively lower skilled work to help fund their studies to gain their first professional role after graduating. Career Developers were typically working within their preferred sectors, or even organisations they wished to remain in, and wanted to use their studies to propel them into

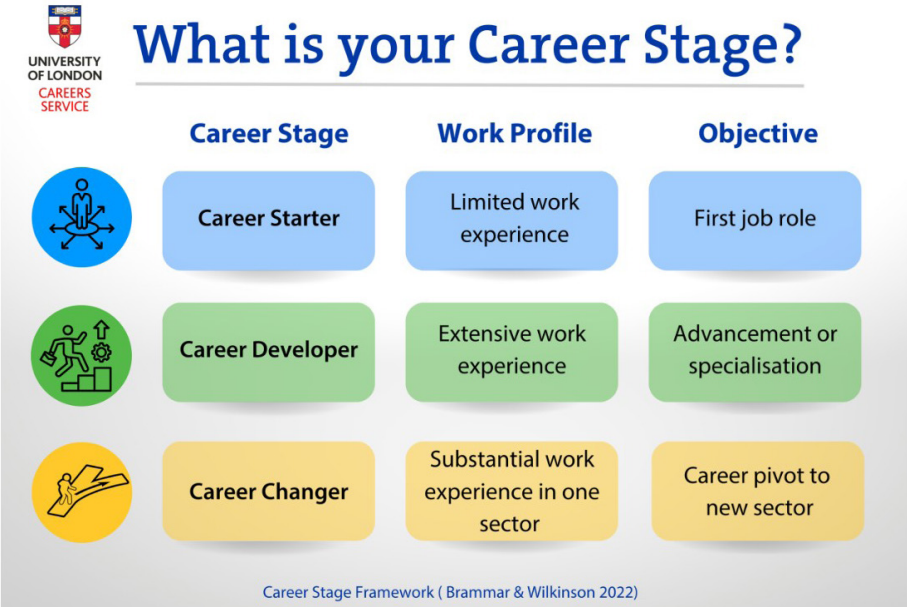
more senior roles. Career Changers were those who already had significant experience in one or more fields and were using their studies to prepare for a departure into a new sector, or profession within their sector, including the launch of their own business or consultancy.

Whilst the three categories of Career Starter, Career Developer and Career Changer were developed independently by us as career practitioners, they correspond to the 'career entry', 'career progression', and 'career transformation' categories identified by Caddell and Cannell (2011) and later elaborated by Winter (2023b). These previous researchers (Caddell and Cannell 2011; Winter 2023b) also identified two additional categories; one category is 'career re-entry students', which can be seen as spanning all three categories of the CSF and the other category is 'personal development students', relating to those students who undertake education for intrinsic personal reasons rather than primarily for career development.

The learning motivations of Career Starters, Career Developers and Career Changers also appear to correspond to the three modes of career growth and adaptation – 'performance', 'learning' and 'development' – postulated by Boyatzis and Kolb (2000). These modes illustrate how individuals progress through their lives including, in relation to their careers, how they develop, learn, and adapt. One might argue that Career Starters are likely to be in the 'performance' mode in their establishment of self-validity, Career Developers are likely to be in the 'learning' mode in their focus on self-improvement, whilst Career Changers are likely to be in the 'development' mode as they seek a clearer sense of fulfilment.

Once these three categories had been identified within the student community (and students are also provided with the opportunity to record that they identify with 'none' of the categories), it became clear that career and employability education which is more tailored to these categories is more likely to be effective in achieving its intended learning outcomes. By adopting a social constructivist learning approach (Vygotsky, 1978) and enabling learners to use their individual work-based experiences to build their own understanding of career education, it became clear how we might use these three stages to enable students to 'actively construct or make their own knowledge' (Elliot, Kratochwill, & Travers, 2000) in relation to their employability.

Figure 1: What is your career stage?



How is the Career Stage Framework Used?

The framework enables us to enhance the perceived relevance of the employability learning activities to students with different levels of experience and different motivations. Additionally, the Career Stage Framework has enabled us to enhance our engagement with multiple stakeholders: students, institutional partners, employers, and alumni. By illustrating to multiple stakeholders that we recognise the diversity of experience and motivations within our cohorts, we demonstrate how we are designing, delivering, and evaluating the impact of work from a comprehensive and nuanced perspective, which in turn helps us to improve our effectiveness. For example, since comprehensively embedding the CSF into both our marketing activities and educational content we have seen an increase of 41% in unique logins to our locally branded careers service management system 'Careers Connect' in 2024 compared to 2023 and a 39% increase in total event registrations in the same period.

This approach is used extensively across each aspect of the pedagogical process in the delivery our career education: from identification of learning needs to articulation of learning aims and outcomes; from segmentation and structuring of learning topics to the design of individual asynchronous and synchronous learning activities. The CSF has also shaped our communication with our learners, with targeted messaging per career stage and has also informed all our data collection and evaluation.

Design and delivery of synchronous careers education (e.g. live webinars, panel events)

Allowing students to recognise their current level of career experience, the CSF supports their learning as it enables educators to provide a consistent strand of teaching through tailored content and learning objectives relevant to different segments of the cohort, reflecting a constructive alignment approach (Biggs, 1996).

Since 2018, the CSF has been woven into all career education initiatives and the UoLCS careers consultant team have been trained in how to teach career stage specific interactive webinars, such as *How to navigate career change in the 2020s*, where learners use e-learning platforms to share their career narratives and illustrate their skills.

We have also cross-referenced all our learning outcomes with the CSF to help students relate the career education to their lived experience. Through embedding the CSF into the learning culture of our career teaching, the students now readily identify themselves by their programme of study, geographical location, and career stage, illustrating how the CSF is now an established part of their career learning environment. For example, in a recent *Employability Skills Experience* series of twenty online workshops for our Technology, Economics, Finance and Social Science students 80% of the students identified themselves by their career stage.

Design and delivery of asynchronous careers education (e.g. virtual learning environment online resources, careers micro-modules)

The value of the CSF is that it can be used to inform the design and delivery of our career education programme, which incorporates both events and asynchronous learning materials, in various ways. Firstly, we can use the CSF to provide opportunities for

students from different career stages to interact with one another and learn from each other's perspectives, such as our '*Got Skills? Prove it! Self-Management Skills*' webinars. Secondly, we can use the CSF to produce tailored provision for specific career stages, providing opportunities for students to connect with and learn from their career stage peers, such as our '*Career Starters: How to bridge the experience gap*' and '*Career Developers: How to successfully achieve your next promotion at work*' webinars. This blend of multiple CSF stage and stage-specific interventions provides diverse opportunities for our students to develop an awareness of their career stage.

Students can self-assess their appropriate Career Stage by completing a brief quiz on our Virtual Learning Environment, which then signposts them to targeted self-directed learning. The CSF is also central to the learning materials within our three career micro-modules, with students finding different self-directed learning activities depending on their career stage.

We also make regular reference to the career stage of our alumni contacts who we interview as part of our podcast series, *Global Careers Calls*. This enables our students to learn how their peers have successfully navigated through their own career stage, both during their studies and after graduation.

Incorporation into our evaluation processes and key metrics (e.g. Careers Registration data)

CSF data is incorporated into all our feedback evaluation forms and is also included in all our end of year reporting. The CSF is featured in our evaluation processes to gain student feedback on its effectiveness in enhancing their career and employability learning. After each intervention, such as a live webinar, we collect both quantitative and qualitative data which includes questions on career stage as standard.

Furthermore, the CSF has been incorporated into existing institution-wide datasets, such as Careers Registration. For example, the range of statements relating to career readiness were expanded to incorporate statements which had greater resonance for those with more work experience, such as Career Developers and Career Changers.

Incorporation into our conversations with our employer and alumni contacts

The particular demographic of our students and recent graduates means that many of our students and graduates are not seeking traditional early careers 'graduate level' roles or 'internships', which are part of large employers' campus recruitment strategies. This provides a unique opportunity for our employer and alumni engagement strategy. Utilising the data from Careers Registration, including the Career Stage Framework, our strategy allows our team to reach out to early careers and experienced hiring teams to seek speakers for live events and asynchronous content. For example, in our engagement with employer contacts 100% indicated they were keen to connect with our Career Starters, 86% were also interested in our Career Developers and 10% had a particular interest in our Career Changers. This has enabled us to incorporate a wider range of participants in our employer events, incorporating more senior employer contacts who are keen to connect with our more experienced students.

This is not without challenges, as many experienced hiring recruiters are not recruiting at volume and do not have a budget to commit resources to our activities. However, utilising our extensive alumni network we are able to engage with experienced voices to ensure our activities include examples which resonate with Career Developers and Career Changers.

Using the Career Stage Framework in our conversations with Early Careers Talent Attraction Professionals is also proving to be a defining characteristic of our offer and as we refine our engagement strategies. It allows us to open conversations around recruiting from more diverse talent pools that many early career professionals are keen to engage with – particularly as there is contraction in the size of UK demographics who would pipeline into early career roles (Reichwald, 2024).

Does the Career Stage Framework work?

When developing the CSF, we shared it with the University of London Student Voice Group to gain an understanding of a user's perspective on it. This feedback reinforced our aim to use the CSF to enrich career learning, as illustrated by these excerpts from participants: '*I think these career stages are incredibly helpful*'; '*It helps to differentiate*'; '*The stages are comprehensive*'.

This student endorsement of the approach has continued ever since, as shown by the proactive and enthusiastic reference students make to their career stage during teaching. This reflects an accessible and supportive learning environment, where a diversity of careers experience is recognised and valued.

Both academic and professional service colleagues from across the institution have since responded very positively to the approach, enabling us to design programme specific career education curricula - which explicitly references the CSF - and to incorporate the CSF into institution-wide data collection.

Since incorporating the CSF into our data sets consistently, the majority of students have recognised themselves as belonging to one of the three stages (88% choosing one stage, compared to 12% who selected none), further illustrating that this approach is sustainable and resonates with our key cohort, our students. The CSF has also been built into our data dashboards as key management information.

Beyond work with our students, the CSF has, after being presented at both national and international conferences, been adopted by institutions as diverse as City St George's, University of London and Arden University as a way of working with their students in the field of career and employability.

On reflection, in terms of effectiveness, the CSF is now an established and enhancing part of the work of those who learn career education, those who design career education curricula, those who teach career and employability education, those who work with external partners in career education (such as employers), those who oversee institutional metrics relating to career education, and those who lead and manage career education services, both within our own institution and beyond.

How has the Career Stage Framework enhanced engagement?

The implementation of the CSF has enhanced engagement in three distinct contexts: student engagement, institutional engagement, and employer/alumni engagement.

Student Engagement

The CSF engages students, as it acknowledges their lived experience in terms of career experience and acknowledges the impact their amount of exposure to the workplace may have had on their motivation to study and career objectives.

The CSF is a way for career and employability services to illustrate to their student cohorts that their career stage is valued by their institution, which is keen for the career education provided to be relevant to the individual needs and requirements of learners.

By consistently being given the opportunity to self-identify as either a Career Starter, Career Developer or a Career Changer during our live webinars, students learn to articulate their career context and objectives in a professional and engaging way. Equally, the asynchronous career education materials designed specifically for each career stage provide the opportunity for students to access on-demand career education resources and materials tailored to their individual needs.

This matters because as graduates move into labour markets, either as early starters or experienced hires, they need to be able to both own and effectively explain their career narratives to future employers, who are eager to learn more about their applicants' motivations and ambitions.

An additional advantage of the use of the CSF from a student engagement perspective is that it readily encourages the development of both formal and informal networks between the student community. We have had many examples during our live delivery where students have enthusiastically included their career stage during their introductions in the session, enabling effective peer support and learning within session delivery. For example, Career Developers who may already be working in an industry which Career Starters want to enter can provide informal advice to their peers, while Career Changers can learn from Career Starters about the latest recruitment techniques and application process which they may not have come across since their last job application.

In this way the CSF helps to engender a sense of shared community from across the student cohort and provides opportunities for enhanced labour market information sharing, organic exchanges of career-related reflection and valuable peer-to-peer support both within and across different career stages. Feedback from our Careers Student Feedback Panel also confirms that they find the CSF a useful mechanism in their career and employability learning. For example, the student membership of the Careers Student Feedback Panel has consistently included students who have self-identified with all three Career Stages; in the 2024/25 iteration of the Panel we have 29% identifying as Career Starters, 38% identifying as Career Developers, 24% identifying as Career Changers and just 5% not identifying with any of the stages. Furthermore, students have voluntarily highlighted the value of the CSF approach in the chat box of our live career webinar delivery, such as '*I quite like the concept of dividing your careers into stages. It helps bring*

the focus down to those select few important questions' and '*As a Career Starter, I feel more confident in exploring my options*'.

Institutional Engagement

In the evolving landscape of higher education, addressing the diverse needs of students and personalising learning is important for fostering a successful and responsive learning environment. Our experience shows that engagement with the CSF can help both careers professionals and academics to do this. The more we use the CSF, as a careers service, to inform our own learning and teaching environment within the careers and employability context, the greater the interest from our academic colleagues who are beginning to incorporate the CSF into aspects of the curriculum. For example, in a new BSc Computer Science *Professional Practice* module launching in April 2025, the Career Stage Framework has been embedded extensively in the curriculum content, as one of the three lenses used in the transdisciplinary activities (the other two lenses being lived experience and academic studies) and the CSF is highlighted in the topic videos on career planning.

Equally, recognising that students enter academia at various points in their career journey enables institutions to develop targeted interventions, specialised resources, and customised learning experiences. For example, a student entering at the start of their career may benefit from career exploration workshops and mentorship, while a career developer might require advanced coursework aligned to their current workplace.

The current lifelong learning agenda emphasises the importance of continuous skill development and adaptability to be effective in a workplace that is changing due to influences such as artificial intelligence and globalisation. As the professional landscape evolves at an unprecedented pace, graduates of any career stage must be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary for not only securing initial employment, but also for navigating subsequent career shifts and advancements. By adopting the Career Stage Framework approach, academic institutions can strategically design programmes that align to principles of lifelong learning (Department of Education, 2024) and demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the skills required. For example, Career Changers may benefit from opportunities for experiential learning to enhance their understanding of new sectors which align to the curriculum.

Within the Careers Service we have incorporated the CSF into all the learning outcomes and evaluations of our career education programmes. We have also worked closely with academic colleagues to feature the CSF within academic programme delivery. For example, as previously mentioned, the CSF has been explicitly referenced within a new professional practice module within one of our Technology programmes. This approach has enabled academics to evaluate the skills and knowledge relevant to their students' professional development and measure learning outcomes more effectively from a workplace experience perspective.

In meeting the needs of lifelong learners, higher education institutions could cater to the diverse needs of students at different career stages by offering modular courses, micro-credentials, and opportunities for upskilling and reskilling. This adaptability in program design allows students to acquire new skills incrementally, enabling them to seamlessly integrate learning into their professional lives. Introducing flexible learning pathways,

recognising that lifelong learning is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour, would enable a diversification of the HE offer and appeal to wider numbers of students.

By acknowledging and addressing the unique needs of students at different career stages, institutions can play a crucial role in fostering a culture of lifelong learning extending beyond graduation, empowering individuals to progress throughout their professional lives. The value of the CSF from an institutional perspective is also shown by the incorporation of the CSF in all our end-of-year reporting which we share with key academic stakeholders.

Employer/Alumni Engagement

Outside of career support for MBA programmes, employer and alumni engagement work conducted in the HE employability space focusses predominantly on the Early Career (EC) stage of recruitment. Using the Career Stage Framework has allowed our employer and alumni engagement to widen conversations with our external stakeholders and reframed our approach to building connections with organisations. Using the CSF as a framing device for conversations has allowed a wider range of experiences to be shared with our students. This has the benefits not only of showcasing opportunities not normally seen by undergraduate students, but also allowing those in the Career Starter phase to be exposed to leaders in their chosen sector, talking to them as equals and modelling the career paths available to them further along their journey.

Additionally, this has allowed us to work with more experienced representatives from employers and alumni to develop a more comprehensive range of career education experiences. These are not purely focussed on the traditional recruitment/selection and brand attraction activities, but instead look at the macro-level nuances of sectors and the labour market, boosting the commercial awareness of our student community.

Could the CSF be utilised with non-distance and flexible learning cohorts?

We feel strongly that the CSF could be utilised effectively by institutions who do not have DFL cohorts. Indeed, the adoption of this approach by other HEIs in the UK illustrates this fact. Campus-based institutions attract a diversity of students, many of whom may be working alongside their studies or at different stages of their career.

For example, postgraduate taught programmes often attract students who have experience of the workforce and are returning to education to advance their career or formalise their specialisation in one area of their work. By utilising the CSF, institutions are better equipped to tailor their career education, enhancing engagement with multiple stakeholders both internal and external to the institution.

The CSF can enable all institutions to demonstrate a way to deepen their understanding of the entire student journey, which could be helpful in terms of recruitment and completion by providing a way to refine metrics such as the Graduate Outcomes Survey, adopt a more nuanced approach to student recruitment, supporting work with alumni and employers, and informing the work of careers services.

What are the limitations of the CSF approach?

The CSF is still in in its relative infancy since its creation in 2018, despite its extensive use and impact from that point. This means there is still more we can learn about how the CSF can be interpreted and utilised by multiple stakeholders.

Furthermore, the CSF relies on students self-reporting which of the CSF stages they most identify with at various points during their studies, both during enrolment and re-registration, as well as during live delivery of career education sessions. It would be helpful for us to understand more about how and why students self-select their career stage and which perimeters they are applying to make that selection.

Also, whilst the majority of students (88%) self-report as one of the three career stages (Career Starter 41%, Career Developer 31%, or Career Changer 16%) some students select 'None' (12%) when given that choice. It would be helpful to learn more about the reasons behind that choice.

What future studies could be applied to the CSF approach?

Beyond further investigation into the reasons why students select their respective career stage, in addition to the 'none' category, it would also be useful to learn more about the sub-categories within each career stage. For example, Career Starters may encompass students who have a very clear sense of their future career direction, as well as those who have very unclear ideas about what they may want to do after their studies. Further research could enable us to see if we need to further refine the framework, either by sub-dividing the three categories or potentially by adding new categories to reflect deeper understanding.

As we are gathering increasing amounts of data on the CSF across multiple academic programmes, we may also want to explore whether certain academic programmes attract particular career stages and if so, what the implications may be in terms of recruitment and marketing.

Finally, we may also want to see if we can map career stage against rates of non-completion and non-continuation to see if we can design intervention strategies tailored to groups of students to support and retain them during their studies.

We work closely with our Careers Student Feedback Panel to further inform and refine how we utilise the CSF in all our work and source ideas from them for future developments to the approach. Furthermore, as more institutions adopt the CSF approach, both for their ODFL and campus-based students, more data becomes available to further explore future research topics.

Conclusion

From our experience the benefits of adopting the Career Stage Framework have been multiple, both as career educators, managers, and senior managers within higher education.

As we have outlined, students proactively engage with the approach and respond positively to the offer of more tailored employability support, rather than glib reassurances that institutions eschew a 'one size fits all' approach. Student segmentation facilitates a more targeted and meaningful engagement with the Careers Service, enabling them to access specialised guidance, industry insights, and networking opportunities tailored to their career stage. Better tailoring of career education allows for better outcomes throughout the student journey and allows for greater collaboration within institutions, including with academic colleagues.

Effective collaboration between academic programmes and the career service is essential to provide students with comprehensive support for their career development. The linking of existing large data sets such as Careers Registration and Learning Gain (Cobb, 2019) will also provide richer data analysis, leading to more effective resource allocation and strategic planning.

The CSF also enables much broader and richer conversations with both employers and alumni, adding benefit to our students and career service colleagues, by equipping them with labour market knowledge and insights, beyond the early career space and contextualising how a career can evolve over time.

Whether it is used with ODFL students or campus-based learners, due to the enhanced engagement with multiple stakeholders which we have outlined, we argue that the CSF enables more sustainable and impactful value for career and employability services, to the benefit of all stakeholders. For this reason, we wholeheartedly recommend it to the HE career and employability sector and community.

References

Artess, J., Mellors-Bourne, R., & Hooley, T. (2017). *Employability: A review of the literature 2012-2016*. Higher Education Academy.

Biggs, J. (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment, *Higher Education*, 32(3), 347-364.

Boyatzis, R., & Kolb, D. (2000). Performance, learning, and development as modes of growth and adaptation throughout our lives and careers. In M. Peiperl, M. Arthur, R. Goffee, & T. Morris (Eds.), *Career Frontiers: New Conceptions of Working Lives* (pp. 76–98). Oxford University Press.

Brammar, L., & Wilkinson, E. (2022). Career stage framework: meeting the students where they are in their employability journey, *Phoenix* (164), 33-45. https://www.agcas.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/Phoenix/Phoenix_Issue_164_February_2022_-_Students_as_co-creators.pdf

Caddell, M., & Cannell, P. (2011). Rethinking graduate attributes: Understanding the learning journeys of part-time students in the Open University in Scotland. In B. Jones, & S. Oosthuizen (Eds.), *Part-Time study: The new paradigm for Higher Education?* UALL. http://oro.open.ac.uk/46147/

Cobb, F. (2019). 'There's No Going Back': The Transformation of HE Careers Services Using Big Data. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *42*(1), 18-25. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.4204

Dalrymple, R., Macrae, A., Pal, M., & Shipman, S. (2021). *Employability: A review of the literature 2016-2021*. AdvanceHE.

Department for Education. (2024). *Lifelong Learning Entitlement overview*. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lifelong-learning-entitlement-lle-overview/lifelong-learning-entitlement-overview

Donald, W., Baruch, Y., & Ashleigh, M. (2023). Construction and operationalisation of an Employability Capital Growth Model (ECGM) via a systematic literature review (2016–2022), *Studies in Higher Education*, *49*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2023.2219270

Dumont, H., Istance, D., & Benavides, F. (2010). *The Nature of Learning: Using Research to Inspire Practice, Educational Research and Innovation*. OECD Publishing. doi: https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264086487-en

Elliot, S., Kratochwill, T., & Travers, J. (2000). *Educational psychology: Effective teaching, effective learning (3rd ed.)*. McGraw-Hill.

Holmes, L. (2013). Competing perspectives on graduate employability: Possession, position or process?, *Studies in Higher Education*, *38*(4), 538–554. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.587140

Jorre de St Jorre, T., & Oliver, B. (2018). Want students to engage? Contextualise graduate learning outcomes and assess for employability, *Higher Education Research & Development, 37*(1), 44-57. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1339183

Latanich, G., Nonis, S., & Hudson, G. (2001). A profile of today's distance learners: An investigation of demographic and individual difference variables of distance and non-distance learners, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 11*(3), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1300/J050v11n03_01

Lavender, K. (2020). Mature students' experiences of undertaking higher education in English vocational institutions: Employability and academic capital, *International Journal of Training Research, 18*(2), 141–154. https://doi.org/10.1080/14480220.2020.1830836

Luzzo, D. (1999). Identifying the career decision-making needs of nontraditional college students, *Journal of Counseling and Development, 77*(2), 135–140. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1999.tb02433.x

Masdonati, J., Fournier, G., & Lahrizi, I. (2017). The reasons behind a career change through vocational education and training, *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training, 4*(3), Article 3, 249-269. http://dx.doi.org/10.13152/IJRVET.4.3.4

Monteiro, S., Almeida, L., Gomes, C., & Sinval, J. (2022). Employability profiles of higher education graduates: A person-oriented approach, *Studies in Higher Education, 47*(3), 499–512. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1761785

Moreau, M., & Leathwood, C. (2006). Graduates' employment and the discourse of employability: A critical analysis, *Journal of Education and Work, 19*(4), 305–324. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080600867083

Neves, J., Freeman, J., Stephenson, R., & Sotiropoulou, D. P. (2024). *Student Academic Experience Survey 2024*. HEPI. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/SAES-2024.pdf

Ng, C. (2018).'I learn for a job promotion!': The role of outcome-focused career goals in motivating distance learners to learn, *Distance Education, 39*(3), 390–410. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2018.1476839

Pham, T., & Jackson, D. (2020). The need to develop graduate employability for a globalized world. In T. Nghia, T. Pham, M. Tomlinson, K. Medica, & C. Thompson (Eds.), *Developing and utilizing employability capitals: Graduates' strategies across labour markets*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003004660-1

Pyvis, D., & Chapman, A. (2007). Why university students choose an international education: A case study in Malaysia, *International Journal of Educational Development, 27*(2), 235–246. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2006.07.008

Reichwald, S. (2024, March 7). The future of early careers recruitment is untapped talent, *Institute of Student Employers*. https://insights.ise.org.uk/home_featured/the-future-of-early-careers-recruitment-is-untapped-talent/

Rodríguez, M., González-Monteagudo, J., & Padilla-Carmona, T. (2021). Employability and inclusion of non-traditional university students: limitations and challenges, *IAFOR Journal of Education, 9*(1), 133–151. https://doi.org/10.22492/ije.9.1.08

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society*. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9vz4

Winter, D. (2023a). Supporting employability. In D. B. L. Amrane-Cooper (Ed.), *Online and Distance Education for a Connected World* (pp. 64–94). UCL Press. https://www.uclpress.co.uk/collect

Winter, D. (2023b). A framework for analysing careers and employability learning outcomes, *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling, 51*(1), 15-25. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5103

Winter, D., & Yates, J. (2021). The (faltering) renaissance of theory in higher education careers practice, *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling, 46*(1), 10-17. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.4603

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5403

Graduate career development: Two empirically-derived models of the career decision-making processes of students and graduates in the UK

Julia Yates

City St Georges, University of London, UK

For correspondence:

Julia Yates: Julia.yates.1@city.ac.uk

To cite this article:

Yates, J. (2025). Graduate career development: Two empirically-derived models of the career decision-making processes of students and graduates in the UK. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling, 54*(1), 19-28. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5403

Abstract

In this article I report on a strand of research, based on interviews with 22 university career practitioners and 30 graduates, that explores the career development of UK students. The research addresses a gap in the literature which has overlooked the decision-making processes of this group and supplements the evidence-base for career practitioners. Findings indicate that students exhibit emotional, cognitive and behavioural career development difficulties, and that graduates consider career options one at a time, engage in self-exploration in the context of a specific option, and use the application process to help them decide on a career direction.

Keywords: Career decision-making; Higher Education; career decision-making difficulties

Introduction

Over the last few years, I have been involved in a strand of research exploring university students' career decision-making – examining how students make their decisions and where they get stuck. The studies have been conducted and published individually (Ayliffe et al., 2024; Yates & Hirsh, 2022; Yates & Hirsh 2024; Yates, 2025) but in this article I

draw them together, to provide a more holistic account of the process of career decision-making in UK students, and to offer some workable ideas for practice.

Study 1: The career decision-making difficulties of students in Higher Education (HE) in the UK

Previous research has examined the career decision-making difficulties of young people who are making their first occupational choices. Much of the research highlights cognitive difficulties and one of the most widely cited taxonomies of career decision-making difficulties identifies ten aspects of cognitive difficulties, grouped within three clusters (Gati et al., 1996). The clusters are *lack of readiness* (lack of motivation, indecisiveness, dysfunctional myths and lack of information about the process), *lack of information* (lack of information about the self, about occupations and about how to research the job market) and *inconsistent information* (unreliable information, external conflicts and internal conflicts). Less explored are the emotional career decision-making difficulties, but Saka et al. (2008) identify three clusters of emotional and personality-related difficulties: *pessimism* (about the world, about the labour market, about their ability to control things), *anxiety* (about making a choice and about the uncertainty of the process) and *self-concept and identity* (generalised anxiety, low self-esteem and an uncrystallised identity).

These career difficulties will no doubt resonate with career professionals, but the research conducted with UK HE students is limited. The first of our studies aimed to start to address this gap in the literature, to identify the career issues, dilemmas and difficulties that UK HE students raise in their one-to-one career appointments.

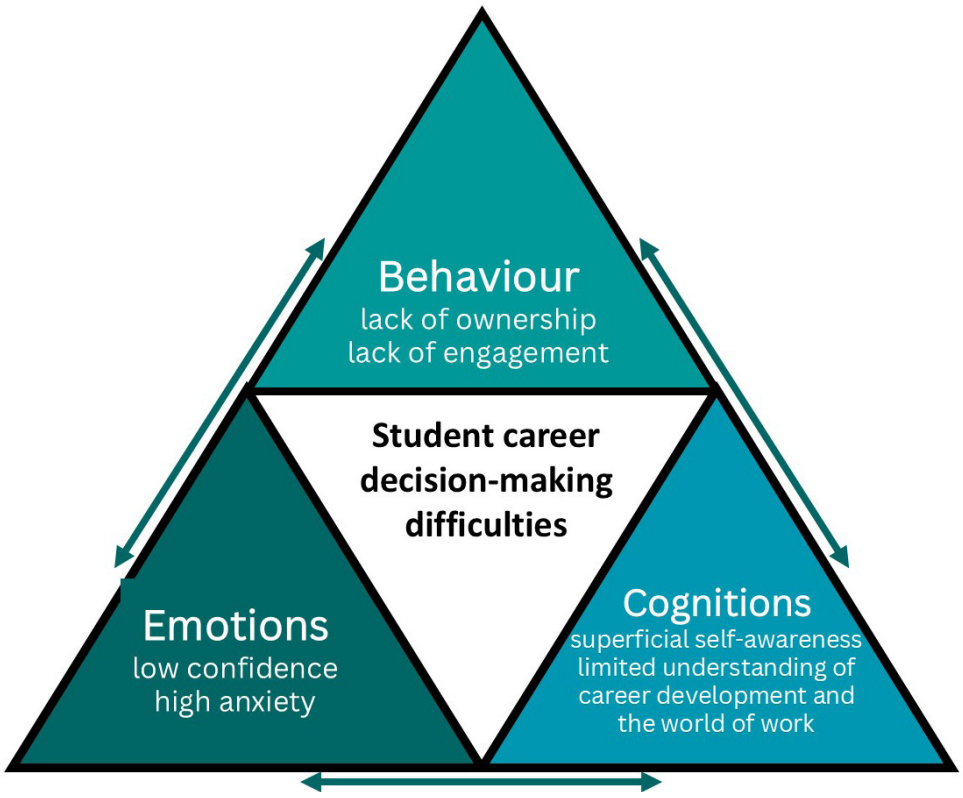
Participants in this qualitative study were 22 career practitioners working in different contexts within Higher Education across the UK. Participants were asked, in semi-structured interviews, to describe the issues that students bring to their one-to-one appointments and we used a template analysis, a form of thematic analysis particularly suitable for large qualitative data sets (King, 2004, 2014) to analyse the transcribed interview scripts. Further details can be found in Yates & Hirsh (2022, 2024).

Findings

We developed three themes, conceptualising the students' career difficulties within a model of interrelated behavioural, emotional and cognitive difficulties (Figure 1). This model echoes Ellis and Beck's well-establish cognitive triangle (Beck, 1976) which explicitly links cognitions, emotions and behaviours, and forms the basis for a range of well-evidenced cognitive behavioural techniques (Hofmann et al., 2012).

The *emotional career issues* described by the career practitioners were most commonly either low confidence or high career anxiety. Low confidence was described as the students' fear that they would not be good enough – good enough to make the right decision, good enough to get a job, and good enough to perform well in post. Career anxiety covered anxiety about making a choice, about the job application process and about actually doing the job. It also referred to anxiety about whether the students would be able to meet expectations – expectations placed on them by their families, by their schools, and by the students themselves, and the fear of falling behind their peers.

Figure 1: Students' Career Decision-making Difficulties



Behavioural career issues were predominately about lack of engagement – either *with* the process or *within* the process. Students who were not engaged *with* the process simply didn't speak to a career practitioner until very late – often not giving their career any thought until after their final university exams were over. Those not engaged *within* the process were those who might attend careers events or appointments, but who would not take ownership of their own career development, expecting either the career practitioner or 'fate' to step in and identify the right career choice for them.

Cognitive career issues were exhibited by students whose self-awareness was deemed superficial, and those who did not know enough about the options available. This cluster also included students who did not understand the process of career choice (what exactly they would need to do to reach a conclusion) and students who were struggling to know what an employer would want or how an employer would see them.

Some of the specific career decision-making difficulties we identified within each of the three factors are well-rehearsed in the literature. Gati et al.'s cluster of *lack of information* (1996) aligns with the cognitive cluster in our model, and Saka et al., (2008) identify low confidence and anxiety in their model focused on emotional career decision-making difficulties. Verbruggen and de Vos's theory of Career Inaction (2020) identifies *inertia-enhancing mechanisms* that constitute psychological barriers to career decision-making, highlighting that fear and anxiety (aligned with our emotional issues) and cognitive overload (linked to our cognitive cluster) both typically contribute to career inaction – which aligns with the lack of engagement in our behavioural cluster. Our new model however seems to be the first such model to bring together the three groups of emotional, behavioural and cognitive difficulties and identify the specific challenges and the relationships between them in this way.

Practical implications

One aim of the study was to offer some guidance that could inform the training of career professionals. Whilst career trainees are generally well equipped to support students with some of the aspects of career difficulties highlighted in this model, there are other issues that are perhaps less widely addressed in initial professional training. The Career Development Institute's qualification in career development, for example (CDI, 2024), ensures that career practice trainees are well qualified to support students with many of their cognitive difficulties, equipping them with techniques for boosting self-awareness, supporting clients researching the labour market, and identifying job ideas, but is less explicit in its focus on the difficulties within the emotional and behavioural clusters.

There are many approaches which could offer career practitioners useful techniques for working with the issues of students who have emotional or behavioural difficulties. Motivational interviewing (Rochat & Rossier, 2016) is an approach that aligns with a person-centred approach to guidance or coaching, and helps to encourage clients to take ownership of their own situation through boosting their intrinsic motivation towards change (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Savickas's work on Career Construction Theory (2020) and Career AdaptAbilities (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) offers techniques to encourage clients to take ownership of their own career planning and Solution Focused Coaching has shown some promise within career contexts as an approach to enabling clients to identify their own solutions to their own problems (Miller, 2016). Emotional difficulties with clients must of course be approached sensitively – most practitioners are not qualified counsellors, and we must be mindful of the limits of our expertise, but there are some techniques from cognitive behavioural coaching that have been show to work within career coaching, and acceptance and commitment therapy helps clients manage the impact of their anxiety and is showing great promise in our field (Luken & De Folter, 2019). These approaches could be incorporated into career practice training programmes to offer career practitioners a wider range of techniques for addressing the student career decision making difficulties we identified.

Study 2: How do students make their career choices?

The students' lack of understanding about how to go about making a career choice was one of the difficulties identified in Study 1 that commanded our attention, notable because our participants, the career practitioners themselves were uncertain about how to best address it. The Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) provides data about graduate outcomes 15 months after graduation. But whilst this data is useful, and often well used within career programmes, the existing destination data is concerned with the nature of outcomes and the graduates' perceptions of them; it does not provide data on how the graduates came to choose those options. The career practitioners in our study evidently had a deep understanding of career development and career choice, yet reported that they felt that they did not have a clear model to explain to the students the steps they needed to take to make a good career choice. Many of them described using both the DOTS model (Law & Watts, 1977) and the theory of Planned Happenstance (Mitchell et al., 1999) but found that even this combination failed to offer a simple step-by-step framework to describe student career choice. This became the goal for Study 2 where I sought to identify and understand the steps that students and graduates took to reach a decision on their first graduate job.

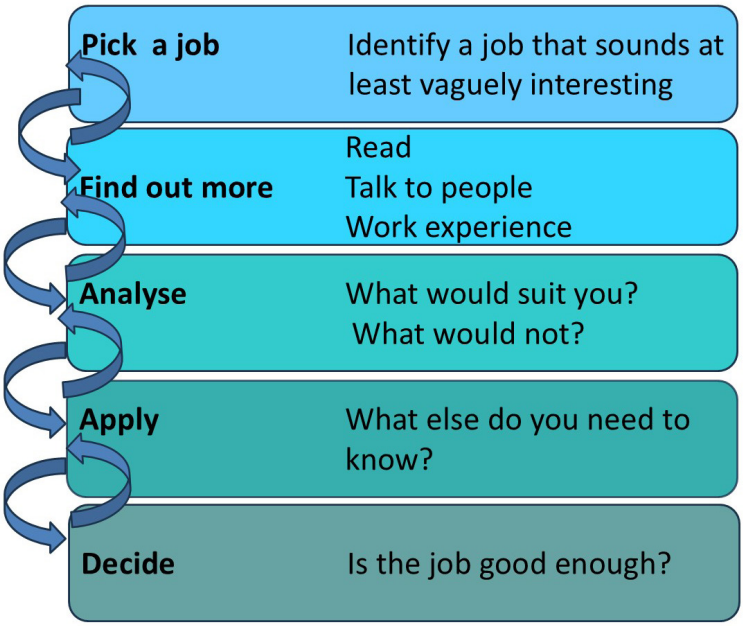
Most existing models of career decision-making are normative, offering guidance for how people 'should' make career choices (for example Gati & Asher, 2005; Hirschi & Läge, 2007). Career practitioners of course want to help students make good decisions, but expecting them to conform to a normative approach may not be the most valuable way to support them; evidence has shown that it can be more effective to meet clients where they are – acknowledging the real-world approach that they are taking and helping them to build on and improve their existing approach (Baron, 2004; Bell et al., 1988). A descriptive model, outlining the steps that graduates typically take to reach a career choice could be a useful starting point for this kind of support.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 recent UK graduates (those who graduated within the previous three years), 15 women and 15 men, who were currently employed, and asked them to describe the career development steps they took as they went from '*I have no idea what I want to do*' to '*I am now working*'. Through a reflective thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2022), an approach to thematic analysis particularly suitable for single-coder research, I developed a model of real-world career decision-making. Further details can be found in Yates, 2025.

Findings

The graduates interviewed came from diverse disciplines and were working in a range of different jobs and industries, yet there was considerable consistency in the steps they described (Figure 2). The graduates explained that they first identified a plausible job idea, and then started to find out more about it. As they researched, they considered whether the job would suit them – whether they would like it, whether they would be successful in that field, and whether the job would meet their needs. If the job failed to meet their standards, then they returned to stage 1 and picked another job. If the job sounded as though it might suit them, then they looked for a vacancy and applied. The process of applying, for many, constituted a deeper stage of exploration, and many made their final decision during or after applying. The whole process was iterative and the graduates went back and forth between the stages until they had reached a decision.

Figure 2: A model of real-world graduate decision-making



The stages in this model align with some aspects of existing normative models (Gati & Asher, 2005; Hirschi & Läge, 2007). It is no surprise to see that students research the job options, analyse how well an occupation would suit them, and make a decision. But there are three notable differences. In this descriptive model, the students generally consider jobs one at a time; they engage in self-exploration after they have conducted some research on a job, and only in the context of this particular occupation; and they use the application process as a way of finding out more – they apply and then decide, rather than decide and then apply.

The graduate participants in this study all described a very similar career decision-making journey, but many of them were aware that their steps did not conform to the normative ideal – they knew how they 'ought' to make a choice and were aware and sometimes a little embarrassed to admit that they were deviating from traditional advice. So, what did they find so appealing about this approach?

I mentioned earlier that one key challenge that students face in making their career choices is cognitive overload (Sauermann, 2005; Verbruggen & de Vos, 2020) and we know that making a career choice can be enormously demanding in terms of time and effort. The real-world model includes four key resource-saving processes and that may be the key to its appeal.

1. *The graduates, where they could, relied on chance to identify a job idea.* Ideally, they generated their career ideas through chance – inspired by a person they met, a course they took or a film they watched. The graduates only put in the effort needed for active career research when chance let them down – when nothing emerged, or when their chance-inspired idea failed to live up to expectations.

2. *The graduates only dealt with one career idea at a time.* Rather than researching a range of options and keeping three or four possible career options live at once, the graduates picked one and pursued it, trying to work out whether it would meet a minimum acceptable standard. Only if it fell short would the students start thinking about a second option. This one-at-a-time known as satisficing (Simon, 1955) reduces the cognitive load required to make a decision, and has been shown to lead to more satisfying career outcomes (Iyengar et al., 2006).

3. *Self-exploration was conducted in the context of a particular, tangible job idea.* Trying to work out what they want from a career, job or next step can be very difficult for young people who have had little experience in the workplace. Traditional careers advice assumes that clients should first identify their own needs, strengths and requirements and then use that information to identify a suitable job idea. These graduates reversed this: they looked for a suitable job and then worked out whether it was what they wanted. Concrete examples are less cognitively demanding than abstract ideas, and it seemed to be much easier for graduates to consider '*what would I like or not like about nursing?*' than '*what do I want in a job?*'

4. *Graduates applied for jobs as a way to help them decide.* Received wisdom in careers writing is that you should make a choice and then apply for a job (Gati & Asher, 2005; Law & Watts, 1977), but many of the graduates I spoke to reversed this: they applied for a job and then made a choice. The application process can be a very efficient way to

research, as applicants meet future colleagues and see the office where they might be based. Arguably, it makes good sense to approach the application process as a two-way interview, and the graduates felt that this process would save their resources, killing two birds with one stone, as they found out more and applied at the same time.

It seems then that this study showed that graduates' approaches to career choice are well suited to dealing with some of the more difficult and demanding aspects of the career decision-making process.

Practical implications

The model as a whole could add value in two specific ways. We identified in the first study that students find it difficult to know how to go about making a career decision and for many this lack of understanding provokes anxiety. Sharing this straightforward step by step model with students could provide them with a clear path towards a decision and allow them to feel confident that they know what they need to do.

Second, the order of the stages offers some insights that could help with curriculum planning. This model suggests that graduates' natural inclination is to engage in self-exploration in the context of a specific job. This reversal of the traditional order of sessions from self-awareness and then opportunity awareness, to opportunity awareness followed by self-awareness in the context of one particular job idea, may well be more valuable for students, who seem to find it easier to reflect deeply on themselves within the context of a tangible job idea. Ayliffe et al., (2024) offer some useful reflections on one such initiative at City St George's, University of London.

Additionally, career practitioners can add value at specific stages. The model is, intentionally, descriptive rather than prescriptive: it shows how graduates actually make decisions, rather than offering advice on how to make good decisions. As such the approach has some limitations and career practitioners are well placed to add value to students by being alert to the flaws in the approach and finding ways to help students to mitigate against some of the risks.

The first limitation is the graduates' approach to identifying their initial job idea, where they typically relied on their life experience, rather than exploring options more systematically. We know that some students and graduates have a wider range of experiences or have access to more aspirational set of occupations than others. This seems to be a point in the process where careers services can add considerable value, offering students opportunities to encounter a wide range of different types of occupations early in their time at university to broaden their horizons for action (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

A further risk lies in the apply-then-decide approach to making a choice. As I have argued, this is in some ways a sensible approach – the application process can offer a great opportunity to research the opportunity at a deeper level. The problem lies in the passive attitude that many of the graduates seemed to take when making the decision, often seeing the employer's decision as to whether or not to offer them a job, as a 'sign' that the job is right for them. Careers support at this stage, encouraging students to really consider whether the job is right for them, could help students and graduates to take ownership of this decision.

Finally, it is worth noting some limitations with the research itself. The limited sample size of both studies means that we should be cautious in drawing generalisable conclusions and 19 of the 30 graduates in Study 2 had finished their HE courses in 2020 and 2021, meaning that their courses were impacted by the Covid pandemic for one or more years. We did not explicitly explore the impact this may have had on their processes, but it is useful to note that this was not a conventional HE experience for them. The cross sectional design of Study 2 means that the graduates were relying on their memories; a longitudinal study, following students at different time points during their career decision making journey could help to develop the model. Further research into specific UK HE populations, including, for example neurodivergent students, students from different TUNDRA quintiles, and students choosing work placements, could help to offer a clearer and more nuanced picture.

Conclusion

In this article I have offered a descriptive account of student and graduate career decision-making – outlining how these graduates made their first occupational choices and the typical career difficulties practitioners see in their student clients. The findings from this research align with existing literature, but there are also aspects identified in these studies that have not been seen elsewhere, notably the close links between emotional, cognitive and behavioural clusters of decision-making difficulties, and some of the steps involved in making a career choice – including the idea of self-exploration only in the context of a job idea and the apply-and-then-decide approach to making a choice. Most literature published on this subject is normative, offering models of good practice, but I argue that working with a descriptive model may be more effective – meeting students where they are, and building on their natural instincts, rather than expecting them to conform to an alien, albeit technically 'better' approach. I hope that the studies reported here offer something fresh that resonates with practitioners and can be used to support clients.

References

Ayliffe, L., Shah, A. & Yates, J. (2024). Boosting student engagement with a research-driven curriculum. *Phoenix*. AGCAS. Issue 172 (40-42).

Baron, J., Koehler, D., & Harvey, N. (2004). Normative models of judgment and decision-making. In D. J. Koehler & N. Harvey (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of judgment and decision-making* (pp. 19-36). Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470752937.ch2

Beck, A. T. (1976). *Cognitive therapy and the emotional disorders*. Penguin.

Bell, D.E., Raiffa, H., & Tversky, A. (1988). Descriptive, normative, and prescriptive interactions in decision-making. In D.E. Bell, H. Raiffa, & A. Tversky (Eds.), *Decision-making* (pp. 9–30). Cambridge University Press.

Career Development Institute. (2024). *Qualifications in career development handbook*. https://www.thecdi.net/CDI/media/Write/QCGD/Handbooks/QCD-Handbook-2024-25-v5.pdf?ext=.pdf

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: a practical guide*. Sage.

Gati, I., & Asher, I. (2005). The PIC model for career decision-making: Pre-screening, in-depth exploration, and choice. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Contemporary models in vocational psychology* (pp. 15–62). Routledge.

Gati, I., Krausz, M., & Osipow, S. H. (1996). A taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 43*(4), 510–526. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.43.4.510

Higher Education Statistics Authority. (2024). *Graduate Outcomes Survey.* https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/13-06-2024/sb268-higher-education-graduate-outcomes-statistics

Hirschi, A., & Läge, D. (2007). The relation of secondary students' career-choice readiness to a six-phase model of career decision-making. *Journal of Career Development, 34*(2), 164–191. https://doi.org/10.1177/08948453073074

Hodkinson, P., & Sparkes, A. C. (1997). Careership: A sociological theory of career decision making. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 18*(1), 29–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569970180102

Hofmann, S. G., Asnaani, A., Vonk, I. J., Sawyer, A. T., & Fang, A. (2012). The efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy: A review of meta-analyses. *Cognitive Therapy and Research, 36*, 427–440. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-012-9476-1

Iyengar, S. S., Wells, R. E., & Schwartz, B. (2006). Doing better but feeling worse: Looking for the "best" job undermines satisfaction. *Psychological Science, 17*(2), 143–150. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.0167

King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research*. Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446280119.n21

King, N. (2014). *What is Template Analysis?* University of Huddersfield.

Law, B., & Watts, A. G. (1977). *Schools, careers and community*. Church Information Office.

Luken, T., & De Folter, A. (2019). Acceptance and commitment therapy fuels innovation of career counselling. In N. Arthur, R. Neault, & M. McMahon (Eds.), *Career theory and models at work: Ideas for practice* (pp. 195–206). CERIC.

Miller, J. (2016). Solution-focused career counselling. In M. McMahon (Ed.), *Career counselling: Constructivist approaches* (pp. 127–138). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315693590

Mitchell, K. E., Levin, S. A., & Krumboltz, J. D. (1999). Planned happenstance: Constructing unexpected career opportunities. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 77*(2), 115–124. https://doi.org/10.1002/J.1556-6676.1999.TB02431.X

Rochat, S., & Rossier, J. (2016). Integrating motivational interviewing in career counseling: A case study. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 93*, 150–162. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2016.02.003

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68

Saka, N., Gati, I., & Kelly, K. R. (2008). Emotional and personality-related aspects of career-decision-making difficulties. *Journal of Career Assessment, 16*(4), 403–424. https://doi.org/10.1177/106907270831890

Sauermann, H. (2005). Vocational choice: A decision-making perspective. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 66*, 273–303. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2004.10.001

Savickas, M. L. (2020). Career construction theory and counseling model. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (3rd ed., pp. 165–200). Wiley.

Savickas, M. L., & Porfeli, E. J. (2012). Career Adapt-Abilities Scale: Construction, reliability, and measurement equivalence across 13 countries. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 80*(3), 661–673. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2012.01.011

Simon, H. A. (1955). *Models of man: Social and rational*. Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-6281-2_14

Verbruggen, M., & De Vos, A. (2020). When people don't realize their career desires: Toward a theory of career inaction. *Academy of Management Review, 45*(2), 376–394. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2017.0196

Yates, J. (2025). Graduates' career choices: An empirically derived process model. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-024-09720-4

Yates, J., & Hirsh, W. (2024). The career difficulties of university students in the UK: A qualitative study of the perceptions of UK HE career practitioners. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2024.2412199

Yates, J., & Hirsh, W. (2022). One-to-one career conversations in UK higher education: Practical approaches and professional challenges. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 46*(9), 1304–1317. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2022.2072195

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5404

'We need carrots and sticks': How to enhance student engagement with career learning in Higher Education

Andy Port and Brian J. Hracs
University of Southampton, UK

For correspondence

Andy Port: a.r.port@soton.ac.uk

To cite this article:

Port, A. & Hracs, B. J. (2025). 'We need carrots and sticks': How to enhance student engagement with career learning in Higher Education. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *54*(1), 29-46. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5404

Abstract

Although students and universities are increasingly concerned about employability, student engagement often remains low. The question is why, and what can be done? This reflective paper addresses these questions by sharing recent experience of designing and delivering a credit bearing employability module. It demonstrates that combined rewards and punishments (carrots and sticks) can successfully enhance student engagement. We achieved 98% attendance across all sessions and an overall module satisfaction score of 90%. Our paper benefits academics, career practitioners and higher education institutions (HEIs) by offering practical solutions which can be scaled and transferred across disciplines, institutions and learning contexts.

Keywords: career learning; student engagement; employability; module design; assessment

Introduction

While working at university recruitment events, we have found that students and their parents are increasingly concerned about securing graduate level work after graduation and how universities support this goal. This trend has also been recognised within our

wider university community. Moreover, alongside key factors such as published league tables, geographical proximity and cost, the selection of universities, courses and modules is often informed by employability rankings (Times Higher Education, 2017). As a result, there is increased pressure upon universities to deliver a comprehensive and effective offer assisting students to develop skills, gain work-related experience, and secure desirable jobs. Universities also increasingly target embedding careers and employability into university teaching and learning curricula, with the aim of improving overall graduate outcomes (Bradley et al., 2021), together with an associated increase in performance measures, indicators and metrics related to careers and employability. These measures include the development of the Teaching Excellence Framework, the Graduate Outcomes survey and the tracking of graduate salaries through the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes dataset (HEPI, 2020).

Despite the stated importance of employability by students and a corresponding increase in both profile and provision of career-related supports and services within UK universities, student engagement remains relatively low. Recent research by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) found that 'students are not necessarily prioritising careers and employability engagement as highly as other university commitments and experiences' (2022, p.34). This raises two key questions: why is student engagement low and what can be done to improve engagement levels?

We address these questions by sharing our recent experience of designing and delivering a credit bearing employability module and drawing upon our forty years of combined experience working in higher education. The first author is a career practitioner within the university's central careers service. The second author is an academic who researches the nature of work and academic Employability Lead within their department. Our paper contributes to ongoing debates around embedding employability within university curricula. Its key audience is academics and career professionals seeking ideas to increase student engagement, whilst recognising common constraints and realities. We propose a range of practical and straightforward solutions that can be applied and transferred across disciplines, institutions and learning contexts.

Reflecting upon the design, delivery and assessment of a new and successful credit bearing module called 'The Professional Geographer', the paper makes three key points. Firstly, it argues that students require and indeed welcome, carrots and sticks to enhance motivation and engagement. Secondly, it outlines how carrots and sticks can be effectively incorporated into teaching design, delivery, and assessment. Finally, it demonstrates that the effective use of carrots and sticks can successfully address some key challenges for students and institutions.

Background context: The Big Picture

Employability is increasingly important within higher education, both within the UK and world-wide. The influential Dearing Report (1997) stated the UK Higher Education system needed to 'meet the legitimate aspirations of its citizens to improve their qualifications and employability' (p.263). In 1998, the Blair government introduced student tuition fees to assist funding of UK higher education. The influential Browne Report (2010) subsequently recommended placing more of the financial burden of funding UK higher education on to graduates. Boden & Nedeva (2010) argue that while UK universities have a long

involvement in the production of useful and productive citizens, they traditionally have had a significant degree of discretion, whereas now, employability is a performative function of universities, shaped and directed by the state. Successive UK governments have tasked higher education institutions to fulfil this responsibility, to improve graduate employability and graduate employment levels and meet the expectations of current and prospective students. Employability is also a key component within the Teaching Excellence Framework, a national policy introduced in 2016 aimed at rating and enhancing the student experience. As a result, HEIs have endeavoured to embed employability into their curricula (Fallows & Steven, 2000). In practice, this can be challenging to achieve due to the challenges surrounding the application of knowledge, staff and of resources within institutions (Senior et al., 2018; Taylor & Parsons, 2011).

A UK Commission for Employment and Skills report, 'The Employability Challenge' (2009) highlighted that developing employability skills is not complicated but is challenging. It requires a properly resourced environment, leadership, funding and incentive structures for staff. Barriers to student participation in employability enhancing activities include work/study commitments, financial/health pressures and a variable lack of student confidence and awareness (Jackson et al., 2024). A recent article reported that more than half of UK students are working long hours in paid work due to a lack of funding and the cost-of-living crisis (The Guardian, 2024). Beyond 'not having the time', common inhibitors to engagement with non-core career learning activities include students viewing these as optional; an anxiety in engaging with their future (especially since the Covid-19 pandemic); as something to do 'later'; and importantly, that such activities are not rewarded with academic credit (Donald et al., 2019). Indeed, Jorre de St Jorre & Oliver (2017) found that students often find graduate learning outcomes too generic to be meaningful and that they are most likely to engage with learning outcomes which are contextualised and assessed. Research by Tymon (2013) has shown that when students were asked why employability matters to them, it did so in instrumental terms (for example better job security or pay, or increased choice of jobs), rather than improving the quality of employment.

Background context: Our experience

Since 2014 we have worked closely together, as career practitioner and academic, to deliver a variety of career-related learning opportunities to our undergraduate geography and environmental science students across year groups. We have engaged in a range of activities commonly found across the UK, but student engagement was a constant challenge. For example, a central component of our offer has been joint delivery of career-related talks to year-based student cohorts (first year, second year etc) to raise student awareness of career pathways and available supports and resources. Although these talks were timetabled and students were provided with a clear rationale of the benefits and encouraged to attend, engagement was usually low averaging between 30% and 50% of the specific cohort. When asked why, students viewed these sessions as 'separate' and disconnected from their academic studies, and importantly, attendance and participation did not result in academic credit. Another common activity involved bringing in employers/industry experts to talk about their career sector, specific roles and career paths. Again, despite active promotion of these sessions, student engagement was typically low, averaging 30% of the total department cohort.

Attempts were also made to provide dedicated 'career days' or 'employability weeks' backed by widespread promotional campaigns. These efforts also failed to attract high numbers of students, with reports from students of feeling overwhelmed, afraid to 'face their future' or that the time would be better spent working on graded assessments. Indeed, the creation of designated 'employability weeks', where traditional academic teaching was suspended to create space for employability activities, were in practice, often regarded as 'reading weeks' by students or as time to rest or visit family.

When we asked students formally and informally for feedback and suggestions to improve the low employability engagement levels, we repeatedly heard that there was a willingness to engage, however, engagement would be much more attractive if it was rewarded with academic credit. Therefore, we believe that enhancing student engagement requires understanding and working with individual preferences, constraints, and complex realities.

At university level, despite increased provision and promotion of career tools and supports available through the university's centralised careers service (e.g. workshops, online resources and one-to-one appointments) overall engagement has been disappointingly low. For example, a CV workshop bookable by all the university's students with capacity for 20 students, may average between two to six students. Moreover, those who engage tend to be either students characterised as 'careerists' (Tomlinson, 2012) or those referred by their personal tutor (an academic responsible for a student's overall academic and personal welfare). Therefore, student engagement was not consistent and equitable across the student population.

After many years of frustration with low student engagement and mounting pressure to enhance the employability offer within the department, a pragmatic decision was taken through the programme revalidation process, (which takes place every five years), to develop a new dedicated and credit bearing employability module. This was greatly assisted by this paper's second author also being academic programme lead at the time, meaning they could advocate strongly for change. A dedicated module was viewed as a more achievable option, as previous attempts to spread employability across modules had been diluted by competing demands upon academic colleagues. Indeed, some academics opposed supporting employability initiatives in their modules because it was 'not their responsibility'. 'The Professional Geographer' was promoted as an optional third-year undergraduate module, to be delivered in the first semester and capped at thirty students. This number was chosen based on our combined previous teaching experience to ensure high quality small group experiential learning. As we outline below, the module was an important opportunity to deliver scalable impact in employability and career learning by engaging and benefiting students taking the module. Importantly, it also generated increased engagement across the wider department, by delivering student-led career events accessible to all departmental students.

Module design: Concept

We aimed for the module to develop students' awareness of their skills and values; increase their confidence and self-advocacy; raise their awareness of the changing world of work and their future within a rapidly changing world; and improve their application of learning in practical contexts.

Based on our experience, and following many discussions with students, we recognised for this module to be successful, we needed to deploy a mixture of 'carrots and sticks'. Carrots are positive rewards which encourage students to engage. Intrinsically, students would be motivated to engage, learn and complete a range of tasks because they find developing and enhancing their skills, experience, knowledge and confidence, enjoyable and satisfying. Extrinsic motivation would derive from tangible rewards including academic credit for engagement, completion, performance, plus practical benefits such as CVs, personal statements, interview skills, benefitting them in both the graduate recruitment process and subsequent career.

Sticks, or negative penalties, are also powerful motivators working on two levels. Intrinsically, students were required to complete weekly self-directed homework tasks, such as readings, preparing documents such as cover letters, or self-reflections or assessments. A psychological contract formed between class members as students did not want to let themselves or other class members down during subsequent discussions of completed homework tasks in class. Extrinsically, students prepared, attended, engaged, and performed to avoid losing marks awarded in small amounts for each task and session. From an individual student perspective, all module elements had some form of value which encouraged consistent and enthusiastic engagement. A combination of carrots and sticks proved highly effective across the entire cohort as this mixed approach appealed to each student regardless of individual personalities, goals, motivations, or reward preferences.

When designing teaching sessions, curating content was a challenging task. We wanted to strike a balance between covering the most important topics, whilst drawing upon our skills and experience, together with providing academic and practical content. We believe that the elements which make our module different from many other higher education employability modules, are the creation of student ambassadors (discussed below), together with a high degree of variation in assessment methods aligned to the world of work, for example the delivery of student-led employer events, report writing and producing recorded book review videos. The module timetable featured three sessions of fifty minutes per week for twelve weeks. We incorporated research-led teaching conducted by the second author, including topics on the spatial dynamics of work, aesthetic labour and entrepreneurship. We wanted to broaden discussions to not just the jobs themselves, but also their geographical and spatial considerations (for example, working for a large firm versus a small or medium sized firm or home working versus hybrid working environments).

A concern when conceptualising the module, and one often expressed within higher education, was that the introduction of an optional employability module within our curricula would not benefit the wider student body (Taylor & Hooley, 2014). Moreover, it would be those 'careerist' students (Tomlinson, 2012) who would study it, and that these students would have achieved their immediate career goals regardless. Importantly, we wanted our module to have wider impact upon the whole departmental student cohort. We aimed to deliver this impact by creating and promoting student-led career learning opportunities through the module, accessible to all departmental students. A common constraint upon many university career services and departments is a lack of available resource to deliver programmes of targeted career events and activities. Our solution to this problem was our module students acting as student 'ambassadors' for their peers within the wider department. These ambassadors would undertake activities which would

develop key areas of their own individual personal employability (for example, teamwork, organisation skills) plus facilitate wider career learning opportunities (exposure to people working in different career roles). Importantly, module students themselves would have significant input into the activity design and delivery. This enabled us to capture and channel the student voice to create a scalable peer-driven programme of career learning activities open to and beneficial to all the department's students.

We designed the module to cater to different learning preferences, based on the VARK model (Fleming & Mills, 1992) and featured experience-based learning, equipping students with key theoretical knowledge and practical skills which they could take forward into graduate work. As outlined in Figure 1, the module features a mixture of lectures, workshops and student ambassador meetings. Ultimately, the co-design and co-delivery of the module proved valuable to students based on post module feedback:

> 'I loved having two perspectives (Author 1 and author 2)' and
>
> 'Really nice to have two lecturers.'

Figure 1: Weekly Schedule

LECTURES	WORKSHOPS
Introduction to the module	Assessing career readiness
The history of work in the UK	Values, motivations, personality, and skills
The changing world of work	What is possible with my geography degree?
Meaningful and rewarding work	Tips for networking
The spatial dynamics of work	Tips for preparing cover letters
Aesthetic labour and self-branding	Tips for preparing personal statements
	Tips for assessment centres
	Tips for job interviews
AMBASSADOR MEETINGS	Tips for 'getting things done'
Weekly student meetings, student led.	Tips for personal productivity systems
Capturing team progress and agreeing	Tips for effective writing
actions.	Tips for effective speaking
	Tips for wellbeing and work-life balance
	Create your labour market entry plan
	Careers help session

Module design: Delivery

When operationalising our module concept, we incorporated some core educational principles. We wanted students to be clear on the logic of the module's sequencing, and its delivery to be an active, experiential process, involving academic and practical material. There was clear constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996) within and between individual topics, and regular provision of individual reflection and group activities.

A key pedagogical design feature was the inclusion of a flipped learning approach, (Bergmann & Sams, 2012), with students assigned pre-session homework to complete. For example, students were asked to pre-record themselves delivering interview question answers, using an Artificial Intelligence Interview Simulator tool. The purpose was to enable students a safe space to practice and to illustrate the importance of effective preparation and rehearsal of answers. They subsequently discussed their experience of completing this task in class. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Weekly Homework

Complete the 'motivations for taking the module survey'	Join Slack platform and review Virtual Learning Environment (Blackboard) materials
Complete vales and preferences survey and reflect upon the results	Develop personal elevator pitch
Create/update LinkedIn profile and evaluate using online resources	Create/update CV and receive feedback using Artificial Intelligence CV360 tool
Create/update cover letter and personal statement and evaluate using online resources	Use Artificial Intelligence Interview Simulator tool to simulate an online recorded interview. Record some reflections.
Write a list of tools and strategies you currently use to assist your productivity and reflect on how you use them	Identify areas you would like to improve (e.g. time management) for class discussion
Complete the 'effective writing' survey and reflect upon the results	Complete the 'effective speaking' survey and reflect upon results
Complete the 'stress and wellbeing' survey and reflect upon the results	Prepare questions and concerns about future career for discussion

Flipped learning was supplemented by an activity learning approach (Bonwell & Eison, 1991) throughout the module, where students interacted with the learning process and co-constructed their own meaning, drawing upon their individual experiences.

Flipped learning ensured students were at a similar level of knowledge and experience prior to taught content delivery, increasing confidence and performance during in-class exercises. There was some prior concern that students may not engage in the pre-session homework, as this had been experienced in teaching elsewhere. Encouragingly, the module achieved consistently high levels of student engagement (98% attendance across all sessions) and performance (81% average grade across workshops). The authors conclude from student observation and feedback that this was due to engaging content where students could clearly recognise the relevance and importance of the topic. Again, carrots and sticks proved to be powerful motivators. Weekly engagement (homework and sessions) was worth 15% of the module marks and while some students saw it as earning credit for doing valuable work (reward), others feared losing marks (penalty). Students were encouraged to discuss their homework together, making it transparent if they had not completed it. Students also completed a self-reporting sheet about their engagement with the homework which was passed around and visible to everyone in each session. We explained the purpose, logic and benefit of this process upfront, and no student concerns were raised.

The module ran weekly across a semester meaning homework was completed weekly, assisting students to manage their time effectively and maintain motivation. This was a deliberate design feature, supporting students to make consistent progress rather than one formal assessment at the end. Indeed, this 'slow and steady' approach to employability was actively encouraged. Overall, with the right mix of alignment and incentives, student feedback indicated that they valued and enjoyed the regular homework:

> 'The weekly homework tasks were manageable and useful.'
>
> 'The weekly homework forced you to think about your employability/life after university which was beneficial.'

Student feedback showed that they particularly valued the module's emphasis on practical activities (e.g. CVs and personal statements). Many reported they were receiving credit for activities they knew they ought to be doing anyway. In contrast, if students attended a central careers service workshop, this was optional, non-credit bearing and perceived as less tailored to their individual circumstances. Frequent interaction within the module also generated trust between students and the teaching team. Once students felt comfortable, many requested subsequent one-to-one appointments to discuss their individual career and future. Moreover, there was an associated increase in subject peers who had not studied the module asking if they could have career discussion appointments, based on the positive experience of module students. This resulted in a 28% increase in geography careers-related individual appointments across the academic year.

As educators, a key part of our role throughout, was to model and explicitly reference professional behaviours in real time. This included providing formal and informal feedback to the students, which we characterised as constructive and supportively challenging. This modelling assisted participants to build upon and adapt their style to subsequently deliver effective feedback to peers in class, through both practical engagement and observation of their fellow classmates and us. We explicitly addressed areas where students felt less confident (for example, speaking in teams or in class) and highlighted that within in the world of work this was a key skill often required. We stressed the module was a safe space to practice and develop such skills. Most participants responded well to this approach, reporting

> 'The size of the classroom and intimacy [created a] comfortable environment to speak and share ideas' and
>
> 'The community spirit of the seminars allowed for a friendly space to voice opinions.'

Finally, module delivery contained a mixture of traditional academic lectures, practical workshops, and group discussions (Zepke & Leach, 2010). This variety assisted student engagement levels by catering to different learning preferences. Students formally fed back that they enjoyed the 'combination of workshops and lectures' and the 'interactive elements of lectures and workshops.'

Assessment design

In designing assessment methods, we did not want to default to more established methods of assessment, such as essays and groupwork projects (Clouder et al., 2012). We wanted the module to look and feel different and to link assessment methods to those that students were likely to typically experience within graduate employment. This approach was informed by the work of Osborne et al. (2013). We included multiple assessment methods; the production of work focused on varied audiences, for example, a report for a prospective employer, or a recorded book review for fellow peers; we also encouraged collaborative work; and a 'light structure' including guidance which does not go into exhaustive detail; and opportunities for both peer and self-review.

Pedagogical principles of 'backwards design' (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) were adopted and sessional content constructively aligned (Biggs, 1996). Constructive alignment draws on two areas of learning: constructivism (Piaget, 1952), the concept of learners constructing their knowledge through learning activities, and alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2007) with intended

learning outcomes (ILOs). Backward design has three stages: It begins with educators considering the learning goals of the module. Having determined the desired results, the second stage is to determine the acceptable evidence, asking 'how will we know that the learning experience is making a difference?'. The third stage considers what content, activities and experiences will lead to the desired results. We had a clear picture in our minds of student participants completing the module with increased self-awareness and knowledge of themselves and the graduate labour market; having developed key skills; gained relevant experience; generated tangible outputs such CVs and personal statements; as well as increased confidence and ability to transition successfully into the world of work (see Figure 3).

We used six different types of assessment and employed a 'slow and steady' approach, which supported students throughout the module. We ensured guidance was provided at key points, that each assessment covered a range of skills, and that they were constructively aligned to module content and delivery. To overcome anticipated concern from students about the relatively high number of assessments, we delivered a detailed introduction to the whole module in the first class, taking time to explain the logic and value of our approach to assessment. We explained each of the six assessments in turn, providing rationale, benefits, and details. Importantly, we indicated how each assessment would allow them to deploy the range of skills developed throughout the module, including opportunities to write in new and different ways. These included report writing and reflective logs which would be useful in many of the professional career options. We allocated time for questions as these assessments were new to most students and we

Figure 3: Assessment Overview

	1. Workshop Engagement	2. Employability Ambassador Engagement	3. Mid-Module Review	4. Recorded Book Review	5. Labour Market Entry Plan	6. Planned Employability Event
Description	Preparation, attendance and participation in discussions and activities	Contributions to sub-team (tasks) and weekly meetings	Report reflecting on career readiness and progress during module plus developing initial career objective and SMART action plan	Choose and read book from list. Produce a 5 minute recorded video review.	Report assessing range of skills (networking etc) plus reflections on progress during the module and developing action plan toward graduation and beyond	Planning, promoting and delivering a specific employer event for the department
Value	15%	15%	20%	10%	30%	10%
Sequencing	Weekly	Weekly	Early in Semester	Middle of Semester	End of Semester	End of Semester
Assessed Skills						
Team Work	*	*				*
Oral Communication	*	*		*		
Written Communication	*	*	*		*	
Reflection	*		*		*	
Planning/Organising	*	*	*		*	*
Time Management	*	*	*	*	*	*
Marketing		*				
Project Management		*				
Networking/Digital Presence		*				*
Research		*	*		*	
Strategic Thinking		*				
Evaluation			*	*	*	
Applying Knowledge			*	*	*	
Distilling Information			*	*	*	

spread assessments across the semester, reducing stress levels commonly associated with deadlines. One student commented,

> 'I liked the set up and timeline for the assignments as I never felt I was rushing to get them done.'

Overall, our approach worked well, with students adapting quickly and producing thoughtful, high-quality work.

Assessment methods: Reports

Two of the six assessments involved students individually reflecting using a report-writing format. They were required to create action plans containing SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound), outlining how they proposed to develop through the module and beyond. The first report, the mid-module review, was 1500 words in length and worth 20%. It encouraged students to reflect on their 1) motivations and values 2) skills and experiences 3) preferences related to types of work and 4) preferences related to the spatial dynamics of work. The report helped students increase their self-understanding early in the module, providing a foundation for the second report at the module's conclusion. The Labour Market Entry Plan was 2000 words and worth 30%. This included assessing their relative strengths and weaknesses of networking skills, self-branding, online presence, and ability to communicate their skills and experiences to potential employers. They also prepared an action plan for moving towards their career-related goals between module completion and graduation. Student feedback revealed that more than three quarters had not critically reflected upon their progress prior to studying this module, used models of reflection, or had previously written SMART goals. These methods of assessment were designed to develop core skills (UCAS, 2024) long required in the world of work, namely, report-writing, critical reflection and action planning.

To enable module students to self-evaluate and document their development we had them complete the university's Career Readiness Test, a psychometrically validated tool, known externally as the Graduate Capital Scale (Tomlinson et al., 2021), at the beginning and end of the module. This produced aggregated data which also enabled us to evaluate whether there was any significant growth in the students' employability capital due to completion of the module. To analyse the data, a Paired Samples t test was conducted using SPSS V.30 and measurements were taken using a Likert six-point scale within the Career Readiness Test which measured overall capital development plus the subscales of human, social, cultural, identity and psychological capital. The data was downloaded and cleaned and any duplicate or missing data was removed. The data was also checked for normalcy and outliers.

The results showed a significant average increase in overall capital development prior to the module start ($M = 3.637$, $SD = .706$) to module completion ($M = 4.733$, $SD = .537$), $t(55) = 11.582$, $p < .001$. The mean increase in scores was 1.09 (95% confidence interval, ranging from .907 to 1.286). The effect size was noted as medium to large (Cohen's $d = .708$) and the largest effect sizes were noted for social and identity capital. Students individually found completion of the Career Readiness Test helpful for them to reflect upon their progress, plus it provided us with data and evidence to demonstrate real impact in student confidence and knowledge.

Figure 4: Graduate Capital Scale analysis - A Paired Samples t test using SPSS V.30

Paired Samples Statistics		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	OverallPost	4.7332	56	.53745	.07182
	OverallPre	3.6368	56	.70559	.09429
Pair 2	HCPost	4.880	56	.5568	.0744
	HCPre	3.705	56	.6686	.0893
Pair 3	SCost	4.5318	56	.78653	.10510
	SCPre	3.1964	56	.91145	.12180
Pair 4	CCPost	4.8688	56	.62070	.08294
	CCPre	3.7816	56	.82872	.11074
Pair 5	ICPost	4.6675	56	.60527	.08088
	ICPre	3.5471	56	.75564	.10098
Pair 6	PCPost	4.7018	56	.63708	.08513
	PCPre	4.0670	56	.83874	.11208

Paired Samples Test		Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				Significance	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	OverallPost-OverallPre	1.09643	1.09643	0.09467	0.90671	1.28615	11.582	55	<.001	<.001
Pair 2	HCPost-HCPre	1.1750	1.1750	0.0995	0.9756	1.3744	11.807	55	<.001	<.001
Pair 3	SCost-SCPre	1.33536	1.33536	0.13737	1.06005	1.61066	9.721	55	<.001	<.001
Pair 4	CCPost-CCPre	1.08714	1.08714	0.10056	0.88563	1.28866	10.811	55	<.001	<.001
Pair 5	ICPost-ICPre	1.12036	1.12036	0.10794	0.90404	1.33667	10.379	55	<.001	<.001
Pair 6	PCPost-PCPre	0.63482	0.63482	0.07571	0.48309	0.78655	8.385	55	<.001	<.001

Paired Samples Effect Sizes					95% Confidence Interval	
			Standardizer a	Point Estimate	Lower	Upper
Pair 1	OverallPost - OverallPre	Cohen's d	.70845	1.548	1.155	1.934
		Hedges' correction	.71829	1.526	1.139	1.907
Pair 2	HCPost - HCPre	Cohen's d	.7447	1.578	1.181	1.968
		Hedges' correction	.7551	1.556	1.164	1.941
Pair 3	SCost - SCPre	Cohen's d	1.02801	1.299	.939	1.652
		Hedges' correction	1.04230	1.281	.926	1.630
Pair 4	CCPost - CCPre	Cohen's d	.75249	1.445	1.066	1.817
		Hedges' correction	.76295	1.425	1.051	1.792
Pair 5	ICPost - ICPre	Cohen's d	.80775	1.387	1.016	1.752
		Hedges' correction	.81898	1.368	1.002	1.728
Pair 6	PCPost - PCPre	Cohen's d	.56657	1.120	.782	1.452
		Hedges' correction	.57444	1.105	.772	1.432

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.
Cohen's d uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference.
Hedges' correction uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference, plus a correction factor.

Assessment methods: Planned event

Running employer events for students has a long history within our institution and has been often delivered through a mix of centrally-led careers service and department-led events. We wanted to bring employer events within our module structure, and enable the student voice to shape their provision, promotion and delivery. This would benefit the students studying the module and those across the wider department. This assessment was worth 10%.

For individual students, responsibility for delivering and hosting a planned event by inviting former students or employers to speak with current students, developed their confidence in approaching and engaging with employers. They achieved a tangible output, improved their career networks and developed marketing skills, promoting their planned event to the department's student body. Students were required to host the employer, chair the event and ensure the activity went smoothly. It also assisted students to gain experience of working with an employer's deadlines and to use their influencing and negotiation skills in relation to event scheduling and its subsequent delivery. The department in turn, benefitted from a wide-ranging employer programme of twenty-five employer talks, open to all interested students. Attendance ranged from 15-40 students per talk, with a core group from the module attending each one (between 5-15). This extensive programme of subject-relevant career events would not have been possible without utilising the module's students.

Assessment methods: Recorded review

A notable student favourite was the recorded book review (worth 10%). Students were required to select from a list of forty self-help books focused on increasing productivity and effectiveness, which we had curated for the module. They could also propose their own book. Titles included 'How to be a Productivity Ninja' (Allcott, 2016), 'Stop Worrying, Start Writing' (Painter, 2021) and 'Getting Things Done' (Allen, 2015). Students were required to produce a short five-minute video format book review, summarising the book's core content, a critical review, and commentary on its impact upon their personal, academic, and work-based habits. They were also asked to appraise the book's relevance for fellow students and whether or not they would recommend it and why. Students reported that they enjoyed the novel format of assessment and for many, having grown up with social media and using it extensively in their everyday lives, it played to both their strengths and preferences. It provided students with an opportunity to be creative with how they produced and edited their video and to consider how to communicate with impact. Most reported they had employed their book's principles within their daily lives, including their studies, with real benefits. Having completed their videos, students were asked if they were willing for them to be used as a resource to benefit all students within the wider department, to which the vast majority were happy to. This is a further example of our module delivering peer-created, scalable, careers-related activity.

Assessment methods: Employability Ambassador Engagement

We have discussed the common challenge for centralised careers services and subject departments of having sufficient resource and capacity to run a series of career activities reflecting students' diverse range of career interests.

Many years prior to the creation our module, the second author developed a potential solution. A group of students within the department were designated 'Employability Ambassadors' who assisted developing, promoting, and delivering a range of activities. Against this backdrop of limited resources and with low student awareness and engagement, the scheme constituted a 'win-win' for the employability lead, the department, and its students. However, the scheme's voluntary nature meant student engagement was unstable from year to year and week to week. In good times, the group swelled to over thirty students and an ambitious range of initiatives were delivered. In exchange for working on various teams, student ambassadors developed key skills, gained experience, and received a signed certificate and letter of reference from the employability lead. However, as there was no pay or academic credit, consistent formal commitment was difficult. When other demands emerged, notably assignment deadlines, those less committed would often miss meetings and deliverables. This uncertainty was to be expected but generated tension among students and made planning precarious.

The module was an opportunity to formalise the positive aspects of the ambassador scheme, adding greater accountability and awarding academic credit (15%) for engagement in weekly meetings and contribution to one of six sub-teams. We briefed students in detail during the first week on the scheme's logic, their role and expectations. We highlighted the positive contributions previous ambassador groups had made. We outlined the six sub-teams (see Figure 5), including the events team and communications team and allocated each student based on their preferences.

While some students selected a team based on what they enjoyed or to enhance their own CV, others wanted to try something new or develop specific skills such as planning or analytical skills. Each week, there was a timetabled session dedicated to team progress updates. Meetings were student-led and agendas sent in advance, with minutes and

Figure 5: Ambassador Teams

Organisation Team	Events Team	Communications Team	Research Team	Education Team	Engagement Team
Help to run the ambassador group including, agenda, meetings, notes and homework. Liaise with all other teams.	Help to coordinate and support individuals and sub-teams organising specific events. Come up with ideas for new events. Develop master schedule. Develop templates and procedures for events.	Promoting and sharing all information about events, initiatives, supports, opportunities etc through physical and virtual channels.	Help to design and conduct research related to employability (student surveys for example). Help to analyse data and feedback into ambassador initiatives and planning.	Help to identify, design and implement ways to embed employability into the curriculum.	Help to tackle the largest issue which is to improve student engagement with events and available supports / resources.
Key Duties & Projects					
Setting meeting agendas	Develop priorities for what events to run	Promoting events and resources	Focus Groups / surveys / interviews	Reviewing the module for enhancement	Why is student engagement so low?
Taking meeting notes	Developing schedule of event times	Getting students to join our channels (LinkedIn etc)	'Borrowing' strategies from other departments and universities	Develop short videos about careers resources (student friendly)	How to increase engagement?
Capturing and circulating 'homework'	Scheduling all events strategically (avoid conflicts and heavy assessment periods)	Developing content for Blackboard	'Undercover' Student - trying careers supports and reporting back	How to embed employability into modules?	Prize draws / giveaways?
Running Slack Platform	Developing database of events, speakers and contacts	Developing physical flyers	Use LinkedIn Group to find out what former students are doing now	Expanding the list of book and app resources for the module	Deploying carrots and sticks
Coordinating final ceremony and certificates	Developing ideas for new events	Managing Instagram	Work with Engagement Team on 'Student Engagement' challenge	Explaining and promoting the module to future students	Ensuring and enhancing engagement across the department
	Coordinate with Ambassadors planning individual events	Sharing content with wider student groups			Focus Groups / surveys / interviews
	Create Database of former events and speakers	Developing promo templates for all events			Getting students to join our channels

next actions captured and circulated by members of the organisation team. During the first few weeks the teams agreed on logical goals, projects, and initiatives and each team then worked towards these. For example, while the events team would develop and schedule a programme of events, the communications team would promote those events, experimenting with different channels and methods of communication to maximise impact. Their Instagram account, for example, attracted followers across the department and was highly effective in promoting events, supports, resources and opportunities. For example, during the semester the account attracted 552 followers, reached 1684 accounts and achieved 52,049 views. The engagement team interreacted with students across the department to ensure events and speakers were relevant. They implemented innovative ways to ensure strong student attendance levels at employer sessions, for example, entry into a prize raffle. Members of the engagement team encouraged peers to take advantage of supports provided by the central careers service, for example, by producing short video-based promotional content posted via Instagram. This saw a 28% increase in students from the wider department asking for individual career guidance and support, plus increased attendance at both departmental and central career events.

As with module homework tasks, the ambassador role was designed to model professional environments and foster effective peer teamworking. While many students were eager to share and discuss their work, others were motivated by not letting their team down as this would be obvious to all during the weekly meetings. A key benefit to students of working within their sub-teams was developing effective teamwork skills. To facilitate the ambassador role and effective communication between the six sub-teams, we had students use the messaging platform Slack, commonly used in external organisations. Utilising Slack assisted modelling real world, real-time work interactions. Teamwork skills are crucial within the world of work, yet personal experience has repeatedly shown us that students generally do not like group assessment. This is driven by mainly instrumental concerns, that their individual awarded mark will be adversely affected by the contribution (or lack thereof) of their fellow team members. To address these concerns, we asked each team to produce a joint final report outlining both what they had collectively achieved but also summarising individual contributions. This report enhanced transparency and fairness in awarding marks, which the students appreciated:

> ‘I liked getting credit for my contributions as this is rare in other modules.’

Students reported that they enjoyed the creative and real-world nature of the ambassador role. Weekly meetings meant they felt supported in fulfilling the role’s requirements, and they appreciated regular in-person contact with friends and peers (especially following the relatively recent aftermath of Covid isolation), plus that attendance was formally recognised. Students commented that they valued gaining practical experience and tangible examples to add to their application packages:

> [The ambassador role] ‘gave me something ‘solid’ to say I have done in interviews, rather than just essays.’

Ultimately, formalising the ambassador scheme within the module proved successful with consistently high engagement driven by both carrots and sticks.

Conclusion

Although students and universities are increasingly concerned about employability, student engagement with specific supports, events and developmental activities remains low. This paper considered why and what can be done. It reflected upon the design and delivery of a dedicated credit-bearing employability module for third year geography students. It highlighted some effective transferable and scalable solutions to challenges facing careers professionals, academics, and higher education institutions. These solutions are pragmatic and demonstrate the powerful role of 'carrots and sticks' upon the design of teaching content, delivery, and assessment and in enhancing student motivation, engagement, and learning.

Our experience resulted in a number of key lessons. To enhance levels of student engagement and deliver meaningful impact, it is crucial to capture and incorporate the student voice. We need to understand what motivates students and align content, formats, and incentives accordingly. Throughout this paper, we have demonstrated the role of effectively deploying carrots and sticks (intrinsic and extrinsic motivators) which students regard as desirable and necessary. One student notably reported at the end of the module:

> 'It has 'forced' me to do something that's employed me with some valuable skills.'

Although the module was capped at thirty students to facilitate effective interaction, and limited to third-year undergraduate students, we achieved our goal of creating meaningful impact for both module students and those in the wider department, notably creating a programme of student-led and tailored career learning activities, resources and events.

The module received an overall student satisfaction score of 4.5/5, demonstrating that despite challenges, it proved successful in engaging students and developing their career learning and employability. Notable student comments received include:

> 'The most practical and genuinely useful module I have ever taken''
>
> 'Favourite module to date''
>
> 'I have gained more knowledge and skills from this module than any module I have ever taken.'

While the individual components and solutions within this module are not intrinsically radical, we have demonstrated that if carefully combined and applied, they can be highly effective in enhancing student engagement, learning and satisfaction. Although the module may seem resource-intensive to those working in leaner environments, we feel that there are opportunities to be strategically selective for your own context, for example, involving students as effective resource-creators, (as in our ambassador concept), to create scalable resource to deliver change. Moreover, despite our focus on a geography module, we believe that these solutions can successfully be scaled and transferred across disciplines, institutions and learning contexts.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Hazel McCafferty for conducting the statistical analysis presented about the Graduate Capital Scale in Figure 4.

References

Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services. (2022, October). *The opportunities and challenges of student engagement in careers and employability provision.* https://www.agcas.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/Resources/Research%20and%20knowledge/Symp_22_Student_Engagement_Report_Final.pdf

Allcott, G. (2016). *How to Be a Productivity Ninja: Worry Less, Achieve More and Love What You Do*, Icon Books Limited.

Allen, D. (2015). *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-free Productivity*, Piatkus.

Bergmann, J. & Sams, A. (2012). *Flip Your Classroom: Reach Every Student in Every Class Every Day* (pp. 120-190). International Society for Technology in Education.

Biggs, J. (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment. *Higher Education, 32*, 347–364. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00138871

Biggs, J. & Tang, C. (2007). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University.* Open University Press/McGraw Hill.

Boden, R. & Nedeva, M. (2010). Employing discourse: universities and graduate 'employability.' *Journal of Education Policy, 25*(1), 37–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930903349489

Bradley, A., Priego-Hernández, J., & Quigley, M. (2021). Evaluating the efficacy of embedding employability into a second-year undergraduate module. Studies in Higher Education, 47(11), 2161–2173. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2021.2020748

Bonwell, C. C. & Eison, J.A. (1991). Active learning: creating excitement in the classroom. ASH#-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 1, The George Washington University, School of Education and Human Development.

Browne, J. (2010). *Securing a sustainable future for higher education.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-browne-report-higher-education-funding-and-student-finance - accessed 6/1/2025

Clouder, L., Broughan, C., Jewell, S., & Steventon, G. (2012). *Improving Student Engagement and Development through Assessment*, Routledge.

Dearing, R. (1997). *Higher Education in the Learning Society*. The National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education.

Department of Business Innovation and Skills (2016). *Success as a knowledge economy: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice.* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523396/bis-16-265-success-as-a-knowledgeeconomy.pdf

Donald, W., Baruch, Y. & Ashleigh, M. (2019). The undergraduate self-perception of employability: human capital, careers advice, and career ownership. *Studies in Higher Education, 44* (4), 599-614. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1387107

Fallows, S. & Steven, C. (2000). 'Building employability skills into the higher education curriculum: a university-wide initiative', *Education + Training, Vol. 42* No. 2, pp. 75-83. https://doi.org/10.1108/00400910010331620

Fleming, N. D. & Mills, C. (1992). Not Another Inventory, Rather a Catalyst for Reflection, From *To Improve the Academy, Vol. 11*, 1992. page 137. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2334-4822.1992.tb00213.x

The Guardian. *More than half of UK students working long hours in paid jobs.* https://www.theguardian.com/education/article/2024/jun/13/more-than-half-of-uk-students-working-long-hours-in-paid-jobs - accessed 28/8/2024

Higher Education Policy Institute. (2020). *Getting on: graduate employment and its influence on UK higher education*. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/03/05/getting-on-graduate-employment-and-its-influence-on-uk-higher-education/ - accessed 2/1/2025

Jackson, D., Lambert, C., Sibson, R., Bridgstock, R., & Tofa, M. (2024). Student employability-building activities: participation and contribution to graduate outcomes. *Higher Education Research & Development, 43*(6), 1308–1324. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2325154

Jorre de St Jorre, T., & Oliver, B. (2017). Want students to engage? Contextualise graduate learning outcomes and assess for employability. *Higher Education Research & Development, 37*(1), 44–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1339183

Osborne, R., Dunne, L., & Farrand, P.A. (2013). Integrating technologies into "authentic" assessment design: an affordances approach, *Research in Learning Technology 21*(2), https://doi.org/10.3402/rlt.v21i2.21986

Piaget, J., (1952). *The Origins of Intelligence in Children*. International Universities Press.

Painter, S.R. (2021). *Start Writing: How to Overcome Fear, Self-Doubt and Procrastination.* Siskin Press Limited; 2nd ed.

Senior R.M., Bartholomew P., Soor A, Shepperd D., Bartholomew N. & Senior C. (2018). The Rules of Engagement': Student Engagement and Motivation to Improve the Quality of Undergraduate Learning. *Front. Educ*, *3:32*. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00032

Taylor, A. & Hooley, T. (2014). Evaluating the impact of career management skills module and internship programme within a university business school. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 42*(5), 487–499. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2014.918934

Taylor, L. & Parsons, J. (2011). Improving Student Engagement. *Current Issues in Education, 14*(1). Retrieved from http://cie.asu.edu/

Times Higher Education (2017). *Why do students go to university and how do they choose which one?* https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/news/why-do-students-go-university-and-how-do-they-choose-which-one - accessed 2/1/2025

Tomlinson, M. (2017). Forms of graduate capital and their relationship to graduate employability, *Education + Training, Vol. 59* No. 4, pp. 338-352. https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-05-2016-0090

Tomlinson, M. (2012). Graduate Employability: A Review of Conceptual and Empirical Themes. *Higher Education Policy 25*, 407–431. https://doi.org/10.1057/hep.2011.26

Tomlinson, M., McCafferty, H., Port, A., Maguire, N., Zabelski, A.E., Butnaru, A., Charles, M. & Kirby, S. (2021). Developing graduate employability for a challenging labour market: the validation of the graduate capital scale. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education, Vol. 14* No. 3, pp. 1193-1209. https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-04-2021-0151

Tymon, A. (2013). *Studies in Higher Education, 2013*. *Vol. 38,* No. 6, 841– 856, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.604408

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. (n.d.). *How to identify your transferable skills.* https://www.ucas.com/careers-advice/how-identify-your-transferable-skills

UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2009). The Employability Challenge, https://www.educationandemployers.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/the-employability-challenge-ukces.pdf

Wiggins, G. P. & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design (2nd ed.)*. Pearson.

Zepke, N. & Leach, L. (2010). Improving student engagement: Ten proposals for action, *Active Learning in Higher Education 11*(3) 167–177, https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787410379680

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5405

Mapping an uncontroversial space: The use of digital technology in school counselling in Romania

Mihai Iacob

West University of Timișoara, Romania

For correspondence:

Mihai Iacob: mihai.iacob@e-uvt.ro

To cite this article:

Iacob, M. (2025). Mapping an uncontroversial space: The use of digital technology in school counselling in Romania. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *54*(1), 47-59. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5405

Abstract

The study employed an ethnographic methodology to map the controversies surrounding the use of digital technology within the Romanian school counselling system. Mapping controversies is a method for retracing agency within actor-network theory. The results point towards the surprising absence of controversy within the explored field. This occurs due to discursive tactics that foreground the problem of enacting platformed bodies and ignore controversies associated with wider social aspects. By making the discursive space unconducive to controversies, the counsellors and the counselling system are made vulnerable to the agendas of the numerous actors that are being ignored.

Keywords: School counselling; digital technology; actor-network theory; controversies; platformed bodies

Introduction

The use of digital technology in career counselling has been one of the main driving forces behind the development of new counselling practices during the past decades (Hooley et al., 2010; Kettunen & Sampson, 2018; Sampson et al., 2019; Barnes et al., 2020). The process has not been free from controversies, as digital technology has had important impacts on career development, such as concerns about the loss of counsellor jobs, about data privacy, about the quality of digital career counselling services, or the automation of work.

Even if not all the predicted impact of digital technology has occurred or will necessarily happen, the ominous presence of a future in which digital technology displaces human labour and limits human access to work has been instrumentalised by neoliberal discourse (Hooley, 2019) to foster a feeling of inadequacy and constant fear of being made redundant by forces outside of our control.

Applying Actor Network theory

As fresh sources of power are developed, fresh sources of analysis and political action are needed (Haraway, 1991, p.165). The epistemological framework hinted at by Haraway as an example of such a critical approach is actor-network theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005), which is part of the larger socio-material family of theories. The use of socio-material theories within career counselling studies has been limited, with existing literature concentrated mostly within doctoral studies (Broad, 2013; Barraclough, 2017; Milosheva et. al, 2021).

Socio-material theories take away the privileged position of human actors when attempting to explain a phenomenon and emphasise the agential nature of non-humans. Agency does not imply volition, nor is it an exercise on the part of the observer to personify non-human actors and make them quasi-human. For example, the ice you might slip on while on your way to the counselling office has no wish or intention to cause harm, yet it affects the actors with which it comes into contact. After decades in which epistemologies took language and language games as the privileged path to understanding reality, socio-material theories attempt to make matter come to matter again (Barad, 2003).

For career studies, drawing upon socio-material theories opens a path towards reconsidering careers beyond human-to-human interactions, which have a reductive approach towards non-human agencies. Describing the position of a truck driver can be fairly easy in terms of skills requirements and regulation, but it hides the agency of the fuels burnt to make it possible, by relegating it to a footnote.

ANT is structured around three principles (Crawford, 2004): agnosticism, generalised symmetry and free association. Agnosticism purports that there should be no a priori assumptions, that one should be impartial and that no interpretation is privileged over another. Generalised symmetry requires a single explanatory frame to be used for all actants in the network, be they human or non-human. Free association puts the researcher in a position to abandon the conventional split between the scientific object and the social subject (Latour, 1993) when analysing phenomena.

Scientific controversies, in their public incarnation, are debates involving scientists and sections of society around a scientific topic (Martin, 2014). They take a specific meaning within ANT studies (Latour, 1993; Venturini, 2010; Petrina, 2019), where they act as a method for retracing agencies. Controversies act as a tool for democratising the discursive space and allow for all actors to participate in the negotiation process (Venturini, 2010). They emerge, develop and close (Callon, 1986); they do not linger endlessly. Latour (2020) provides the example of the climate crisis, which, after years of debate, can no longer be considered a controversy for science, as the facts are beyond dispute, even though there are groups who will try to cast doubt and politicize the matter, regardless of the scientific facts.

The use of digital tools within career services (Hooley & Staunton, 2020; Wilson et al., 2022) is not done in a vacuum; instead, they become part of the socio-material assemblage that is the counselling system. As the COVID-19 pandemic settled in, digital tools were seen as a practical way to thwart the virus's reproductive programme which was using human gatherings to find suitable hosts. The digital environment was used to enact a different obligatory point of passage (Callon, 1986). In ANT such points are defined as materializations of attempts to capture the movements of other actors. They can take the shape of conceptual tools – such as regulations or research projects – or that of physical infrastructures.

In the Romanian context, counselling started being offered overwhelmingly as platformed work (Gillespie, 2010), where counsellors performed their tasks using one of the several platforms made available by the public educational system. The closed nature of these platforms – though interlopers do manage to intrude from time to time – distinguishes them from the social media that constitute the public side of the platformed society (van Dijck, 2013), but they share the same manner of enacting the platformed body (Møller & Nordtug, 2021; Cardoso & Scarcelli, 2021). The understanding and the experience of one's own body changes when its projection is mediated by a digital device, as their affordances condition what and how we perceive as our own body. This had been apparent for some time (Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015), but the pandemic forced the counsellors into a sudden position of having to use their digital bodies in order to represent themselves when interacting with their beneficiaries.

Video-conferencing platforms facilitate the *'collocation of different people on the same mental map'* (Gitelman, 2008, p. 7), but they also support and mediate the meeting of digitised bodies. The symmetry that ANT invites us to incorporate into our view of sociality, brings to the fore the fact that it is not only human bodies which are of concern – that of the counsellor and the counselee – but also the body of the digital hardware that requires equal attention, as it needs to be prepared to mediate the interactions.

Background: the Romanian context

The Romanian school counselling system is built around 42 Centres for Resources and Educational Support (CRES) – one in each of the 41 counties and the Municipality of Bucharest – which, at the time of the data collection were employing over 2500 counsellors.

School counsellors are hired by the CRESs, following the same procedure as all other teachers in the public education system. Multiple tertiary qualifications allow access to the profession, the most prevalent of which are psychology, pedagogy and sociology. Counsellors carry out their work in one or multiple schools where they are assigned. They have the status of teaching staff and are required to provide 2 to 4 hours per week of teaching activities, along with their main body of work, which comprises counselling activities.

An exploratory study regarding the patterns of use of digital technology by Romanian school counsellors on the eve of the pandemic (Iacob & Borș-Georgescu, 2022) pointed towards the existence of three groups: a) counsellors who make all-round use of digital technology, who were the smallest group, b) counsellors who make less frequent use of

digital technology, who were the largest group and c) counsellors who make regular use of digital technology for specific professional tasks.

A review of policy documents locally developed by the CRESs has shown that they failed to engage with controversies related to the use of digital technology (Iacob, 2024) due to the use of formulaic approaches in mapping issues affecting the system, which relied on scanning tools not fit for purpose, like the SWOT analysis (Hill & Westbrook, 1997) and the PEST analysis (Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020).

Methodology

From November 2019 to June 2021, I conducted interviews in Romanian with seven school counsellors (C1-C7), three CRES managers (M1-M3) and one project coordinator (PC) working in a CRES. Participants had at least five years of experience on their job.

They were contacted through email and professional meetings. They agreed to take part in the study voluntarily. Ten participants were female and one male (M3), reflecting the gender imbalance affecting teaching positions in the Romanian public education system.

Twenty semi-structured interview sessions were conducted, totalling 640 minutes of recordings. The interviews were transcribed and thematically coded (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using Nvivo.

The participants were explicitly asked to present their experiences and opinions on the controversies, critical incidents and issues affecting the use of digital technology in the practice of school counsellors. The analysis was limited to what the counsellors and managers identified as problematic and did not include what an outside observer could consider problematic or controversial (e.g. the use of personal social media accounts in professional settings, the need to use personal devices for professional tasks).

Results

In line with the results of the analysis of local policy documents of the CRESs (Iacob, 2024), which showed potential controversies being reduced to problems, that were meant to be solved in procedural ways, the interviews failed to identify involvement in the negotiations that surround controversies. The failure raised the possibility that either the theoretical framework had been poorly applied or there were other phenomena at work that precluded counsellors and managers from articulating their engagement with controversies.

Reviewing the use of controversies in ANT, Venturini (2010) warns against using bad controversies in ANT-informed studies, of which he describes four types: cold controversies – where actors either ignore each other or are in harmony with one another; past controversies – where debates are no longer ongoing between the actors involved; boundless controversies – the ones that are highly complex and require considerable resources to be mapped; and underground controversies – which are not publicly observable, such as those involving secretive groups. Arguably, the use of digital technology in school counselling does not fit in any of these categories: it is a current issue, which generates controversies within public debates involving professionals and the general public, and is observable and bound to prescribed professional practices.

Feeling sufficiently confident that it was not the theoretical framework which led me to this point, I have cautiously proceeded to map how the problems raised by the interviewees were precluded from becoming full blown controversies.

Suppressing controversies: denial, downplaying, distancing, doubt

Controversies have surrounded the use of digital technology during the pandemic, and multiple actors have participated in them, but they repeatedly failed to burst onto the scene of school counselling in Romania. The interview participants noticed them but did not feel that the controversies involved them as a community of professionals in the debates.

Public debates have flared around the use of digital technology, aided by the circulation of cultural products such as the documentary 'The Social Dilemma' (Orlowski, 2020), on the practices used by social media companies to increase engagement and drive-up adoption of their products, which was mentioned by one of the counsellors as terrifying and eye-opening. However, when questioned about the use of social media within school counselling, she made a clear break between how they are used in professional settings and elsewhere:

> C5: 'I see a bunch of threats, but not for counselling.'

As the Zoom video-conferencing platform was rapidly being adopted as an educational tool, serious security vulnerabilities became apparent (Singer & Perlroth, 2020). Although the National Cybersecurity Directorate issued a warning (DNSC, 2020) noticed by one of the interviewed counsellors, it was ignored by the counselling system, leaving her to decide how to act upon it.

The use of digital technology within the counselling system had episodic reflections in the national press where it showed, for example, how the lack of private space for conducting counselling sessions required students to attend them from bathrooms (Guță, 2020) or while having walks in the park.

None of the reflections and experiences of the counsellors and the managers made visible through the interviews can be construed as representing engagement with a controversy related to using digital tools in a professional setting. That is not to say that participants were not aware of the controversial nature of digital technology or the debates that were taking place around it. They could nominate controversies, but they treated them as not applicable to school counselling.

Several tactics of rendering the discursive space unsupportive towards controversial issues have emerged during the coding of the interview material, which reflect various levels of disengagement and distancing from controversies.

The most potent tactic used was the outright denial of the existence of critical incidents or controversial issues related to the use of digital technology within school counselling practices.

M3: 'To be honest with you, we haven't had any incidents on this topic. Until now, we haven't had any incidents of this kind, which would create the need to over-regulate something of this sort.'

C4: 'During all these months, it never happened to me.'

The representation of the use of digital tools becomes sanitised of any threats either arbitrarily, as illustrated by the counsellor separating the use of social media in professional and non-professional contexts, or by appeal to an unspecified scientific authority or mechanism that purportedly verifies the digital tools that are recommended for the use of counsellors.

The most prevalent disengagement mechanism was downplaying the effects entailed by incidents, the inadequate access to digital technology, and the exclusion they generated.

C2: 'There is a pretty small percentage of children who don't … who have difficulties because of the technology. 5-10%, something like that.'

C5: 'Really, they [i.e. connection breakdowns] didn't happen too many times.'

The downplaying of the effects was often done in conjunction with the transfer of responsibility to the beneficiaries, even if their vulnerabilities were compounded by other factors that would have warranted additional support.

M1: 'Many didn't join the [online] classes, especially children from disadvantaged groups. Even if they had tablets, they still didn't participate in school activities.'

When incidents happen, they happen to someone else, thus marking a distance between the counsellor and the incident, meaning that it did not require action on their part. Participants identified several incidents, but each time, another counsellor or teacher was the one affected rather than the interviewee.

C4: 'A teacher was coordinating the pedagogical practice of some students, and they joined some [online] classes. […] They joined the wrong class: they were supposed to join TechEd, but they joined the English class. […] When it will happen to me, I will learn my lesson.'

The introduction of digital devices in school counselling settings has rendered the actor's body transportable and subject to increasingly more costly procedures for policing its ontological boundaries (Nimmo, 2011). What do we take for the body of an actor? Is a message typed in chat sufficient proof that the person we suppose is behind the keyboard generating it is indeed that person? Is the claimed failure of digital devices real, or just a simulated breakdown? Doubts have plagued the interaction between teaching staff – counsellors among them – and students. These doubts were instrumentalised to obscure the extent of inadequate access to digital devices and connectivity.

> C5: 'I've noticed, from what my colleagues tell me, that for maths, Romanian language, biology, there is a very pronounced tendency to have this sort of incidents happen [i.e. connection breakdowns], especially if the students know that they'll have an oral or written test.'

These discursive tactics – denial, downplaying, distancing, and doubt – have taken away the public and communitarian aspects of controversies and reduced them to problems that each counsellor needs to solve alone or in small groups. Counsellors were being delegated the responsibility to negotiate with other actors – parents, IT companies, digital devices, beneficiaries – the fallout of incidents related to the use of digital technology, but this was done within a fixed framework that lacked the mechanisms that would take into consideration the concerns of the counsellors and would have supported them in finding new equilibria in relationship with the other actors.

Enacting platformed bodies

While counsellors were not engaged in controversies, they saw many problems associated with using digital tools to deliver counselling and educational services. Central to these problems was the enactment of platformed bodies, of which three participated in the counselling process: the counsellor, the counselee, and the digital tools (both as physical entities and mediation devices). Each body required preparation for the interaction and constant care, as they were seen as having the potential to fail at any moment.

While preparing for online work, counsellors spared little thought for their physical appearance as they subsumed it into professional routines and did not mention it. What did concern them was the process of digitising their bodies: was their image properly captured and projected onto the screens of the students? Was their voice being clearly heard? Headphones, external speakers, microphones and video projectors – which rendered the voice and the image – became part of the body image of the counsellor. The physical body was only discussed in terms of the effects that platformed work had on it, such as tiredness and increased health concerns (e.g. worsening eyesight, weight gain, reduced physical activities).

Digital tools as physical entities and software also needed care. Very slow computers were returned to the organisation providing them, work phones with limited functionality were supplemented with personal phones, software licences had to be renewed, and workarounds had to be found for testing software to function on newer operating systems.

Digital materiality (Latour et al., 2012) has enabled the creation of digital rooms for digital bodies. Like physical rooms, digital rooms came with different affordances, depending on the software architecture underpinning them and the devices that enabled participants to join. Being able to share a presentation or dividing participants into smaller groups was conditioned by the functions of the software used – Google Meet and Zoom were the most widespread – and the device – laptop, desktop, phone or tablet – used by each participant. New maps were required to navigate this materiality: where was a specific button displayed on a specific device? Did one device allow for one specific function? How was an image displayed on a particular student's device? Getting lost was a common occurrence, as software architecture would change frequently, and devices were prone to glitches.

Unlike for themselves, the counsellor's gaze was much more aware of the counselee's physical appearance. Several reasons might account for this discrepancy. On one hand, students were less accustomed to routinising the preparation of their appearance, they had unequal access to resources to care for and digitally project their image and voice, and they shared their home space with other human and non-human actors, which brought their agendas. On the other hand, counsellors needed to purposefully seek information about the counselees – which in face-to-face settings was abundant, but was much more challenging to access in digital environments. Legal requirements related to online teaching, school codes of conduct and the personal understanding of the counsellors of how students should present themselves have also come into play.

Discussion

The use of digital tools has been on the agenda of counselling services for many decades (Watts, 1986), but they were at different levels of capacity and readiness to engage with the reality brought on by the spread of the COVID-19 virus. While some counselling systems felt reasonably well prepared for such a change (Moore, 2021), this did not seem to be the case for the Romanian school counselling system.

What become apparent in the analysis of the interview material was the propensity to reduce a messy reality that would have warranted being treated as a matter-of-concern, to one rendered as a matter-of-fact (Latour, 2005). Rather than being politicized, disruptions were quickly naturalized and equated to previously mapped situations.

For the investigated context, denying the existence of controversies was the central message that could be discerned from the interviews, even if its veracity was called into question by examples provided later by the same person. This made it possible for the system as a whole to dismiss potential requests by outsiders to join the debates. Mechanisms were not set up to engage in a meaningful way with the actors that claimed a right to be part of the negotiations – like software and hardware providers, parents, the virus, cable networks. Adjustments were based on the educational system's understanding of the needs of the other actors, that had limited support in the way in which those actors represented their own needs.

When the issues were systemic and could not be dismissed, downplaying the effects and transferring the responsibility were the next lines of defence from the controversies that threatened to barge in and engulf the counselling space. For day-to-day practice, less powerful but still effective tactics were employed: distancing oneself from the epicentre of the incidents and casting doubt on the nature of the problem.

Counselling professionals were aware of the controversial nature of the use of digital technology, but the professional discursive space was sanitised of references that would engage the counselling system in a negotiation process with other actors on this topic. Both service practitioners and managers resorted to discursive tactics that suppressed, pushed aside, distanced themselves from or minimised the existence and effects of controversial aspects of digital technology. The critical incidents noted by the interviewees were not treated as issues to be addressed by the professional community, but by individual practitioners.

Enacting platformed bodies became the focus of counselling practitioners during the pandemic, when interactions were almost exclusively mediated by digital devices. Digital bodies are fragile and prone to breakdowns. Streaming them requires great care. Counsellors were preoccupied with digitising their own bodies, creating a digital meeting space, and policing the presence of the counselees. The use of a digital environment entailed constant effort for things that used to be taken for granted in face-to-face settings, such as access to the facial cues of the other participants.

Conclusions

ANT-informed studies shy away from claiming to offer a definitive picture of the investigated reality, recognizing that what they provide is but a snapshot in an ever-changing landscape. What they try to do instead is to sensitize readers into recognizing agencies that manifest themselves within the space being mapped, while at the same time inviting them to consider entering negotiations with actors staking a claim of legitimate participants to the process – in our case: counselling processes.

Nominally open and standardized, the use of digital technology within the school counselling system in Romania has proven to be just as messy and entangled as its use within much less regulated environments, such as the gig economy (Galfalvi et al., 2020). By not recognizing this reality and the associated agencies, the counselling system has put the counsellors in a position of continuously being made vulnerable (Sultana, 2022) by those very agencies.

Problematisation in terms of controversies (Martin, 2014) is part of a democratic culture that empowers its members to enrol human and non-human actors in enacting professional practices based on a set of negotiated principles. In the absence of this exercise, school counsellors are rendered vulnerable, with their practice open to interference from other actors, with whom they are not equipped to engage.

Policy makers (Kettunen & Sampson, 2018) retain the legitimacy and power to launch the consultation and negotiation processes needed to co-opt other actors' views into the vision of the counselling system. The urgency of the process rests not only on practical implications of using digital technology, but also on the ethical considerations that arise (Kettunen & Makela, 2019).

What were the agendas of the software and hardware providers? Who had access to the students' personal data? How could that data be instrumentalised? What could be done to prevent interlopers from joining online classes? How did outdated hardware and software affect counsellors in delivering their services? How were counselling sessions affected by the private environment from which they were streamed? How did the presence of pets distort the conversations?

All of these questions require negotiations between multiple actors in order for the counselling system to act as the obligatory point of passage that it presents itself to be. However, because digital technology was an incontrovertible topic in the context of the Romanian school counselling system, the agency of the many participating actors was obscured. Commercial interests remained unscrutinised, cats and babies wondered freely around the counsellor, parents and siblings eavesdropped on the counselling sessions,

saints peered over the shoulders of participants from their place on the wall, family members shared digital devices. When these agencies disrupted the counselling process, it was the counsellor alone who had to figure things out.

Ethical statement

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Commission of the University of Bucharest (156/06.07.2020).

References

Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 28*(3), 801–831. https://doi.org/10.1086/345321

Barnes, S.-A., Bimrose, J., Brown, A., Kettunen, J., & Vuorinen, R. (2020). *Lifelong guidance policy and practice in the EU: Trends, challenges and opportunities: final report*. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/91185

Barraclough, S. J. (2017). *Re-imagining the posthuman in counsellor education: entanglements of matter and meaning in the performative enactments of counsellor-in-training identities* [University of Canterbury]. https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstreams/29f46422-0760-4d58-8016-17713c15aaa1/download

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Broad, J. H. (2013). *Doing it for themselves: A network analysis of vocational teachers' development of their occupationally specific expertise* [University of London]. https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10020018/

Callon, M. (1986). Some elements of a sociology of translation: Domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay. In Law, J. (Ed.) *Power, Action, and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?* (pp. 196–233). Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Cardoso, D., & Scarcelli, C. M. (2021). The bodies of the (digitised) body: Experiences of sexual(ised) work on OnlyFans. MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research, 37(71), Article 71. https://doi.org/10.7146/mediekultur.v37i71.122642

Crawford, C. S. (2004). Actor-network theory. In Ritzer, G. (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, Sage Publications.

Diaz Ruiz, C. A., Baker, J. J., Mason, K., & Tierney, K. (2020). Market-scanning and market-shaping: Why are firms blindsided by market-shaping acts? *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 35*(9), 1389–1401. https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-03-2019-0130

DNSC. (2020, April 2). *Aplicația Zoom are probleme majore de securitate* [The Zoom app has major security issues]. https://dnsc.ro/citeste/alerta-zoom-vulnerabilitati

Galfalvi, E., Hooley, T., & Neary, S. (2020). Are young people aged 16-19 using or expecting to use the gig economy for their careers? *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling, 45*(1), 34–40. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.4505

Gillespie, T. (2010). The politics of 'platforms'. *New Media & Society, 12*(3), 347–364. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738

Gitelman, L. (2008). *Always already new: Media, history, and the data of culture*. MIT Press.

Guță, S. (2021, June 20). Cum face față un consilier școlar la peste două mii de elevi. „Nu e suficient să ajut 10 copii, dacă alți 100 sunt în dificultate" [How a school counsellor manages to work with over two thousand students. "It's not enough for me to help 10 children, if another 100 are having trouble"]. *Libertatea*. https://www.libertatea.ro/lifestyle/cum-face-fata-un-consilier-scolar-la-peste-doua-mii-de-elevi-nu-e-suficient-sa-ajut-10-copii-3610273

Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs, and women. The reinvention of nature*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203873106

Hill, T., & Westbrook, R. (1997). SWOT analysis: It's time for a product recall. *Long Range Planning, 30*(1), 46–52. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0024-6301(96)00095-7

Hooley, T. (2012). How the internet changed career: Framing the relationship between career development and online technologies. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling, 29*(1), 3–12. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.2902

Hooley, T. (2019). Career guidance and the changing world of work: Contesting responsibilising notions of the future. In M. A. Peters, P. Jandrić, & A. J. Means (Eds.), *Education and Technological Unemployment* (pp. 175–191). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-6225-5_12

Hooley, T. & Staunton, T. (2021) The Role of Digital Technology in Career Development. In Peter J. Robertson, Tristram Hooley, and Phil McCash (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Career Development*. Oxford University Press.

Hooley, T., Watts, A. G. & Hutchinson, J. (2010). *Careering through the Web. The potential of Web 2.0 and 3.0 technologies for career development and career support services*, UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

Iacob, M. (2024). Translation and treason: analysis of policy documents on the use of digital tools in the Romanian school counselling system. *Journal of Pedagogy, LXXII* (1), 223-243. https://doi.org/10.26755/RevPed/2024.1/223

Iacob, M., & Borș, O. (2022). Patterns in the use of digital technology among school counsellors in Romania. *Journal of Pedagogy, LXX* (2), 9–27. https://doi.org/10.26755/RevPed/2022.2/9

Kettunen, J., & Makela, J. P. (2019). Practitioners' conceptions of ethical practice in social networking in career services. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 19*(3), 345–362. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-018-9383-4

Kettunen, J., & Sampson, J. P. (2018). Challenges in implementing ICT in career services: Perspectives from career development experts. *International Journal of Educational and Vocational Guidance*. https ://doi.org/10.1007/s1077 5-018-9365-6

Latour, B. (1993). *We have never been modern*. Harvard University Press.

Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford University Press.

Latour, B., Jensen, P., Venturini, T., Grauwin, S., & Boullier, D. (2012). 'The whole is always smaller than its parts' - a digital test of Gabriel Tardes'. *The British Journal of Sociology, 63*(4), 590–615. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2012.01428.x

Latour, B. (Director). (2020, January 9). *MOOC-BL-04-PART-2*. https://vimeo.com/383741420

Martin, B. (2014). *The controversy manual*. Sparsnäs: Irene Publishing.

Milosheva, M., Hall, H., Robertson, P., Cruickshank, P., & Lyall, C. (2021). *The socio-material nature of careers work: An exploration of knowledge co-creation amongst career practitioners*. https://hdl.handle.net/2142/109678

Moore, N. (2021). What has digital technology done for us and how can we evolve as a sector to make best use of what it has to offer? *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling, 46*(1), 25–31. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.4605

Møller, K., & Nordtug, M. (2021). Platformed Bodies. *MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research, 37*(71). https://doi.org/10.7146/mediekultur.v37i71.128779

Nimmo, R. (2011). Bovine mobilities and vital movements: Flows of milk, mediation and animal agency. In Bull, J. (ed.). *Animal Movements. Moving Animals: Essays on Direction, Velocity and Agency in Humanimal Encounters*. Uppsala: Uppsala University, Centre for Gender Research.

Orlowski, J. (2020). *The social dilemma* [Film]. Exposure Labs.

Petrina, S. (2019). *EDCP 585 Lecture Notes (STS Controversies)*. University of British Columbia. https://blogs.ubc.ca/msts/files/2019/04/04a-EDCP585LectureNotesSTSControversies.pdf

Sampson, J. P., Kettunen, J., & Vuorinen, R. (2019). The role of practitioners in helping persons make effective use of information and communication technology in career interventions. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-019-09399-y

Singer, N., & Perlroth, N. (2020, April 20). Zoom's Security Woes Were No Secret to Business Partners Like Dropbox. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/20/technology/zoom-security-dropbox-hackers.html

Sultana, R. G. (2022). Four 'dirty words' in career guidance: From common sense to good sense. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-022-09550-2

Tiidenberg, K., & Gómez Cruz, E. (2015). Selfies, image and the re-making of the body. *Body & Society, 21*(4), 77–102. https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X15592465

van Dijck, J. (2013). *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*. Oxford University Press.

Venturini, T. (2010). Diving in magma: How to explore controversies with actor-network theory. *Public Understanding of Science, 19*(3), 258–273. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662509102694

Watts, A.G. (1986). The role of the computer in careers guidance. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 9*(2), 145-158.

Wilson, M., Robertson, P., Cruickshank, P., & Gkatzia, D. (2022). Opportunities and risks in the use of AI in career development practice. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling, 48*(1), 48–57. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.4807

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5406

Responding to the impact of career echo chambers: A career learning approach

Nicki Moore

NICEC Fellow

For correspondence

Nicki Moore: Nicki_moore_50@hotmail.com

To cite this article:

Moore, N. (2025). Responding to the impact of career echo chambers: A career learning approach. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *54*(1), 60-70. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5406

Abstract

This article adopts the term career echo chambers to compare and contrast the traditional view of a person's social influences on career decision making and the impact of online sources and influences. The article uses a review of literature to investigate the algorithms which sit behind online career echo chambers and their potential impact on people's career decision making behaviours. It considers the potential of career echo chambers to limit diversity and inclusion within career decision making and will then describe the implications of career echo chambers for young people's career development and the careers education programmes which support them. The article concludes with a process which practitioners can adopt to help them and their clients to understand and challenge the impact of career echo chambers and algorithms.

Key words: Career development, career decision making, careers education, online echo chambers, algorithms

Introduction

The article investigates the extent to which in-person and virtual echo chambers exert different influences on young people's career decision making. Career Echo chambers are poorly defined in literature. Traditional theories suggest and describe various factors which contribute to young people's career choices and for the purpose of this article, the

ideas espoused by theorists such as Krumboltz et al (1976) or Law (1992) who set out to describe the impact of an individual's social circumstances and environment on career choice are deemed to be describing the phenomenon of career echo chambers. The article asks what knowledge, skills and behaviours young people need to overcome the impact of both in person and online career echo chambers including developing a response to the algorithms which sit behind them. It then goes on to set out the arguments for addressing the practical and ethical issues associated with career echo chambers within career guidance programmes.

This paper raises questions about the growing phenomenon of online career echo chambers.

- Does current theory help us to understand the impact of social media algorithms on career decision making?
- Should career development practitioners have concerns about this growing phenomenon?
- How can we mitigate the impact of social media algorithms on young people's career decision making?

What are career echo chambers?

Conventionally, the term echo chamber is defined as an enclosed space where sound reverberates. However, more recently the term has been used to denote an environment in which someone only encounters beliefs or opinions that coincide with their own, so that their existing views are reinforced, and alternative ideas are not considered. For the purposes of this article, the idea of career echo chambers has been developed to describe a situation where individuals are exposed to a limited range of information and perspectives, which can restrict their career options and limit their potential for growth and development. Career echo chambers can arise through interactions with online media and groups, and through in person interactions with networks of family friends and social groups. This article explores and compares the impact of two types of echo chambers: in-person echo chambers and virtual or online echo chambers and their impact on career choice. In both instances, these echo chambers are influenced through human intervention. Whilst human influence is a consistent theme between these two types of echo chamber, there are also differences. The article concludes with some recommendations to help young people to counteract the impact of online career echo chambers, a relatively new phenomenon.

Research methodology

This article uses data collected from a desk-based review of literature. The article was conceived as a contribution to the Norwegian Educational Research Association (NERA) conference in 2023 as a thought piece on the impact of digital technology on career guidance and development. The article was stimulated by the authors growing concern about the impact of young people's online behaviours and the impact this might have on the information they saw which might influence career decision making. Several approaches were used to identify information, for example, drawing on personal knowledge of existing resources, recommendations by colleague scholars and searches of databases

including Google scholar and the University of Derby's collection of online journals. Search terms included those relating to 'social learning', 'impacts on career learning and decision-making behaviours', 'online behaviours', 'impact of social media', 'echo chambers' and 'filter bubbles'. Furthermore, a wider Google search revealed several recent or new books on the subject algorithms, and filter bubbles whose content has contributed to the literature review.

Differences between in-person and online echo chambers

In-person echo chambers occur through the direct, personal, and face- to-face interaction of an individual with their networks of family, friends, and social contacts. In-person networks have more obvious and visible members and therefore a greater level of accountability. Ezioni and Ezioni (1997) note that the relationships developed in online communities are not as intimate or strong as those in in-person communities and therefore have a more limited effect. However, Kraut et al (2008) note that too much emphasis has been placed on the function of online communities being primarily for information exchange and argue that online communities are social systems in their own right. Further to this, Sassenberg (2002) notes the distinction between online common bond groups and online interest groups. He describes the inter-relational nature of members of common bond groups and suggests members may exhibit and value more attachment and perceived similarity to the other members of the group. This is a contrast to members of common interest groups who are organised around a common interest or activity.

In the case of virtual or online career echo chambers, the influencers may be obvious, such as members of an online discussion forum or a group which is mediated by an individual with a particular view or bias. They may also be caused by the more subtle and less obvious intervention of algorithms.

What are algorithms and how do they work?

Algorithms are a series of logical instructions which demonstrate how to move through a task from the beginning to the end. Algorithms exist in everyday life and are easily recognisable, for example the instructions accompanying a flat pack furniture item or the instructions on how to get from one place to another. When the term is used in the context of digital operations, they are a series of mathematical operations (models) which are translated into computer code.

The relationship between algorithms and online media determines the individualised content that users encounter. Pariser (2012) in describing 'filter bubbles' notes that 'every click symbol you create is a commodity, and every move of your mouse can be auctioned off within microseconds to the highest commercial bidder' (Pariser, 2012, p7). In this paper the term online career echo chamber has been used to describe this phenomenon. O'Neil (2016) describes the mathematical model (algorithm) as a process which takes information about an individual and uses it to predict future behaviours in different situations.

Algorithms can create career echo chambers in one of four ways (Fry, 2018). The following examples are based on someone who may have searched for information about accountancy careers.

- Prioritising or making an ordered list, for example a search in Google. This leads to the idea of search engine optimisation (SEO) in which organisations adopt approaches to ensure that their website is prioritised as a result, if people search 'careers in accountancy', if SEO is maximised then certain companies or course providers will always come to the top of the list.
- Classifying based on the characteristics you exhibit (You look like someone who ought to like this…). This results in personalized feeds based on user behaviours, preferences, and interactions. If you search courses in mathematics- maybe you resemble someone who should consider accountancy! This is evident in platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, where the order of posts is determined by an algorithm that predicts what content a user is most likely to engage with.
- Finding and making relationships between things (If you liked this, then you might like this!). Connectivity Algorithms suggest potential connections based on mutual friends, shared interests, and other factors, and in this way, foster network growth. In practice, if you make contacts with people who are accountants on LinkedIn then the algorithms will find more accountants for you to be-friend. Algorithms play a crucial role in displaying targeted advertisements to users based on their interests, demographics, and online behaviours. This helps advertisers reach specific audiences more effectively. In our example, this could include education providers who offer accountancy programmes being recommended to our career explorer.
- Filtering based on your interests (news feeds). If you investigate careers in accountancy several times, then you are more likely to start seeing adverts for accountancy programme providers in your news feeds.

While algorithms can enhance user experience and provide valuable features, they have also raised concerns. Issues include the potential for creating filter bubbles (Pariser 2012) and echo chambers (Van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson 1997) by showing users content that aligns with their existing views, as well as concerns about privacy and the ethical use of data. Whilst individuals invest trust in a system which may seem, on the face of it, quite logical, algorithms are based on a series of human assumptions. These assumptions may be based on personal experience and can undermine the impartiality of the information which individuals receive. These challenges have sparked discussions about algorithm transparency, accountability, and the need for user control over the algorithms that shape their online experience.

How might in-person echo chambers influence career choice?

In terms of the influence of in-person echo chambers on career choice, some examples can help understand the impact. Moore et al. (2021) found that one of the most important influences on young people's career choice are parents and that they trusted career and labour market information the most when it was mediated by parents (Moore et al 2021). Roe (1956) suggests that an individual's career choices will be influenced by the experiences of childhood including the behaviours of parents. In this sense, the family unit arguably operates as an echo chamber which reinforces inter-generation experiences of career and imprints this on future generations.

Several theorists have written about the impact of someone's context on their career decision making. These theorists describe the phenomenon of an echo chamber. The term, first coined by Van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson (1997) describes a situation whereby individuals screen out materials which don't conform to their preferences and in so doing, they insulate themselves from opposing viewpoints. This is referred to as confirmation bias (Wason, 1960) and can in turn impact on their decision making.

Bourdieu (1977) for example, developed his concept of habitus which refers to the way someone internalizes and replicates past experiences. Bourdieu suggests that whilst individuals have some agency over the extent to which they replicate behaviours, these are relational and are enacted through and within three sets of personal resources or capitals (economic, social and cultural capital). Bourdieu suggests that an individual's autonomy to engage with their habitus is through interactions between a set of assets or 'capitals'. These are financial, social, and cultural capitals and are derived from the context in which the individual operates. In exerting some agency over the way they interact with their context; individuals may show a bias towards the norms with which they are familiar and apply these in career decision making. In this way life chances may be determined by the cultural norms and values prevalent in their cultural, social and economic context. These cultural assets reinforce an individual's attitudes and behaviours and are largely responsible for the intergenerational persistence of social inequality. In this way, it could be argued that Bourdieu could be interpreted as describing an echo chamber which is derived from an individual's context and the confirmation bias which comes with sticking with more familiar and therefore preferential options.

Krumboltz (1979) argued that agency exists in career decision making but is largely influenced by the lessons learned from someone's social context which in turn influences their values and beliefs. Thus, an individual may apply confirmation bias in their behaviours and career choices as they may stick with what is comfortable or familiar rather than enacting decisions which take them beyond their social and cultural norms.

Law (1991) developed his community interaction theory in response to the work of Roberts' (1968) whose view was that individuals do not have free choice and that career decisions are restricted by the opportunities and structures which surround them. Law considered that it was not the social structures which limited an individual but rather that it is the way individuals engage with those structures that influence the way people think and behave. Law identified five main modes in which this influence occurs:

- **Expectations** — pressures to follow particular paths based on what is considered acceptable by family or community groups.
- **Feedback** — messages that individuals received about their strengths and weaknesses, and their suitability for particular roles.
- **Support** — reinforcement of aspirations and assistance in developing appropriate skills and strategies.
- **Modelling** — the availability of influential examples and the extent of identification with others when thinking about work.
- **Information** — opportunities to find out about options and the extent to which data is filtered by the norms of the social group.

Law suggests that individuals may apply confirmation bias in their career decision making which is derived from the way they engage with 'career' structures and in so doing could be deemed to be describing a career echo chamber.

How might virtual/online echo chambers influence career choice?

More recently, with the increasing use of social media and other online applications such as search engines and artificial intelligence, echo chambers are an increasing phenomenon due to the algorithms which sit behind them. Pariser (2012) notes that 'The algorithms that orchestrate our ads are starting to orchestrate our lives' (Pariser, 2012, P 9). He goes on to describe the way algorithms extrapolate from personalised data created through online activity to create a filter bubble which alters the way individuals encounter and use information.

Young people are active consumers of unmediated information and researchers are only just beginning to understand the impact of online media echo chambers on people's behaviours. Whilst there is some research on how these impact on election outcomes (Epstein and Robertson, 2015) or young people's well-being (Vallejos et al., 2021), there has been little exploration of this phenomenon on career decision making. It is possible to imagine a situation, for example, where a young person might interact with an online community which has a very specific view about the military which might colour their views of military career paths or may do an online search for university courses in law where the results have been filtered due to geographical location. What is unknown is the extent to which online career echo chambers exert a more limiting impact on career decision making than more traditional in-person career echo chambers and is an important question to explore.

Addressing the impact of career echo chambers through traditional models of career guidance

Although seen as a private as well as a public good (Watts 2002), the availability of career guidance is subject to funding mechanisms determined by governments and are therefore subject to their priorities and influenced by political ideologies. Where the needs of the labour market are seen as the driving force, career guidance will be concerned with trying to prepare people to fit the gaps in the labour market. In other words, career guidance exists as a means of social control. Where a more liberal view is taken, career guidance is seen as a means of addressing social inequity and therefore a means of social change. The extent to which individuals are supported to challenge the impact of career echo chambers is influenced by the availability of public funded career guidance services and therefore on government priorities and ideologies.

Traditional models of career guidance consist of interventions such as access to high quality mediated career and labour market information, effective programmes of careers education and access to personal career guidance throughout secondary and tertiary phases of education. They are aimed not just at providing the material to inform career decision making but also at challenging young people to raise their aspirations and to make career decisions free from negative influence, stereotypes, and biases.

Career guidance can help learners develop career management skills which have been defined as 'competencies which help individuals to identify their existing skills, develop career learning goals and take action to enhance their careers' (Neary et al., 2015, p.13). Do these traditional models help young people to confront the potential impacts of the algorithms which create online career echo chambers or are new approaches required? An exploration of frameworks which support the development of programmes of careers education reveals the extent to which this is the case.

The DOTS model (Decision making, Opportunity awareness, Transition skills, and Self-awareness) was proposed by Law and Watts (1977) and describes four learning domains required for an individual to be a competent career manager. It could be argued that whilst not explicit, the ability to navigate the online space successfully could fall into several places for example in transition skills (learning to navigate the interface between one situation and another) or opportunity awareness which requires the skills of research. These skills are important in addressing the impact of online career echo chambers. However, whilst this framework provides a useful high-level view, Law (2001) later revised this model to take account of the changes in career theory and explicitly gave the context of technological change to support his arguments. The 'new Dots' model however, does not make explicit reference to the potential impact of online career management-related activity although Law does suggest that critical thinking is an essential component of good career management. Whilst not explicitly referring to the need to equip young people to address the impact of online career echo chambers, critical thinking skills are a key component of this.

The Career Development Institute (CDI) have produced a framework (The CDI 2021) to support the development of the careers curriculum. In this framework, competences are grouped under 6 headings: Grow throughout life; Explore possibilities; Manage Career; Create opportunities; Balance life and work; and See the bigger picture. Whilst it is possible to imagine online activities supporting all of these broad areas, there is no explicit mention made of the relationship between an individual and the virtual online space and it is only alluded to within the area of 'explore possibilities' through the notion of researching options. Practitioners using this framework will therefore need to ensure that learners understand the need to apply critical digital literacy to their career decision making.

The need for new models of career guidance

Hooley (2012) notes that increasingly the internet is becoming a source of information that informs and relates to individuals' informational needs. He also describes the phenomenon whereby individuals are using the internet as a space for developing online networks as well as for job search. Hooley suggests that to navigate the internet for the purposes of career development there is a specific set of competences which he refers to as digital career literacy. He suggests that these digital literacy competences can be categorized into 7 areas (The 7 C's of digital literacy). Several of these describe competences which would help with understanding and combatting the impact of career echo chambers:

1. Changing describes the ability to understand and adapt to changing online career contexts and to learn to use new technologies for the purpose of career building.

3. Critiquing describes the ability to understand the nature of online career information and resources, to analyse its provenance and to consider its usefulness for a career.

5. Communicating describes the ability to interact effectively across a range of different platforms, to understand the genre and netiquette of different interactions and to use them in the context of career.

7. Curating describes the ability of an individual to reflect on and develop their digital footprint and online networks as part of their career building.

Whilst these competences are useful contributions to overall digital career proficiency, they do not provide a framework which would help someone to understand the relationship between online activity and the potential impact on career decision making. Staunton (2018) critiques Hooley's framework and highlights the degree of autonomy suggested by the framework which may not exist due to the unseen nature of algorithms which can manipulate individual decision making through the creation of online echo chambers.

It is possible to conclude that traditional programmes of careers education do, to some extent help young people navigate the impact of traditional career echo chambers. Whilst some career management skills set out in frameworks of careers education are useful for navigating both virtual and real echo chambers there are some specific skills which are required to address the issues that the impact of algorithms introduce. These are not covered in traditional frameworks and therefore further thinking needs to take place to review and revise these to ensure that they help young people tackle these unseen influences.

Whilst the manipulation by algorithms may seem sinister, it is possible to mitigate the impact of online career echo chambers. This requires an awareness of the impact of algorithms, a high level of critical thinking which allows an individual to explore information from different perspectives and an understanding of how to manage online presence for example through the management of cookies which can reduce the impact of algorithms.

Five steps to reducing the impact of algorithms on career decision making

It seems that existing models of career guidance should be enhanced to provide opportunities for learners to gain the competences required to overcome the potential impact of career echo chambers. The implication is that career development practitioners will need to enhance their practices to ensure that they help people to develop the critical skills needed to do this. The author proposes the following as a framework for supporting career development practitioners to develop their competence in this area.

- **Awareness** of the presence of algorithms and their potential biases in the online space.
- **Apply** critical thinking about how algorithms can reflect societal biases and reinforce prejudice and discrimination and impact on career choices.
- **Assess** career-related online information sources and applications for bias caused by algorithms.
- **Alert** organisations when algorithms are discovered which exert bias.
- **Adapt** careers education interventions to encourage an awareness of the impact of algorithms on career decision making and develop approaches to mitigate their impact.

Conclusion

We are all subject to the influences imposed by echo chambers, however this has become more concerning with the increase of online media. Young people are particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon as they are not always aware of how the algorithms which are embedded within online media operate to manipulate their choices. There is research to suggest how this might impact political and other types of decision making but as yet, little research which explores the impact of algorithms on young people's career decision making. It is still early in the debate about online safety and the use of artificial intelligence but there is a growing voice which is demanding that this should receive immediate attention. Given a lack of research into the impact of algorithms on young people's career decision making, one recommendation derived from this article is that more empirical research needs to be done to understand this phenomenon. This article suggests that some aspects of traditional or current programmes of career guidance do address some of the issues presented by career echo chambers however there are specific issues surrounding the impact of online career echo chambers which need to be addressed through such programmes. There are steps which career development practitioners can take to begin helping their clients and particularly young people overcome the effects of online career echo chambers. This will require new knowledge and skills, and as the Career Development Institute (2019) sets out in its code of ethical practice, practitioners have a duty to act in a transparent and trustworthy manner and in the best interests of their clients. This surely underlines the need for practitioners to understand algorithms and the importance and impact on career decision making and to act within their practices. This will involve developing career guidance programmes which help to raise awareness of algorithms and their potential impact on career choice. It will also involve developing young people's skills of critical thinking when undertaking career-related research. Career Development practitioners may need to develop tactics to encourage online social media platforms and information providers to provide explanations for how their algorithms work so that they become more transparent. This would enable young people to understand the reasoning behind the recommendations which are made and to trust sources. Finally, it may mean that practitioners may need to challenge organisations whose online applications exhibit bias.

References

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Epstein, R., &. Robertson, R. (2015). The search engine manipulation effect (SEME) and its possible impact on the outcomes of elections. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 112* (33).

Etzioni, A. & Etzioni, E. (1997). *Communities: Virtual vs Real. Science Vol 227* Issue 5324 P295.

Fry, H (2018). *Hello World: How to be Human in the Age of the Machine*. Doubleday

Hooley, T. (2012). How the Internet Changed Career: framing the relationship between career development and online technologies. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling October 2012, Issue 29* pp 3-12. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.2902

Kraut, R., Wang, X., Butler, B., Joyce, E. & Burke, M. (2008). Beyond Information: Developing the Relationship between the Individual and the Group in Online Communities. Information Systems Research.

Krumboltz, J. D., Mitchell, A. M., & Jones, G. B. (1976). A Social Learning Theory of Career Selection. *The Counseling Psychologist, 6*(1), 71-81. https://doi.org/10.1177/001100007600600117

Krumboltz, J. (1979). *The Effect of Alternative Career Decision-making Strategies on the Quality of Resulting Decisions*. School of Education, Stanford University.

Krumboltz, J. D. & Hamel, D. A., (1977). *Guide to career decision making skills*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board.

Law, B. (1981). Community interaction: a mid-rage focus for theories of career development in young adults, reproduced in Dryden, W. & Watts, A.G. (Eds) *Guidance and Counselling in Britain: A 20-Year Perspective.* Hobsons Publishing, pp.211-230.

Law, B. (1992). Career-learning Theory in A. G. Watts, Bill Law, John Killeen, Jennifer M Kidd & Ruth Hawthorn. *Rethinking Careers Education and Guidance - Theory, Policy and Practice*. Routledge

Law B. (2001). New DOTS: Career Learning for the Contemporary World, NICEC Briefing [online]. *Hihohiho*. https://www.hihohiho.com/memory/cafnewdots.pdf [Date viewed: 02/11/2023].

Law, B. & Watts, A. (1977). The DOTS Analysis. Schools. In Careers and Community: *A Study of Some Approaches to Careers Education in Schools. London: Church Information Office*. pp. 8-10

Moore, N., Clark, L., Neary, S., & Blake, H. (2021). *Crucial impacts on career choices: Research to understand the influences on young people's choices in primary and secondary schools: Final report.* University of Derby.

Moore, N. (2024). Career Echo Chambers and The Impact of Algorithms On Career Choice: What Do Career Practitioners Need To Know? *Career Matters,* Issue 12.1 pp.16-17. Stourbridge. The Career Development Institute.

Neary, S., Dodd, V. & Hooley, T. (2015). *Understanding Career Management Skills: Findings from the First Phase of the CMS Leader Project*. International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

O'Neil, C. (2016). *Weapons of Math destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*. Crown Publishing Company

Pariser, E. (2012). *The Filter Bubble. How the personalized web is changing what we read and how we think*. Penguin.

Roberts, K. (1968). The Entry into Employment: An Approach towards a General Theory. *The Sociological Review, 16*(2), pp.165-184. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1968.tb02570.x

Roe, A. (1956). *The psychology of occupations*. John Wiley & Sons

Sassenberg, K. (2002) Common Bond and Common Identity Groups on the Internet: Attachment and Normative Behaviour in On-Topic and Off-Topic Chats. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice. 2002, Vol. 6*, No. 1, 27–37. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2699.6.1.27

Staunton, T. (2018). A critical response to Hooley's Seven Cs of digital literacy. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling* (April 2018, Issue 40 pp 47-53). https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.4008

The Career Development Institute (2019). *Code of ethics*. The CDI.

The Career Development Institute (2021). *The Career Development Framework. Supporting learners to improve their career development skills*. The CDI.

Van Alstyne, M. & Brynjolfsson, E. (1997). *Electronic Communities: Global Village or Cyberbalkans?* MIT.

Vallejos E., Dowthwaite L., Creswich, H., Portillo, V., Koene, A., Jirotka, M., Amy McCarthy, A, & McAuley, D. (2021). The impact of algorithmic decision-making processes on young people's well-being. *Health Informatics Journal*. Sage. https://doi.org/10.1177/1460458220972750

Wason, P. (1960), 'On the failure to eliminate hypotheses in a conceptual task', *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology, 12* (3): 129–140, Sage. https://doi.org/10.1080/17470216008416717

Watts, A.G. (2002). Careers guidance and public policy. In Watts, A.G., Law, B., Killeen, J., Kidd, J.M. & Hawthorn, R.: *Rethinking Careers Education and Guidance: Theory, Policy and Practice*. Routledge.

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5407

Career counselling interventions for women survivors of intimate partner violence

Charles P. Chen

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto, Canada

Karan K. Wong

University of Toronto, Canada

For correspondence:

Professor Charles P. Chen: cp.chen@utoronto.ca

To cite this article:

Chen, C. P. & Wong, K. K. (2025). Career counselling interventions for women survivors of intimate partner violence. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *54*(1), 71-86. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5407

Abstract

Women survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) often face many challenges that can significantly impact their career development. However, career counsellors may not be fully prepared to support the unique needs of these women. This article will explore major issues faced by women survivors of IPV in their career development and propose counselling interventions that draw from Krumboltz' social learning theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory. A counselling framework that is informed by these factors can help career counsellors empower women survivors of IPV in moving forward and rebuilding their lives.

Key words: career development; intimate partner violence; career theories; counselling interventions

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious issue impacting millions of women worldwide (Aizpitarte et al., 2023). Though men also experience IPV, women are significantly more

likely to be victims of IPV than men. Intimate partner violence has been defined as 'any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm' (World Health Organization [WHO], 2012, p. 1). Intimate partner violence has many consequences on the lives of women affected, including their career development (Chronister et al., 2004). For instance, IPV can occur at or near workplaces, wherein survivors can be stalked by their ex-partner, forcing them to leave their workplace for safety reasons, and secure new employment (Al-Modallal et al., 2016; Riger et al., 2000). Furthermore, women facing IPV often express challenges at work because of exhaustion, feeling unwell, being injured, increased distressed regarding the IPV (MacGregor et al., 2022). As a result of the aforementioned challenges, women may be more likely to miss work, have difficulty concentrating and have decreased job performance (Al-Modallal et al., 2016; Wathen et al., 2015). For some women, their partners or ex-partners directly interfere with their ability to secure employment or prohibit them from attending work (Al-Modallal et al., 2016; Wathen et al., 2016; Swanberg et al., 2005). In comparison to women who have not experienced IPV, women with a history of IPV reportedly have increased job instability, lower income, and greater financial difficulties (Adams et al., 2013; Crowne et al., 2011). Given that women who experience IPV often face career challenges (OMorris et al., 2009), it is highly likely that career counsellors would need to support this population at some point in time. However, there is a gap in career counselling services available to women survivors of IPV (Chronister et al., 2012).

Based on these concerns, this article will attempt to discuss several issues encountered by women in abusive relationships that might affect their career development process. These issues include low self-esteem, diminished self-efficacy, dependency, social isolation, and psychological distress. It is then followed with a discussion on how career counsellors could integrate some theoretical aspects of Krumboltz's social learning theory (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1984) and the social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994, 2000) as interventions to facilitate the career development of women survivors of IPV.

It is important to highlight that women who experience IPV are not a homogenous population; they may come from all races, ethnic groups (Cory & McAndless-Davis, 2008), communities, educational levels (Lundberg-Love & Marmion, 2006) and socioeconomic statuses (Worell & Remer, 2003). Their stories of abuse and personal needs may therefore vary greatly as well. However, given that the tasks of examining and addressing the intersections of these women's identities and their life difficulties are beyond the scope of this article, a broader definition of women who experience IPV has been utilized. Women in this article include those who are in abusive relationships and who are either employed or pursuing educational and/or career goals.

Major issues faced by women in abusive relationships

The following subsections will present some of the key issues that women face in abusive relationships, and consider the potential impacts these issues may have on their career development.

Low self-esteem

Self-esteem has been referred to a personal evaluation of one's own value or sense of worth (Dutton, 1992). For many women survivors of IPV, low self-esteem, which might at times occur along with feelings of shame, is one of the most devastating consequences they suffer from abuse in their relationships (Dutton, 1992; Noormohamadi et al., 2021; Sáez et al., 2021). Intimate partner violence may include repeated experiences of verbal or emotional abuse such as belittling, name calling and criticizing from an abusive partner (Lundberg-Love & Marmion, 2006), resulting in women internalizing those negative messages. Consequently, their self-esteem may deteriorate, and they may feel worthless and powerless (Worell & Remer, 2003). In Taylor et al.'s (2001) phenomenological study that explored the lived experiences of women who had faced IPV, almost all women reported losing self-esteem after having endured partner abuse. Additionally, a study by Tariq (2013) examined the impact of IPV on women and found that self-esteem was lower for women who had experienced abuse compared to those who had not.

An individual's self-esteem has been found to impact career satisfaction, job performance, and career outcomes (Bowling et al., 2010; Krauss & Orth, 2022). High self-esteem has been shown to have a positive influence on career decisions and success, and vice versa (Milburn, 1986). Brown et al. (2000) examined the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making among women who experienced IPV, and they found that high-self-esteem significantly contributed to greater confidence in making career decisions and implementing career plans. This suggests that women with low self-esteem will likely experience an opposite effect. Thus, as women survivors of IPV often struggle with low self-esteem and evaluate themselves negatively, their career development will undoubtedly be affected.

Diminished self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief that he or she can successfully perform specific tasks or achieve a certain goal (Morris et al., 2009). Albaugh and Nauta (2005) note that self-efficacy is an important component in the development of career interests, and implementation of choices and goals. People with high self-efficacy will likely feel capable of initiating tasks and capable of putting a greater amount of effort into tasks despite difficulties, whereas those with low self-efficacy might avoid the task, perform poorly and ultimately fail to succeed (Albaugh & Nauta, 2005; Brown et al., 2000; Hackett & Betz, 1981).

Due to being involved in a relationship that is of a denigratory nature, survivors of IPV might be in fewer situations where they could develop feelings of competence (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003). Often, an abuser may minimize a woman's sense of accomplishment when she successfully executes any general or career-related tasks to maintain control over her (Worell & Remer, 2003). Over time, a victim of IPV may start to believe she is incapable. She may also doubt her own ability to succeed in a variety of areas including her pursuits of education and career (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003). Because women survivors of IPV may have fewer opportunities for positive learning experiences, they may have lower career decision self-efficacy (Albaugh & Nauta, 2005). Consequently, ongoing abuse leaves survivors of IPV with a low sense of self-efficacy (Gianakos, 1999; Matheson et al., 2015;

Sáez et al., 2021). Based on these considerations, survivors of IPV with low self-efficacy will certainly face challenges in terms of their career development, as they may be unlikely to attempt career-related behaviours and overcome challenges to reach their career goals.

Dependency

Another major issue faced by women survivors of IPV is that they are often made by their abusive partners to become dependent on them in various ways. Abusers tend to direct women's lives through manipulation and coercion, which in turn weaken women's ability to make decisions for themselves (Bowen, 1982; Wettersten et al., 2004; Wright et al., 2021; Van Niel, 2021). Thus, these women may not only have trouble making everyday decisions, but they may also experience difficulties in reaching career-related decisions (e.g., choosing relevant activities in their career exploration) independently. Some women may even rely on 'benevolent others' to help them decide instead (Bowen, 1982, p. 124). Additionally, researchers have noted a general decrease in many women's problem-solving skills due to being involved in abusive relationships (Ibrahim & Herr, 1987; Lundberg-Love & Marmion, 2006). Thus, one could reasonably expect that women who have experienced IPV might struggle to cope well with new situations.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon for abusers to exploit women financially so that women would become economically dependent (Collins, 2011; Gianakos, 1999; Wettersten et al., 2004). Numerous researchers have pointed out that a lack of economic resources might play an important role in explaining why some survivors of IPV continue to stay in their abusive relationships (Brown et al., 2000; Dutton, 1992; WomanACT, 2021). Without sufficient economic resources, women will unlikely view leaving the relationship as an option because they (and their children) could be facing tremendous living difficulties on their own (Dutton, 1992; WomanACT, 2021). For this reason, Bowen (1982) contended that helping a woman attain financial stability should be given emphasis in career counselling with this population. This could be done by helping women develop necessary job skills and secure employment so that they could generate income to meet their basic needs. By establishing financial independence, women might then become more willing to separate from their abusers and regain control over their lives.

Social isolation

The next major issue facing many women survivors of IPV is that they are often forced into social isolation (Goodman & Epstein, 2008). In many ways, they may feel completely alone in experiencing the abuse. An abuser may attempt to keep a woman from meeting her family and friends, and actively damage all her potential sources of support (Lundberg-Love & Marmion, 2006). Stark (2012) stated that the aim of these abusive behaviours is to further instil dependence and take exclusive control over the woman's agency and skills. On the other hand, women facing IPV might also choose to stay away from their close ones because they may feel shame, embarrassed or become fearful of rejection (Worell & Remer, 2003).

Consequently, women survivors of IPV who have been socially isolated, have lacked access to external helping resources. They tend to have very few opportunities to contact supportive

individuals and to be in situations where they can develop positive mental health (Michalski, 2004). Additionally, Chronister and McWhirter (2003) noted that women survivors of IPV may rarely interact with and learn from role models who are pursuing similar career and educational interests. Thus, their ability to acquire occupational knowledge and obtain career-related information such as job skills training may be particularly limited.

Psychological distress

Furthermore, given the unpredictability of the abusers' violent behaviour, victims of IPV often live with high levels of stress and experience significant psychological distress. For instance, survivors of IPV may struggle with anxiety and depressive disorders, somatoform disorders, substance use disorders, sleep difficulties, poor concentration, hypervigilance, and anger (Dutton, 1992; Van Niel, 2021). There is also evidence to suggest a strong link between partner violence against women and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Particularly with women experiencing prolonged and intense abuse in their intimate relationships being more prone to exhibiting severe PTSD symptoms (Woods, 2005). A meta-analysis by Spencer et al. (2019) included 207 studies that examined the relationship between mental disorders and physical IPV victimization. They found PTSD to be a significant correlate for IPV victimization in women. This was aligned with other research indicating the correlation between IPV and PTSD for women (Babcock et al., 2008; Golding, 1999; Woods, 2005).

Psychological distress that results from abuse may also have long-term negative effects on a woman's ability to connect with others, handle difficult situations and gain satisfying experience regarding career development and advancement (Brush, 2000). Therefore, the distress will inevitably affect a survivor of IPV's ability to work to a great extent. In fact, studies have found that women reported being involved in an abusive relationship have caused them to either be late for work or miss work (Wettersten et al., 2004). Women survivors of IPV also often find it challenging to stay focused at work and perform their best in work tasks (Swanberg, Macke, & Logan, 2006). Moreover, the amount of psychological distress among women may intensify, because in addition to the abuser's violent behaviour at home, it is very common for abusers to employ a variety of interference tactics to harass women at their workplace (Swanberg, Logan, & Macke, 2005). Some consequences of such harassment are that women may not only be occupied with worrying thoughts about what might happen while at work (Wettersten et al., 2004), but they may also end up losing their jobs (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003). Overall, for these women, their inability to become a productive and responsible worker will likely have a negative impact on their colleagues and employers' perceptions of them. There are high possibilities that they will receive fewer opportunities to develop important job skills and receive undesirable comments in their job evaluations (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003). Consequently, as a victim's prospects of growing professionally suffer, they are likely to continue experiencing distress.

Underlying theories

Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory

Krumboltz's social learning theory utilizes Bandura's social learning theory as a foundation with the intent of addressing how career decision-making process is influenced by the

interaction of four factors: (1) genetic endowment, (2) environmental conditions and events, (3) learning experiences, and (4) task approach skills (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1984). As a result of these four factors interacting with one another, individuals will acquire their own unique learning experiences which in return, influence how they form certain beliefs about themselves, make generalisations about their surroundings and approach career tasks (Krumboltz, 1994). In this regard, this theory would be applicable to women survivors of IPV because as discussed earlier, many women in abusive relationships have been situated in an isolated and restrictive environment where their opportunities to develop positive views about their personal qualities and learn task skills are very limited.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

There have been several studies suggesting that social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994, 2000) can be used effectively to support the career development of women survivors of IPV (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003; Chronister et al., 2018; Morris et al. 2009). In general, as described by Morris et al. (2009), SCCT considers that the development of one's career interests, goals, and actions are influenced by interactions among key concepts including self-efficacy, outcome expectations and contextual barriers and supports. Individuals whose career self-efficacy beliefs are low will also tend to have low outcome expectations for being successful in their jobs or their career pursuits (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003). As it has already been mentioned that many women survivors of IPV often have low self-efficacy and anticipate negative outcomes in both life and work, it would be necessary for career interventions to follow a SCCT approach that aim at improving these two aspects. Additionally, focusing on the contextual barriers and supports surrounding women survivors of IPV would be equally necessary, because such environmental factors could influence whether individuals will set career goals based on their own career interests and take certain actions to reach those goals (Lent et al., 2000).

Proposed helping interventions with application of career theories

Based on the discussion of key issues above, counselling interventions for women survivors of IPV are proposed by drawing aspects from Krumboltz's social learning theory (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1984) and the social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994, 2000).

According to Krumboltz's (1996), a career counsellor working from a social learning perspective should focus on actively helping clients to learn, so that they would be able to take appropriate actions to manage their career-related concerns and experience life satisfaction. Therefore, in accordance with this theory's emphasis on learning, a career counsellor could support women survivors of IPV by teaching practical skills, introducing relevant learning resources and employing cognitive strategies.

Teaching practical skills

Since women survivors of IPV may often have a hard time making career decisions on their own, the career counsellor can teach them how to come to a more appropriate and informed decision independently. To do this, the counsellor can introduce Krumboltz and Hamel's (1977) 'DECIDES' model that describes career decision-making as a process

consisted of seven steps: (1) define the problem, (2) establish an action plan, (3) clarify values, (4) identify alternatives, (5) discover probable outcomes, (6) eliminate alternatives systematically, and (7) start action. By dividing the entire decision-making process into smaller steps, this model would enable women survivors of IPV, who may often experience fear of making a wrong choice (Gianakos, 1999), to feel less overwhelmed in making decisions regarding their career. The counsellor could suggest to women to reanalyse their action plans if needed (Gianakos, 1999) while reminding them that all decisions—including tentative ones—can teach them a lot about themselves (Krumboltz, 1996). A gentle and manageable approach could be particularly beneficial for survivors of IPV, as they could slowly regain self-confidence and trust in themselves to make important decisions even when facing with a new career problem.

In addition, a woman survivor of IPV's problem-solving skills could be enhanced by teaching her to perform a cost-benefit analysis (Worell & Remer, 2003). In this hands-on approach, the counsellor could encourage the woman to take an active role in evaluating the pros and cons associated with each of her choices.

Introducing relevant learning resources

As the primary focus of the social learning theory is to promote client learning, the career counsellor's task could include offering women survivors of IPV new learning experiences through a variety of useful resources that aim to expand their interests, values, interests, work habits and skills (Krumboltz, 1996). For example, to assist a woman who is engaging in career exploration, the counsellor could share books, reports, magazine articles, videos and internet sites (e.g., http://www.careerinfonet.org/) so that she is able to obtain accurate information about career areas that interest them. The counsellor could further set up opportunities for associative learning to occur, such as connecting the woman with supportive role models (Sharf, 2013). In doing so, these women might be able to learn about the role models' actual work experiences (e.g., their typical workday and working conditions) as well as receive guidance on how to acquire certain skills or training required for specific jobs. Together, these learning resources will help increase occupational knowledge and facilitate the achievement of career goals for women survivors of IPV.

Employing cognitive strategies

Challenging troublesome beliefs

Using the cognitive strategy of challenging troublesome beliefs is a crucial part of career counselling with women survivors of IPV because abusive experiences often result in their tendency to form strong negative beliefs about themselves. Thus, throughout the counselling process, the counsellor not only needs to listen attentively to the women's stories but also identify any 'assumptions, presuppositions and beliefs' that could possibly hold them back from achieving career success (Krumboltz, 1992, p. 2). For example, a woman's faulty and unhelpful beliefs might be reflected through her statements such as 'I will never be able to support myself' or 'I am never good enough for any job'. In such cases, the counsellor could gently point to evidence in the woman's life that contradict such beliefs (Krumboltz, 1992) and respond in the following ways: 'Let's look back on the progress you have made and see how much you managed to support yourself this whole time' and 'Think of some positive qualities or strengths, no matter how small, that you feel

you possess. Think about what some people who are close to you might say about this'. With consistent support of the counsellor, women survivors of IPV might start to realize that such negative beliefs they hold are not representative of their authentic selves. This can lead to an increased sense of empowerment among women, while improving their self-esteem and subsequent vocational behaviour.

Cognitive rehearsal

Another cognitive strategy that could be employed is called cognitive rehearsal. In this strategy, women survivors of IPV could be encouraged to practice saying positive statements or affirmations to themselves, to replace their negative thoughts that have been so deeply ingrained (Krumboltz, 1996). For instance, the counsellor may ask the woman to repeat positive and uplifting phrases about herself such as 'I am capable of doing things right' and 'I can move forward with my life.' Doing so repeatedly could help women see that they have more options (Sharf, 2013). They might also spend more time considering their future opportunities rather than dismissing them immediately (Sharf, 2013), hence increasing their chances of growing professionally. Concurrently, the counsellor could teach women to avoid labelling themselves (Krumboltz, 1992) to build healthy self-esteem. For example, although a woman might not accomplish a task, she can rehearse saying, 'This is an unsuccessful attempt, but I am not a failure.'

Increase self-efficacy

In order to increase self-efficacy, the career counsellor could consider the four main sources of information that contribute to its development: performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, emotional arousal and verbal persuasion by others (Bandura, 1977). Likewise, facilitating women survivors of IPV to experience these four sources could influence their existing self-efficacy beliefs.

Performance accomplishments

As women begin to identify their career interests and skills, the counsellor could suggest they engage in relevant and manageable tasks or activities in which they are very likely to gain success experiences (Brown et al., 2000). For example, it may be helpful for the counsellor to first ask women to perform tasks that are of non-evaluative nature (Gianakos, 1999), such as gathering information about current employment trend and report it back during the counselling session, since these types of tasks are typically less intimidating. Gradually, the counsellor could also suggest participating in suitable activities such as volunteering or skills-building workshops so they will further experience a stronger sense of efficacy. Brown and Lent (1996) recommended that after each successful performance accomplishments, inviting clients to talk in detail about how they think they were able to achieve such positive outcomes is a good way to reinforce their self-efficacy.

Vicarious learning

For vicarious learning, giving women opportunities to observe role models who have persisted and successfully overcome similar career challenges could be particularly helpful (Betz, 1992; Brown & Krane, 2000; Chronister et al., 2012). This is because women survivors of IPV may not only learn some useful behaviours to overcome their own challenges from observing, but they may also start to believe in themselves to be able to

do the same. Such vicarious learning experiences could potentially be more powerful if the models with whom women interact are women who had once been in abusive relationships (Gianakos, 1999; Chronister et al., 2012).

Emotional arousal

Regarding addressing emotional arousal, the counsellor could strive to help women experience a more balanced mood or positive feelings by teaching them techniques to manage their stress or anxiety (Betz, 1992; Ibrahim & Herr, 1987). While the techniques may vary greatly depending on what fits best for each client, some useful ones could include deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation exercises. The calmness that usually coincides with regular practice of such techniques might allow women to feel that they can effectively manage their career task at hand. It might also help alleviate psychological distress that women survivors of IPV often experience.

Verbal encouragement

Lastly, increasing women's self-efficacy through verbal persuasion can be achieved by offering consistent encouragement and support as they are working towards independence (Bowen, 1982; Chronister et al., 2012). Since women survivors of IPV often experience self-doubts, it would be imperative for them to receive messages indicating that have great potential to succeed. Hearing such encouraging messages over time could help enhance women's beliefs about their own abilities.

Improve outcome expectations

Similar to self-efficacy, outcome expectations among women survivors of IPV needs to be improved as they might often anticipate negative situations. For example, a woman may be afraid of losing financial support if she does choose to leave her abusive partner (Morris et al., 2009). In this case, the counsellor could validate the woman's concern while engaging her in a discussion that focuses on the possibilities of positive outcomes (Morris et al., 2009). For example, noting that she could achieve financial independence and establish a life free of abuse. On the other hand, for a woman who may fear getting harassed at work by her partner and express worry about her job performance and security being affected (Wettersten et al., 2004), the counsellor could work with her to develop a personalized safety plan for work. They could also work together to explore whether to disclose the abuse to someone whom she trusts at the workplace and strategize how to do so if she proceeds (Swanberg et al., 2005). This could possibly lead to positive outcomes (e.g., feeling less distress, being able to work productively) as Swanberg et al. (2006) found that most women survivors of IPV in their study received a range of supports from their colleagues and supervisors when they chose to share their experiences of abuse.

Contextual Factors: Barriers and Supports

Finally, while career counsellors should assess the contextual barriers that can prevent women survivors of IPV from achieving safety and career success, it is also important to encourage women to identify them on their own as well (Chronister et al., 2012; Morris et al., 2009). To this end, a counsellor could first share information related to IPV such as the cycle of abuse and the power and control wheel (Cory & McAndless-Davis, 2008; Worell & Remer, 2003). Such information can be very valuable as it could allow women to realize

they are not responsible for the abuse and to become aware of the difficult challenges they would be facing if they continue to stay with their abusive partners (Cory & McAndless-Davis, 2008). The counsellor could then gradually shift to asking women more specific questions about what barriers they think they might encounter in their career pursuits because of being involved in an abusive relationship.

Once the counsellor elicits a better understanding from the woman about her perceived barriers, they could connect her with appropriate supports that would help minimize the impacts of such barriers (Chronister et al., 2012; Morris et al., 2009). For instance, for a woman who is lacking a reliable support system, referring her to join support groups might allow her to make meaningful connections with other women who are facing or have overcome similar abusive experiences in their intimate relationships (NiCarthy, Merriam, & Coffman, 1984). Women in a group setting can support each other to break isolation, build confidence and exchange useful knowledge including survival strategies and career information (Bowen, 1982). Moreover, depending on the woman's challenge (e.g., in need of financial assistance or medical care), the counsellor can help women gain access to a variety of community resources such as social services agencies, health centres, food banks and local women's shelters (Cory & McAndless-Davis, 2008). Similarly, since women survivors of IPV might often need extensive support when looking for employment and educational or job training, the counsellor could also be prepared to guide and direct them in this process as much as possible (Bowen, 1982). These multiple sources of supports may effectively raise hope and strengths for women to leave the abuse situation.

For all the aforementioned interventions and strategies to be effectively implemented into counselling and provide effective outcomes, women survivors of IPV require counsellors with advanced skills and knowledge in the treatment of IPV. According to research, accurate diagnosis of both current and past IPV is the utmost crucial aspect in ensuring that there are no misdiagnosis and improper treatment (Sutton et al., 2020). Some researchers reported that formal education inadequately prepared counsellors to work with clients experiencing IPV (Fedina et al., 2017; Todahl et al., 2008), thus, increasing the demand for greater in-depth clinical training. Studies revealed that mental health professionals who have received adequate training regarding IPV are more likely to engage in comprehensive assessments and intervention practices (Murray et al., 2016). Not only are assessment and intervention practices important, but also the counsellors' individual skills and knowledge. For instance, professionals working with IPV should be aware of stigmatizations that exist, proper language that does not covey biases, being aware of their own non-verbal body language as victims of IPV often rely on body language for safety, and being cautious not to cause re-victimization (Maghsoudi, 2018). Counsellors who can participate in trainings that address the above-mentioned, are more likely to be in a better position to support survivors of IPV, and thus, accurately implement the strategies and interventions discussed in this paper. Taken together, counsellors require the foundational knowledge and awareness of IPV to properly incorporate effective interventions.

Conclusion

This article presents that women who experienced abuse in their intimate relationships face multiple challenges, particularly low self-esteem, diminished self-efficacy, dependency, social isolation and psychological distress. While these challenges can have profound

negative impacts on women's career development, it becomes possible to support this population in an appropriate and sensitive manner by employing helping interventions that incorporates aspects of the social learning theory and social cognitive career theory. These interventions that have been proposed here, such as teaching practical skills, introducing learning resources, using cognitive strategies, increasing self-efficacy and expanding sources of support, are aimed primarily at helping women empower themselves. As a woman survivor of IPV's self-worth and inner strengths grow, she will be much more likely to overcome challenges in her life and career. In addition, it would also be extremely important for career counsellors to demonstrate an empathic and encouraging attitude to affirm the woman's attempt to improve her situation throughout the counselling process. By taking all these factors into consideration, career counsellors will become better able to assist them in moving forward and rebuilding their lives.

Data Availability Statement

Data availability is not applicable to this article, as it is entirely based on existing literature that is fully accessible to the public.

Conflict of Interest Statement

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent and Ethical Statement

Informed consent and ethics review are not required or applicable to this article, as it is entirely based on existing literature that is fully accessible to the public.

References

Adams, A. E., Tolman, R. M., Bybee, D., Sullivan, C. M., & Kennedy, A. C. (2013). The impact of intimate partner violence on low-income women's economic well-being: The mediating role of job stability. *Violence Against Women, 18*(2), 1345-1367. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801212474294

Aizpitarte, A., Tamarit-Sumalla, J.M., Hernandez-Hidalgo, P., & Arràez, L.A. (2023). The impact of intimate partner violence on women in criminal courts: Beyond the victim-survivor dichotomy. *Victims and Offenders*, pp. 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2022.2159904

Albaugh, L.M., Nauta, M.M. (2005). Career decision self-efficacy, career barriers, and college women's experiences of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Career Assessment, 13*(3), 288-306. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072705274958

Al-Modallal, H., Al-Omari, H., Abujilban, S., & Mrayan, L. (2016). Intimate partner violence and female nurses' employment: Disclosure and consequences. *Journal of Family Violence, 31*, 161-166. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-015-9755-1

Babcock, J.C., Roseman, A., Green, C.E., & Ross, J.M. (2008). Intimate partner abuse and PTSD symptomatology: Examining mediators and moderators of the abuse-trauma link. *Journal of Family Psychology, 22*(6), 809-818. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013808

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2), 191-215. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446261057

Betz, N. E. (1992). Counseling uses of career self-efficacy theory. *Career Development Quarterly, 41*(1), 22-26. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.1992.tb00352.x

Bowen, N. H. (1982). Guidelines for career counseling with abused women. *The Vocational Guidance Quarterly, 31*(2), 123-127. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2164-585X.1982.tb01302.x

Bowling, N.A., Eschleman, K.J., Wang, Q., Kirkendall, C., & Alacron, G. (2010). A meta-analysis of the predictors and consequences or organization-based self-esteem. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 83*(3), 601-626. https://doi.org/10.1348/096327909X454382

Brown, C., Reedy, D., Fountain, J., Johnson, A., & Dichiser, T. (2000). Battered women's career decision-making self-efficacy: Further insights and contributing factors. *Journal of Career Assessment, 8*(3), 251-265. https://doi.org/10.1177/106907270000800304

Brown S. D., & Krane N. E. R. (2000). Four (or five) sessions and a cloud of dust: Old Assumptions and new observations about career counseling. In Brown S. D., Lent R. W. (Eds.), *Handbook of counseling psychology* (3rd ed., pp. 740–766). John Wiley.

Brown, S. D., & Lent, R. W. (1996). A social cognitive framework for career choice counseling. *The Career Development Quarterly, 44*(4), 354-366. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.1996.tb00451.x

Brush, L. D. (2000). Battering, traumatic stress, and welfare-to-work transition. *Violence Against Women, 6*(10), 1039-1065. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778010022183514

Chronister, K. M., & McWhirter, E. H. (2003). Applying social cognitive career theory to the empowerment of battered women. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 81*(4), 418-425. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2003.tb00268.x

Chronister, K. M., Wettersten, K. B., & Brown, C. (2004). Vocational Research for the liberation of battered women. *The Counseling Psychologist, 32*(6), 900-922. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000004269300

Chronister, K.M., Harley, E., Aranda, C.L., Barr, L., & Luginbuhl, P. (2012). Community-based career counseling for women survivors of intimate partner violence: A collaborative partnership. *Journal of Career Development, 39*(6), 515-539. https://doi.org/ /10.1177/0894845311401618

Chronister, K.M., Luginbuhl, P., Ngo, C., Downey-McCarthy, R., Wang, J., Barr, L., Aranda, C., & Harley, E. (2018). The individual career counselling needs and experiences of female survivors of partner violence. *Journal of employment counselling, 55*, 84-94. https://doi.org/10.1002/joec.12077

Collins, J. C. (2011). Strategy of career interventions for battered women. *Human Resource Development Review, 10*(3), 246-263. https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484311408691

Cory, J., & McAndless-Davis, K. (2008). *When love hurts: A woman's guide to understanding abuse in relationships* (2nd ed.). WomanKind Press.

Crowne, S. S., Juon, H., Ensminger, M., Burrell, L., McFarlane, E., & Duggan, A. (2011). Concurrent and long-term impact of intimate partner violence on employment stability. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 26*(6), 1282-1304. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260510368160

Dutton, M. A. (1992). *Empowering and healing the battered woman: A model for assessment and intervention*. Springer.

Gianakos, I. (1999). Career counseling with battered women. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 21*(1), 1-14.

Golding, J. M. (1999). Intimate partner violence as a risk factor for mental disorders: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Family Violence, 14*(2), 99-132. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022079418229

Goodman, L, A., & Epstein, D. (2008). *Listening to battered women: A survivor-centered approach to advocacy, mental health, and justice*. American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/11651-000

Fedina, L., Lee., J., & Tablan, D. D. (2017). MSW graduates' readiness to respond to intimate partner violence. *Journal of Social Work Education, 54*(1), 33-48. https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2017.1307150

Hackett, G., & Betz, N. E. (1981). A self-efficacy approach to the career development of women. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 18*(3), 326-339. https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791(81)90019-1

Heise, L., Ellsberg, M., & Gottemoeller, M. (1999). Ending violence against women. Population Reports, Series L, No. 11. Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, Population Information Program.

Ibrahim, F. A., & Herr, E. L. (1987). Battered women: A developmental life-career counseling perspective. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 65*, 244-248. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1987.tb01275.x

Krauss, S., Orth, U. (2022). Work experiences and self-esteem development: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *European Journal of Personality, 36*(6), 849-869. https://doi.org/10.1177/08902070211027142

Krumboltz, J. D. (1992). *Challenging Troublesome Career Beliefs*. ERIC Digest.

Krumboltz, J. D. (1994). Improving career development theory from a social learning perspective. In M. L. Savickas & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Convergence in career development theories* (pp. 9-31). Consulting Psychologists Press.

Krumboltz, J. D. (1996). A learning theory of career counseling. In M. L. Savikas & W. B. Walsh (Eds.), *Handbook of career counseling theory and practice* (pp. 55-80). Consulting Psychologists Press.

Krumboltz, J. D., & Hamel, D. A. (1977). *Guide to career decision-making skills*. College Entrance Examination Board.

Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 45*, 79-122. https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1994.1027

Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (2000). Contextual supports and barriers to career choice: A social cognitive analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 47*, 36-49. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.47.1.36

Lundberg-Love, P. K., & Marmion, S. L. (2006). *'Intimate' violence against women: When spouses, partners, or lovers attack*. Praeger.

Maghsoudi, M. (2018). Addressing counselor stigma in working with female intimate partner violence survivors. *Journal of Professional Counseling, Practice, Theory & Research, 45*(1), 33-44. https://doi.org/10.1080/15566382.2019.1603015

Matheson, F.I., Daoud, N., Hamilton-Wright, S., Borenstein, H., Pedersen, C., & O'Campo, P. (2015). Where did she go? The transformation of self-esteem, self-identity, and mental well-being among women who have experienced intimate partner violence. *Womens Health Issues, 25*, 561–569. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.whi.2015.04.006

Michalski, J. H. (2004). Making Sociological Sense out of Trends in Intimate Partner Violence: The Social Structure of Violence against Women. *Violence against Women, 10*(6), 652–675. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801204265018

Milburn, B. (1986). The role of self-esteem in the career development of adults. *New Directions for Continuing Education, 32*, 33-44. https://doi.org/10,1002/ace.36719863205

Mitchell, L. K., & Krumboltz, J. D. (1984). Social learning approach to career decision making: Krumboltz's theory. In D. Brown, & L. Brooks (Eds.), *Career choice and development* (1st ed.) (pp.235-280). Josey-Bass Inc.

Morris, C. A., Shoffner, M. F., & Newsome, D. W. (2009). Career counseling for women preparing to leave abusive relationships: A social cognitive career theory approach. *The Career Development Quarterly, 58*(1), 44-53. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2009.tb00172.x

Murray, C. E., Davis, J., Rudolph, L., Graves, K. N., Colbert, R., Fryer, M., Mason, A., & Thigpen, B. (2016). Domestic violence training experiences and needs among mental health professionals: Implications from a state-wide survey. *Violence and Victims, 31*(5), 901-920. https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-14-00092

NiCarthy, G., Merriam, K., & Coffman, S. (1984). *Talking it out: A guide to groups for abused women*. Seal.

Riger, S., Ahrens, C., & Blickenstaff, A. (2000). Measuring interference with employment and education reported by women with abusive partners: Preliminary data. *Violence and Victims, 15*, 161-172.

Sáez, G., López-Nuñez, C., Carlos-Vivas, J., Barrios-Fernández, S., Rojo-Ramos, J., Adsuar, J.C., & Collado-Mateo, D. (2021). A multicomponent program to improve self-concept and self-esteem among intimate partner violence victims: A study protocol for a randomized controlled pilot trial. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*, 1-10. https://doi.org/10/3390/ijerph19084930

Sharf, R. S. (2013). *Applying career development theory to counseling* (6th ed.). Brooks/Cole.

Spencer, C., Mallory, A.B., Cafferky, B.M., Kimmes, J.G., Beck A.R., & Stith, S.M. (2019). Mental health factors and intimate partner violence perpetration and victimization: A meta-analysis. *Psychology of Violence, 9*(1), pp. 1-17. http://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000156

Stark, E. (2012). *Re-presenting battered women: Coercive control and the defense of liberty*. http://www.stopvaw.org/uploads/evan_stark_article_final_100812.pdf

Sutton, A., Beech, H., Ozturk, B., & Nelson-Gardell, D. (2021). Preparing mental health professionals to work with survivors of intimate partner violence: A comprehensive systematic review of the literature. *Affilia, 36*(3), 426-440. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109920960827

Swanberg, J. E., & Logan, T. K. (2005). Domestic violence and employment: A qualitative study. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 10*(1), 3-17. https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.10.1.3

Swanberg, J. E., Logan, T. K., & Macke, C. (2005). Intimate partner violence, employment, and the workplace: Consequences and future directions. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 6*(4), 286-312. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838005280506

Swanberg, J. E., Macke, C., & Logan, T. K. (2006). Intimate partner violence, women, and work: Coping on the job. *Violence and Victims, 21*(5), 561-578. https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.21.5.561

Tariq, Q. (2013). Impact of intimate partner violence on self-esteem of women in Pakistan. *American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 1*(1), 25-30. https://doi.org/10.11634/232907811301271

Taylor, W. K., Magnussen, L., & Amundson, M. J. (2001). The lived experience of battered women. *Violence Against Women, 7*(5), 563-585. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778010122182604

Todahl, J. L., Linville, D., Chou, L. Y., & Maher-Cosenza, P. (2008). A qualitative study of intimate partner violence universal screening by family therapy interns: Implications for practice, research, training, and supervision. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 34*(1), 28-43. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2008.00051.x

Van Niel, M.S. (2021). Overview of Intimate Partner Violence. In Bailey, R.K. (Eds.), *Intimate Partner Violence: An evidence-based approach* (pp. 1-6). Springer International Publishing.

Wathen, C. N., MacGregor, J. C. D., & MacQuarrie, B. J. (2015). The impact of domestic violence in the workplace: Results from a pan-Canadian survey. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 57*(7), 65-71. https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000000499

Wettersten, K. B., Rudolph, S. E., Faul, K., Gallagher, K., Trangsrud, H. B., Adams, K., Graham, S., & Terrance, C. (2004). Freedom through self-sufficiency: A qualitative examination of the impact of domestic violence on the working lives of women in shelter. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 51*(4), 447-462. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.51.4.447

WomanACT. (2021). *'Hidden in the everyday': Financial abuse as a form of intimate partner violence in the Toronto area*. https://womanact.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WomanACT_Hidden-in-the-everyday_Financial-Abuse-Report-1.pdf

Woods, S. J. (2005). Intimate partner violence and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms in women: What we know and need to know. *Journal of Interpersonal violence, 20*(4), 394-402. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260504267882

Worell, J., & Remer, P. (2003). *Feminist perspectives in therapy: Empowering diverse women* (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

World Health Organization. (2012). *Understanding and addressing violence against women: Intimate partner violence*. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/?sequence=1

Wright, N.M., Dmitrieva, J., & DePrince, A.P. (2021). Dependence in adult relationships: Latent classes of relational dependence and associated outcomes in women exposed to intimate partner abuse. *Psychological Trauma, 13*(3), 359-367. https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000661

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5408

Evaluating career coaching for employed adults

Wendy Hirsh
Institute for Employment Studies, UK

Alison Carter
Institute for Employment Studies, UK

For correspondence:

Wendy Hirsh: wendy.hirsh@employment-studies.co.uk

To cite this article:

Hirsh, W. & Carter, A. (2025). Evaluating career coaching for employed adults. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *54*(1), 87-102. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5408

Abstract

This article examines the practical challenges of evaluating the impact of career development interventions with employed adults. It does this through a case example of a one-to-one career coaching programme offered to all individuals working in primary healthcare in England. The paper describes the coaching intervention and its context, followed by the development of an evaluation logic model and the choice and design of data collection tools. Summary results are presented. Reflections on the evaluation approach, methods and tools are shared with the aim of encouraging others to evaluate career interventions, especially with employed adults, in other contexts.

Key words: Career coaching, career development, evaluation, employed adults, healthcare, England

Introduction

This paper describes the context and nature of a career coaching intervention for workers in primary healthcare and how its evaluation was approached. The focus of this paper is on methods, so the samples covered by the analysis and the evaluation results are given here in summary form. The paper ends with some reflections and suggestions for others seeking to evaluate career interventions, especially with employed adults. Further details of samples, analysis and results are reported in Carter and Hirsh (2024).

Background to the intervention and the evaluation

In 2021, a national body supporting publicly funded healthcare initiated a career coaching programme open to all individuals delivering primary care services in England. This intervention covered many occupations including those working in general practice (community-based medical care) such as doctors, nurses, other health professionals, managers, and receptionists. Other work settings in scope included pharmacies, dental practices and optometry. From October 2021 to March 2024, over 2,000 primary care workers received coaching support through this programme.

The career coaching was delivered by a pool of experienced coaches contracted through one coaching provider organisation. Some were general or leadership coaches and others specialised in career coaching. Some coaches had worked in the health sector, often as health professionals or managers. There was no fixed agenda for the coaching. Coaches were expected to support individuals to address their own career issues, take more control over their careers and widen their understanding of career opportunities.

Individuals self-nominated and registered themselves for the programme and the intervention was administered through an online platform. Individuals could access up to four sessions with their coach, normally up to 45 minutes long, via video or phone at times agreed with the coach. Coaches could signpost an individual to further support if needed and coachees were emailed with follow up information and support once their coaching sessions had finished. The coaching experience for each individual started and ended on their own timeframe.

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) was commissioned before the programme launch to design and conduct an evaluation. The sponsoring body, as the client for the evaluation, specified focusing on the impacts of career coaching rather than feedback on the coaching process (e.g. administration, relationship with coaches etc.). Impact was to include how the intervention affected individuals but also its potential effects on staffing issues of concern to organisations in the sector.

The project evolved over time, and a growing interest in longer-term impact extended the timeframe of the evaluation from one year to two years. Evaluation data was collected from January 2022 to January 2024. Data was analysed at various times with final reporting in May 2024.

Key features of the context

When this initiative started, primary healthcare in England was under huge workload pressure from both new patient needs and backlogs following the disruptions to service delivery during the early phases of the Covid pandemic in 2020-21. Many staff continued to be exceptionally busy during the whole period of the intervention and its evaluation.

A driver for this programme was concern that stress and reduced job satisfaction might lead primary care workers to reduce their working hours or retire early: a trend already being seen for doctors. Many of these workers would have trained and worked for many years to become highly skilled in their chosen professions and would be difficult and expensive to replace.

The sponsoring organisation hoped that career coaching, along with other existing forms of employee support, might have a positive impact by helping individuals adjust their current jobs, or find other work to suit them without leaving the sector.

Developing the evaluation approach

Establishing an appropriate evaluation methodology turned out to be more challenging than expected. Technical advice on appropriate measures for the impacts of career interventions was sought from experts in career development including NICEC fellows, commercial career coaches and career development leaders in employing organisations. These preliminary investigations did not find well-accepted measures for the impacts of career interventions with employed adults.

Measures like career decidedness, engagement with education and training, and moving towards employment are often relevant for young people, the unemployed or the low skilled. But they were not appropriate in this context where the coachees were all in work, and mostly highly trained.

The development phase therefore needed to:

- Create an underpinning logic model, or theory of change, for the evaluation to map the likely impacts for individuals and potential organisational outcomes of interest to the sponsoring organisation.
- Agree appropriate methods for data collection and how these would be administered to people working for many different organisations.
- Design and agree appropriate metrics, questions and conversation guides to be used in the chosen evaluation method(s).

Extensive discussions with the sponsoring organisation helped to clarify their aims for the intervention, which were initially rather general. The more specific aims then informed the logic model and the questions to be asked.

The coaching programme got underway before the evaluation could catch the very first coachees. Although less than ideal, this did give the opportunity for the project team to interview some of the coaches who had already conducted sessions with early users of the service. These early insights into the issues that coachees were voicing and the kinds of changes coaches were starting to see were extremely helpful in finalising the evaluation design.

Insights from literature

Literature on the factors influencing how adults make career decisions was relevant to identifying possible impacts of career coaching to include in the evaluation. The literature highlighted limitations on the rationality of decision-making and the role of chance (Mitchell et.al. 1999; Hodkinson, 2008) and the importance of general psychological state on career decision-making (Sampson et.al. 2013). It was useful to recognise that adults

may approach career decisions in varied ways (Bimrose et.al. 2007; Gloster et.al. 2013) and that the process is not necessarily linear or explicitly rational. Kidd's (2006) attention to career skills and attitudes was helpful in identifying how career coaching might help individuals develop their career management skills. Various versions of the Blueprint model were useful for constructing items around cognitive impact and career learning (see for example Hooley et.al., 2012). Hirschi's career resources model (2012) was especially relevant to the evaluation of an intervention intended to widen how coachees extend and use the resources available to them, especially their social networks.

Robertson's (2021) analysis of evaluation identifies outcomes of career development as potentially economic, educational, psychological and social. In this project, economic and social outcomes were relevant, especially at sector level, but not open to direct assessment in the short term. Psychological outcomes, seen by Robertson as including attitudinal, emotional and behavioural changes, were the focus of this project.

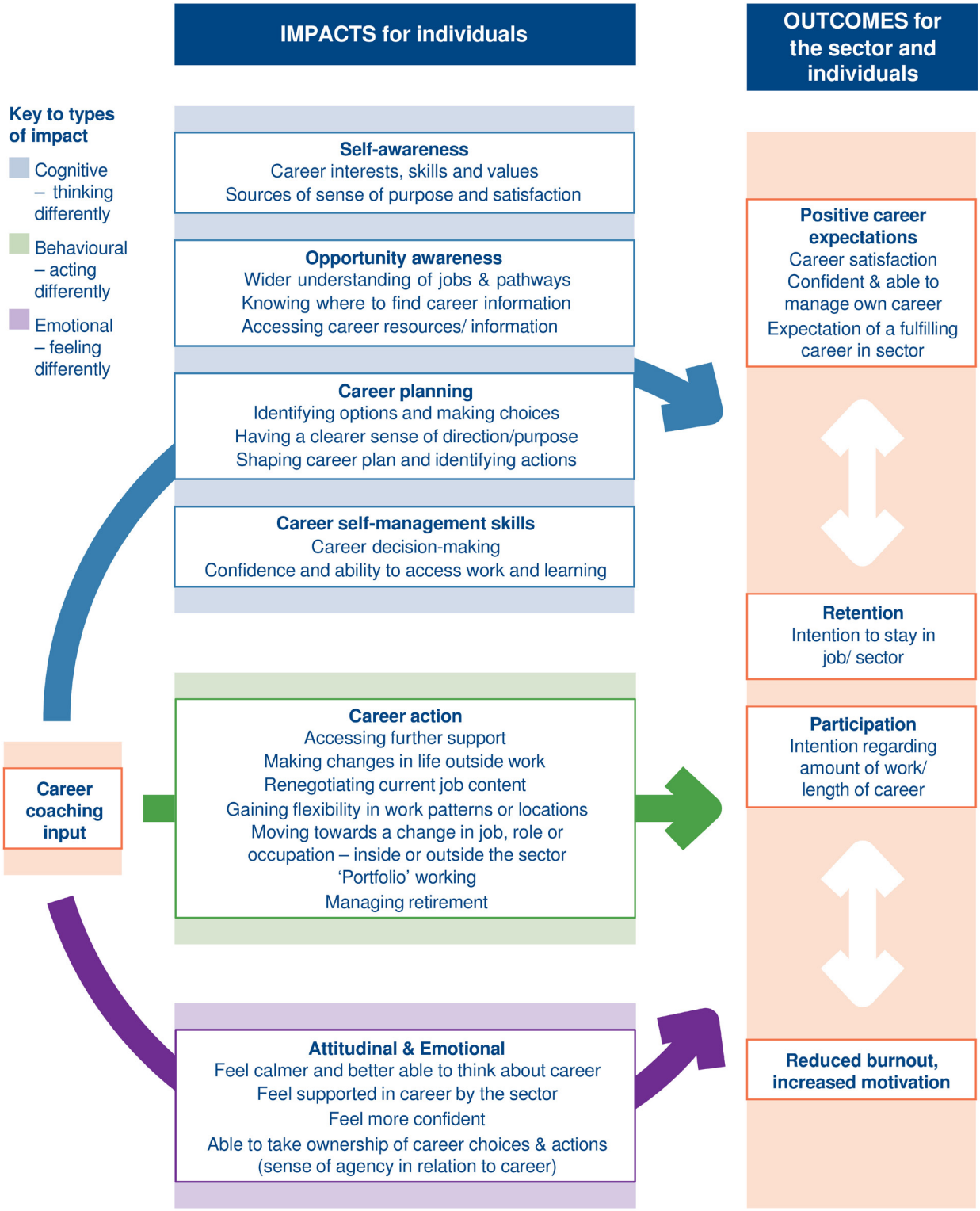
A focused rapid evidence review was conducted within the project looking specifically at the outcomes of employer-sponsored career development. This review, published by IES (Edwards & Carter, 2024), screened 30 articles, mostly from outside the UK, and summarised the 12 most relevant in detail. These papers examined whether developing career self-management necessarily increases career satisfaction (Renee Barnett & Bradley, 2007). De Vos et.al.(2009) emphasise the importance of seeing career management as a joint responsibility of employer and employee. The potential impact of career support on employee retention was of high interest in the project context. Some studies indicate that career support from an employer may increase external employability but not increase organisational commitment or retention (Rodrigues et.al., 2020). A large meta-analysis (Ng et.al., 2022) presents the alternative view, that organisational career development can positively affect perceived organisational support, organisational attachment and turnover intention. Interestingly this effect appeared to come from individuals being aware of the employer's offer of career support rather than from the actual impact of their participation in career development interventions.

Evaluation logic model

The evidence gathered from the literature, interviews with coaches and inputs from career development experts was used, in discussion with the sponsoring organisation, to build a logic model to underpin the evaluation.

The model, shown in Figure 1, identifies two sets of potential effects of the career coaching input. The term 'impacts' is used for the possible effects of career coaching on the individual coachee that one might expect to be relatively direct. The 'outcomes' on the right-hand side of the diagram are effects that seem unlikely to occur without some of the impacts happening first.

Figure 1. IES evaluation logic model



The **impacts** are divided into three broad categories:

- **Cognitive changes** in how the individual thinks about their career. This group is divided into self-awareness, opportunity awareness, career planning, and career management skills.
- **Emotional changes** in feelings and some attitudes. These include the coachee feeling supported in their career and able to take ownership of their career.
- **Behavioural changes** in the form of career actions: specific things the coachee is doing about their career.

These three categories are not intended as a watertight classification, but proved very useful in design, analysis, and communication. Thinking, feeling and acting differently was easy for everyone involved to remember. The logic model also highlights how impacts work together. Cognitive and emotional effects both drive changes in behaviour. Taking action also produces career learning and may make people feel more positive and further develop their career management skills.

On the right-hand side of the model, some possible **outcomes** are identified. These effects are likely to be mediated by impacts and might take longer to show. They included:

- **Positive career expectations** including self-assessed career satisfaction and expectations of being able to have a fulfilling career in the sector.
- **Staff retention** in terms of staying in the sector.
- **Participation** in terms of working hours and length of career in the sector. This was relevant because staff may stay in the sector but deal with stress by reducing their working hours.
- **Burnout** signifies feeling so stressed about work that carrying on becomes difficult.

These outcomes were potential effects on individuals but also significant for the sector and the aims of the intervention. Burnout, staff retention and participation were crucial issues for the sponsoring organisation. They also wanted staff to be able to navigate their careers within the sector and to expect a satisfying career.

The differences between impacts and outcomes are not always clear cut, but the outcome part of the model was a useful reminder that some of the most important potential effects may not happen very quickly and may be the result of several kinds of shorter-term impacts working together.

Data collection methods: survey, interviews and journalling

Once the logic model had been agreed, it was clear that a survey tool to collect self-reported data from each coachee over time would form the backbone of the evaluation. A survey could clearly reflect the evaluation logic model and would generate the quantitative data most relevant to the sponsor's needs. By using the same questions for all participants at different time points, including baseline data before coaching took place, it was hoped that significant changes could be tracked.

The evaluation was conducted in two phases, resulting from its extension by the sponsoring organisation. Across the whole study, the survey was given to every coachee before coaching (as they registered), after their final coaching session and again after a further 3-6 months. When the evaluation was extended for a further year a fourth time point was added for all coachees who were by then 1-2 years after finishing their coaching sessions. This was a rare and valuable opportunity to examine longer-term impacts. The content of the survey tool is shown later.

Semi-structured interviews were designed to provide richer, qualitative data. These took place once the coaching had finished. Individuals were asked by their coaches at that point if they would be happy to share their experiences of the coaching. With their permission, the coaches then passed on their details to the IES researchers so that interviews could be arranged. The initial round of interviews took place between December 2021 and February 2022. Participants were asked about their current role, why they accessed the coaching service, what actions they had undertaken since the coaching, and their hopes for their careers going forward. Follow-up interviews were sought with the same people 8-10 months after their initial interviews. These discussed what, if any, changes had occurred in their career decisions or actions, and what the role of the coaching was in any changes made. The interviews conducted were extremely useful, especially in giving the sponsoring body some early feedback, but the context of primary healthcare was a very difficult one in which to arrange as many interviews as originally hoped for. For this reason, interviews were not used in the second phase of the evaluation.

The project also used prompted journalling as a third, more experimental, method of data collection. Coachees were invited to reflect on their experiences of the intervention and write their own thoughts. This method was chosen as an alternative source of qualitative data if, as turned out to be the case, interviews proved difficult to fix. IES had recent positive experience of using journalling in other projects, including in coaching evaluation.

Journalling is naturally a good fit for the evaluation of a coaching intervention. It is well established in the adult learning literature that reflection is an important enabler of learning and change. Personal reflection is very much part of the philosophy of coaching, often used directly within the coaching process and recommended by most international coaching professional associations (Hullinger et. al., 2019). Reflection helps individuals focus their thinking and journalling stimulates such reflection.

Prompted journalling, seeking short inputs on a limited number of occasions from each participant, seemed likely to be a good fit for busy people. Specific prompts could also focus the responses on issues of most interest in the evaluation.

All coachees were prompted via email to reflect on just three questions at several time points in their journey: pre-coaching, up to three times during their coaching period (between coaching sessions), and after coaching. These time points were chosen to focus on change during the coaching period, not just before and after. During the second phase of the evaluation, all coachees who were by then 12 months or more after the end of their coaching were prompted for an additional journal entry. As with the survey, this was a chance to identify longer-term impacts.

The journalling questions, slightly adjusted to fit their timing, asked how the individual was feeling about their current job, how they were thinking about their future career, and what

they hoped to achieve, or had achieved through accessing the coaching. Responses were submitted as text online.

Content of the survey

It seems helpful here to share the survey questions in more detail for the benefit of readers who wish to evaluate career development interventions. The survey questions were built to cover the main components of the logic model, adjusting the content in a few places in the light of further information at that time. For example, a question on worklife balance was added after the early interviews with coaches, who found this topic came up frequently.

Rather than ask direct questions about intentions to stay, items about how close the individual was to changing their job were felt to be easier to answer and possibly more reliable. The career actions questions included items on portfolio working and moving towards retirement which shed potential light on the participation outcome.

There was a desire by the sponsoring organisation to use well established metrics where possible. Inventories for burnout and meaning at work were included, as referenced below.

IES career coaching survey

Cognitive and emotional impacts and career satisfaction outcomes were covered by a core set of questions as follows:

Thinking about your current work and career, please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statements [5 point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree]:

1. I am clear about the kinds of work activities I find interesting and enjoyable
2. I can articulate my skills and strengths
3. I can find and use relevant information about career opportunities
4. I access the support of others in managing my career
5. I have a clear sense of direction in my career
6. I know what actions I intend to make about my career
7. I achieve a good balance between my work life and my home life
8. I am confident in my ability to plan and manage my own career
9. I know how to make effective decisions relating to my career
10. I feel supported by [the sector] to develop my career
11. I feel in control of my choices about my work and career
12. I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career
13. I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my career goals
14. I expect to have a fulfilling career in [the sector]

Career actions were used to describe behavioural impacts. Retention and participation outcomes were informed by items 10 and 11 below.

These action questions asked: 'Below is a list of activities you may have engaged with when thinking about your career. Please indicate which activities you have carried out in the past two weeks' (yes/no response):

1. Had a conversation with someone I know well (family, friend, or close colleague) about my career
2. Extended my career network through my existing contacts, professional organisations, social media etc.
3. Had a conversation with my line manager, senior manager, or someone in HR in my organisation about my career
4. Accessed other personal support (e.g. for my health and wellbeing)
5. Researched career information
6. Made changes in life outside work
7. Made changes to my current job content
8. Gained flexibility in working hours
9. Gained flexibility in location of work
10. Moved towards working fewer hours in my current job, combined with taking on other paid or unpaid work, inside or outside [the sector] (i.e. 'portfolio' career opportunities)
11. Made preparations for retirement or moved towards a phased retirement

Moving towards job change, a proxy for retention, was assessed through two questions as follows:

The following scales represent distinct stages of moving towards a change in job, role, or occupation either within or outside [the sector]. Please indicate where you currently are on the scale:

1. Changing job, role, or occupation within [the sector]
2. Changing job, role, or occupation outside [the sector]

These were each scored 1-5 as follows: not currently thinking about a change, thinking about a change, searching for a new job, applying for a new job, accepting a job offer.

In addition, the survey included two open-access, valid and reliable inventories: the seven work-related items of the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (Kristensen et.al., 2005), and the ten items in the Work as Meaning Inventory (Steger et.al., 2012).

Reflections towards the end of this paper include some suggestions about how this survey might be further developed and adapted to different contexts.

Managing ethical issues and data collection

The sponsoring organisation did not require formal ethics committee approval for a programme evaluation. The project was discussed and approved by the IES ethics committee. The evaluation was introduced to all coachees at the point they signed up through the IT platform that supported the management of the coaching programme. Coachees were given a briefing note and privacy notice, including the role of IES and how their data would be handled. They could opt out of the evaluation at any point without needing to give a reason.

An individual ID number was assigned by the IT platform provider to each coachee as they started the programme, and these were used to match up each person's survey data from different time points.

At the specified times on their own coaching journey, coachees were sent links to submit their survey and journalling data online. Surveys were completed on the IT platform provider's website and the anonymised data were forwarded to IES. Journal entries were typed by coachees into a protected area of the IES website, again using individual ID numbers. At no point did IES have access to the names of those providing data.

Quotes from interviews and journal entries were used in reports to the sponsoring organisation but without names or other information that could identify the person.

In reporting the survey, results were not broken down by occupation or demographic variables as each cell would be too small for robust statistical analysis and might potentially identify individuals.

Data sets and analysis

Data collection ran from January 2022 to January 2024. Early findings were presented in March 2022, with two main phases of analysis and reporting in spring 2023 and spring 2024. Over both phases of the project, the data included:

- Pre-coaching survey data from 1,248 coachees. Of these, 124 also completed the survey immediately post-coaching, 62 in the first phase of the project and 62 in the second phase. 54 coachees completed the survey 3-6 months after finishing coaching (not all of whom also completed it immediately after coaching). 51 coachees from the first phase completed the survey 1-2 years after finishing coaching in the longer-term follow up.
- Thirteen post-coaching interviews, and a follow-up interview with nine of these same coachees held 8-10 months later. Analysis of these nine matched pairs of interviews looked for cognitive, emotional and behavioural impacts and potential implications for NHS outcomes. As explained earlier, there was no interview data from new coachees starting in the second phase of evaluation.
- Over 300 journal entries from over 220 coachees, covering times before, during and after coaching. Different individuals chose to respond to different prompts giving a mix of times for journal entries. 21 entries came from the additional journal prompt sent to coachees 1-2 years after their coaching finished.

The evolving nature of the project over two phases and its extended timeframe led to unusually complex data sets. Although all coachees were invited to participate in the survey and journalling at all time points relevant to them, different individuals chose to respond to prompts at different time points. Priority was given to analysing data that could show changes for the same coachees over specific phases of their coaching journey i.e. matched data for the same individuals at different time points.

Although 124 coachees (about 10% of those invited to do so) voluntarily completed the post-coaching survey, far fewer participated at every time point they were asked. Two ways of selecting matched data from the survey proved especially useful and are the basis of the findings summarised later. Firstly, short-term impact was assessed by comparing pre- and post- coaching survey results from the same individuals. These findings were very similar for the 62 people completing both these surveys in phase 1 and the separate analysis of 62 different coachees doing likewise in phase 2. Secondly, longer-term impact was examined by using data from the 51 coachees who had completed both a pre-coaching survey and responded again 1-2 years after coaching.

The journal entries from both phases of data collection were analysed using an inductive thematic approach. In phase 1, material from four individuals submitting three or more entries were composed into 'vignettes': short narrative accounts of a single person's experience over time, often including verbatim quotes. These were a quick and powerful way of communicating individuals' concerns, motivations and some early actions and impacts. They had a significant effect on the sponsoring organisation's plans for the programme and its further evaluation. Vignettes were added for seven phase 2 coachees who submitted at least four journal entries. Special attention was also paid to the 21 entries from individuals who responded to the longer-term prompt, 1-2 years after their coaching finished.

Summary results

Cognitive impacts were clearly seen in both short-term and longer-term survey results. The strongest positive changes after coaching were in career planning, having a better sense of career direction and understanding actions needed to move their career forward. Individuals also reported improved career management skills and later on a clearer sense of career direction, work interests and ability to articulate their strengths.

The journalling data also highlighted action planning, a better awareness of opportunities and a deeper understanding of how to overcome barriers to career development. Finding and using information on career opportunities emerged as quite challenging in such a complex and fragmented sector. The information available was neither comprehensive nor well integrated.

Early **behavioural changes** included coachees having a career conversation with someone in their organisation (as opposed to people they already knew well outside work) and moving towards changes to their current job content. Extending networks, changes made outside work and improving worklife balance were evident in both short-term and longer-term survey data. Accessing support from others was a strong

behaviour post-coaching from all the data sources. Later journalling started to show preparations towards changing job roles in some cases, with others continuing to renegotiate their current job content and some accessing the development they needed to progress.

Some **emotional** impacts around feeling more confident and calmer showed up quickly in the interviews and journalling. The relevant items in the survey showed more limited and slower change with modest improvement in feeling more supported in career development. One would not expect that to change quickly. More general confidence and resilience were themes in the journalling, but these impacts were not explicitly covered by the survey questions.

In terms of the **outcomes**, short-term survey findings showed some reported progress towards meeting career goals but not yet improvement in career satisfaction, expectations of having a positive future career or any reduction in burnout. These findings did not surprise the IES team. In the data collected at least a year after coaching, there was movement in career satisfaction, especially satisfaction around career achievements and progress towards goals. There was also some drop in burnout and some increase in finding work meaningful.

Looking across all the data sources an early effect of career coaching might have been to increase intention to stay in the current job or at least to be more considered in approaching a possible job move. The journalling and interview data showed some examples of potential retention, at least in the short term, but other coachees were deciding to leave the sector. The longer-term survey data showed a clearer reduction in considering a change of role, both within and outside the sector.

The findings on possible improvements in career satisfaction and staff retention are good news, but it is difficult to know if these might be influenced by changes in the primary healthcare system after the immediate post-Covid period to deal more effectively with continuing high levels of demand. As expected, some coachees moved towards so-called 'portfolio working' after coaching – working fewer hours in their current role combined with other paid or unpaid work inside or outside the sector. This hints at reduced participation being a price paid by the primary healthcare sector for retaining some staff.

In summary then this study showed significant and positive cognitive and behavioural impacts following coaching, although of course this is not proof of cause and effect. Increases in career satisfaction seemed slower to come but some showed up in the longer-term data, a year or two after coaching. This was also the case for a possible improvement in staff retention and reduction in burnout.

Reflections and suggestions

The remainder of this article reflects on the learning from this evaluation experience and how the approach might be adapted in other contexts.

Agreeing the purpose of a career intervention is important to collecting and feeding back relevant data to the sponsoring organisation or employer. The logic model with its articulation of impacts and outcomes proved useful in this study, as did the loose classification of impacts into cognitive, emotional and behavioural.

Three methods were used for collecting evaluation data in this case example: interviews, journalling, and a survey. Having at least one qualitative method can provide some insights very quickly.

Interviews proved too difficult to fix in large numbers in this study but could work well in many other contexts, especially in smaller scale interventions. Knowing how interview data will be analysed is an important part of evaluation design.

Journalling was a more exploratory method and turned out to be attractive both to the coachees and to the sponsoring organisation. It offered coachees a chance to reflect and seemed to be easier than interviews to fit into busy working lives. The journalling vignettes showed powerfully how cognitive, emotional and behavioural changes worked together for individuals during and beyond their period of coaching. The vignettes, each being a personal story, had high impact on the programme sponsors, being both vivid and memorable.

It is crucial to collect some 'baseline' data before the intervention although timing this can be challenging. Over the whole study, IES collaborated closely with the providers of the IT platform who sent out the communications to the coachees. Sending more than one data collection link to an individual in a single email resulted in fewer responses. It was better to send each data request separately, even if close together in time.

The survey method generally worked well, especially by using the same survey at different time points with the ability to join up data for the same person using their unique ID. This matched data approach meant that if a mean score changed significantly, this was because the same people gave different responses over time, not because different people had filled in the survey at different time points (as would be likely in a cross-sectional approach).

Even with considerable attention to follow up, getting large enough survey samples of post-coaching data was very challenging, especially at the longer-term time point. However, it was the longer-term data that started to show some of the changes of greatest interest to the sponsoring organisation. The extra effort to extend the evaluation timeframe was therefore very worthwhile.

Even in work settings where large scale surveys would not be possible, short questionnaires developed from the tool shown here could be used within or alongside an interview or group discussion.

It takes discipline to design a survey short enough to be acceptable in a work setting. The 17 questions from the two inventories used in this study were of particular interest in this sector at the time but took up a lot of space and would not be necessary in all contexts.

Suggestions on refining the survey tool

The experience of this project leads to some specific suggestions for adjusting the survey questions as follows:

- **Personal confidence** should be added e.g. 'I feel confident about myself.' It was in the logic model and often mentioned in interviews and journalling.
- 'I feel **calm** enough to think clearly about my career' was in the model and would be worth considering. Coachees often reported how helpful it was for them to slow down and not jump to a quick career decision.
- **Job satisfaction** would be a useful outcome measure e.g. 'Overall I feel satisfied with my job.' It might reflect the outcomes of varied changes made at work and complement the questions used on career satisfaction.
- In terms of **outcomes** beyond job and career satisfaction, retention is an important outcome in most contexts and should be kept in the survey. Other outcomes to include will vary according to context and employer interest e.g. stress or burnout, wellbeing, employee engagement or commitment, motivation, sense of purpose or meaning in work.
- The list of **career action** items could be tailored to context. Accessing support from others and making changes inside or outside work will be relevant in most settings. 'Portfolio' working, for example, was of specific relevance to this study.
- The two questions on **moving towards job change** should ask more clearly whether a job move had happened. The scale stopped at 'accepting a job offer' but could be extended to include 'have made a job move.'

The evaluation data described here was subjective, being self-assessed. There was no viable way in this study of comparing attitudinal data with objective personnel data, for example on retention, job movement, promotion or participation in formal training. In other contexts this might be possible with care.

The early input from coaches provided a different perspective. If resources had permitted, it would have been valuable to gain fuller insights from coaches as the programme went on, perhaps through more group discussions.

The longer-term findings were of very high interest, but one cannot assume all the longer-term changes were influenced by the coaching. Some of the improvements in career satisfaction and burnout may have been due to some easing of stress in the sector. In some settings including a few career-related questions in attitude surveys sent to all employees, might help to show if changes for employees who have used an intervention are different from the wider workforce.

Close working between the IES team and the sponsoring organisation was essential, especially in designing the project and in feeding through results. Interim reports and presentations were useful markers along the way of what was emerging. The final report

wrapped as much of the data together as possible to give a balanced overall picture but also to document the evaluation process.

Although much of the learning about evaluation methods should be of value to others, we cannot assume that the findings of this evaluation can be generalised. The limited survey response rates were high enough to show statistically significant change for the same individuals over time, but the experiences of those choosing to send in the survey were not necessarily representative of all coachees. The occupations and work context of any workplace intervention are inevitably specific. So we need more studies of this kind in different contexts to add to our evidence base.

Evaluation is a challenging activity but fascinating and of huge value to organisations supporting career development at work. It can be readily adapted in scale and sophistication to fit the context. The authors of this paper hope that readers feel empowered to use and further develop some of the tools presented here and to share what they learn.

Acknowledgements

The authors are indebted to the project sponsors, the coaching providers and all the coachees who responded to our data requests at such a busy time. Particular thanks go to: Prof Mike Holmes; Dr Andrew McDowell; Heather Simpson; Kathy Ashton; Dr Ian Gregory and to IES colleagues Megan Edwards, Dr Zofia Bajorek, Joe Cook, and Claudia Plowden Roberts.

References

Bimrose J, Barnes S A, Hughes D, Orton M (2007). *Navigating the labour market: career decision-making and the role of guidance*. Department for Education and Skills, Research Report

Carter, A. & Hirsh, W. (2024). *Career Coaching: A case study in evaluating impact.* Institute for Employment Studies. https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/career-coaching-case-study-evaluating-impact

De Vos, A., Dewettinck, K., & Buyens, D. (2009). The professional career on the right track: A study on the interaction between career self-management and organizational career management in explaining employee outcomes. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 18*(1), 55-80. https://doi.org/10.1080/13594320801966257

Edwards, M. & Carter, A. (2024). *Outcomes from employer-sponsored career development: Review of the literature*, IES Paper 164. Institute for Employment Studies. https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/outcomes-employer-sponsored-career-development

Gloster, R., Pollard,P., Henderson, L., Hirsh, W., Bertram, C., Oakley, J., Buzzeo, J.(2013). *Adult career decision-making: Qualitative research*, BIS research paper No 132, Department of Business, Innovation and Skills.

Hirschi, A. (2012). The career resources model: an integrative framework for career counsellors. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 40*(4), pp. 369-383. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2012.700506

Hodkinson, P. (2009). Understanding career decisionmaking and progression: Careership revisited: The fifth John Killeen memorial lecture, October 2008. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling, 21*(1), 4-17. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.2102

Hooley, T, Watts, A.G., Sultana, R.G. & Neary, S (2012). The 'Blueprint' framework for career management skills: a critical exploration. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 41*(2): 117-131. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2012.713908

Hullinger. A.M., DiGirolamo. J. A., & Tkach. J. T. (2019). Reflective Practice for Coaches and Clients: An Integrated Model for Learning. *Philosophy of Coaching: An International Journal, Volume 4*, No 2, pp. 5-34. http://dx.doi.org/10.22316/poc/04.2.02

Kidd J (2006), *Understanding Career Counselling: Theory, Research and Practice*, pp.48-49. Sage.

Kristensen, T.S., Borritz, M., Villadsen, E. & Christensen, K.B. (2005). The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory: A new tool for the assessment of burnout. *Work & Stress, Vol. 19*, No. 3, 192-207. https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370500297720

Mitchell, K. E., Levin, A. S., Krumboltz, J. D. (1999). Planned Happenstance: Constructing Unexpected Career Opportunities. *Journal of Counselling & Development, vol. 77*, pp. 115-124, Wiley-Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1999.tb02431.x

Ng, T. W., Yim, F. H., Chen, H., & Zou, Y. (2022). Employer-sponsored career development practices and employee performance and turnover: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Management, Volume 50*, Issue 2, https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063221125143

Renee Barnett, B., & Bradley, L. (2007). The impact of organisational support for career development on career satisfaction. *Career Development International, 12*(7), 617-636. https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430710834396

Robertson, P.J. (2021). Evidence-based practice for career development. In P.J. Robertson, T. Hooley & P. McCash (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Career Development*, pp. 353-370. Oxford University Press.

Rodrigues, R., Butler, C. L., & Guest, D. (2020). Evaluating the employability paradox: When does organizational investment in human capital pay off? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 31*(9), 1134-1156. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2019.1704825

Sampson, J. P., McClain, M. C., Much, E., Reardon, R. C. (2013). Variables affecting readiness to benefit from career interventions. *The Career Development Quarterly, vol. 61*(2), pp. 98-109. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2013.00040.x

Steger, M.F., Dik B.J. & Duffy, R.D. (2012). 'Measuring Meaningful Work: The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI). *Journal of Career Assessment, Volume 20*, Issue 3. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072711436160

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5409

Reauthoring my career narrative towards hope and agency: Twenty years in adult guidance counselling practice

Joan McSweeney

Cork Education and Training Board, Ireland

For correspondence:

Joan McSweeney: Joan.mcsweeney@corketb.ie

To cite this article:

McSweeney, J. (2025). Reauthoring my career narrative towards hope and agency: Twenty years in adult guidance counselling practice. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *54*(1), 103-114. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5409

Abstract

This is a narrative inquiry self-study of the cumulative impact of recent rapid adaptations experienced in my role, and of finding myself at a career crossroads after twenty years in adult guidance counselling practice. Four key, dynamic, and recursive themes were identified: changing context and its impact; social justice - a core value; re-commitment to self-care; connectedness and collaboration in practice. Engaging with these themes has enabled a process of reauthoring a more agentic and hopeful practice narrative.

Key words: Adult guidance; professional identity; narrative inquiry; reauthoring; Ireland

Introduction

I am an adult guidance counsellor with over twenty years' experience in practice, initially in adult education settings. My role is now situated in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector in Ireland, a sector that is undergoing rapid change since its emergence in 2013, with the formation of a further education and training authority, SOLAS. The former

state providers of vocational education, Vocational Educational Committees (VECs), and FÁS training centres have been amalgamated into sixteen new entities, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) collectively represented by Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) (Mulvey, 2019; Fitzsimons & O'Neill, 2024).

Glanton (2024) outlines the increasing neoliberal focus in recent FET strategies and policy, including the shift to performativity and an outcomes-based funding model, where outcomes are focused primarily on upskilling learners for the economy with little mention of a learner-centred ethos focused on citizenship, social justice and personal development which has previously typified adult education. The consequent increased administrative workloads and challenge to also meet learner needs can have significant impact on staff's identities, sense of self and relationship with others. Research with FET adult guidance counsellors in 2018 found that practice and professional identity were being 'profoundly impacted by national and localised lifelong learning and neoliberal policy outcomes' (Hearne et al., 2022, p.136), citing role fragmentation, diffusion, and increased workload, all of which resonated for me. I experienced further significant change post-amalgamation, in moving from working as part of a team of guidance professionals in a city service to a more dispersed model of being a sole guidance counsellor in a county area.

Subsequent recent macro-level events such as the Russia-Ukraine war and a growing number of migrants seeking sanctuary has necessitated further rapid adaption to working with new target groups and increased caseloads. Migrant/multi-cultural guidance counselling with some of the most vulnerable members of society is characterised by high levels of uncertainty and complexity (Chant & Sundelin, 2022; Akkök & Hughes, 2023) necessitating investment to enable career practitioners to be 'trained, empowered, and well-equipped to design and deliver multi-cultural career guidance' (Akkök & Hughes, 2023, p.8). The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE), an agency of the Irish Department of Education tasked with supporting and influencing guidance provision across the lifespan in accordance with best practice (NCGE, 2023), outlined challenges with access to information on entitlements and funding; recognition of foreign qualifications; acquisition of English language and support with dealing with trauma (NCGE, 2022).

The Indecon (2019) review of career guidance commissioned by the Department of Education recommended moving away from locating responsibility for guidance solely with the Department of Education to include other relevant Departments, for example, the Department of Social Protection. Implementation of the Indecon review led to further restructuring including the closure of the NCGE in August 2022 (Department of Education, 2022), with its FET guidance functions now re-organised into ETBI. In this transitionary period there were less opportunities to meet fellow practitioners and get support and upskilling through related CPD and resource development.

I became aware that working in this period of rapid change was taking a cumulative toll on me as a practitioner, to the extent that I was actively considering if I could continue to stay in the role. I found myself questioning if I should leave a role which had been highly congruent for me and one which I assumed that I would always do. This brought to the fore for me the need to inquire into these difficult experiences, to support myself in getting further insights into my experience and identify how I might sustain myself in my practice. This led to me returning to my alma mater some twenty years after my initial guidance counselling postgraduate qualification, to undertake a Master's thesis, seeking 'exposure to

theory, policy and opportunities for reflection' to support me in becoming a 'more confident, empowered practitioner with a strengthened sense of professional self' (Neary, 2014, p.199).

Methodology

I chose a narrative inquiry self-study methodology which is defined as an inquiry into problematic situations in practice that are 'confusing, uncertain, or conflicted' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p.582). 'Narrative inquiry is first and foremost a way of understanding experience' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.20). It is a multi-dimensional exploration of experience involving temporality (past, present and future), interaction (personal and social), and location (place). We create and tell stories about how we experience and understand our worlds and narrative inquiry seeks to mine these stories for experiential knowledge. Chase (2011, p.422) describes narration as 'the practice of constructing meaningful selves, identities, and realities'.

Narrative inquiry recognises that these stories are not constructed in isolation. 'Within this space, each story told and lived is situated and understood within larger cultural, social, and institutional narratives' (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p.542). I do not exist outside of relationships and my stories are shaped and informed by interacting with stories of others including clients, colleagues, fellow practitioners, management and policies. I am 'in the midst' (Blix et al., 2025) and this relational dimension is a key part of my inquiry, seeking to get further insights and a better understanding of how my narrative is influenced by these broader narratives and what aspects I need to attend to so that I can sustain myself in my practice. Narrative inquiry also brought my awareness to the possibility of constructing alternative, more hopeful narratives.

With its focus on inquiring into experience in practice with participants in the field, Clandinin and Caine (2008) speak about the process of narrative inquiry as beginning with field texts 'commonly called data' (p.544) and the writing of both interim and final research texts. They outline various methods which can be used to gather data including 'conversations…and participant observations…as well as from artifacts. Artifacts…include… policies' (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p.544). The data used for this self-study inquiry was generated from conversations, participant observations, and policies.

I engaged in conversations in a wide range of contexts including at work, CPD events and the Institute of Guidance Counsellors conference to assist me in my inquiry. While I haven't recorded these conversations, I have sought to engage actively with new insights gained from these conversations through the taking of field notes and subsequently through reflective journalling as soon as possible after the conversations took place. Some one-to-one conversations happened naturally, including those with clients or with colleagues. I also sought out other conversations to inform my study, for example, with a former colleague who had made the decision to leave the role and other colleagues who were still actively committed, to get a range of perspectives 'co-compositions…telling and showing those aspects of experience that the relationship allows' (Clandinin and Caine, 2008, p.544). Conversations in groups where there were rich discussions with other practitioners also provided thinking points for my journalling, including masterclasses for adult guidance counsellors, and group supervision sessions which were an integral part of the Masters programme.

Data was also collected through my observations as a participant at relevant conferences, seminars, and events to engage with 'how larger social, institutional, and cultural narratives inform our understanding and shape the researchers'…stories by which they live.' (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p.545). Field notes were taken throughout these seminars in order to capture key points of interest as well as the mood of the wider practitioner population. These seminars also provided insights from leaders in the field of guidance counselling on current issues and possible future directions. Conferences and events included adult guidance focused regional meetings, national conferences, the Lifelong Guidance Strategy networking event and a series of professional Masterclasses. I also became more active on LinkedIn to connect virtually with the broader guidance counselling community.

Reviewing and engaging with guidance-related policy documents also provided insights into the wider institutional and government narratives around adult guidance counselling and the opportunity to reflect on their impact on my practice. These documents include the Indecon (2019) review of guidance counselling in Ireland, FET strategy documents for the period 2014-2024 (SOLAS 2014, 2020), and the Adult Guidance Association's vision statement for FET adult guidance services (Adult Guidance Association, 2020).

Group supervision with supervisors and fellow students as well as individual supervision with my thesis supervisor supported my teasing out of ethical dilemmas. 'Engaging in the self-study (of teacher education), by its very nature, is an ethical approach to improving practice and the scholarship of practice' (Kitchen, 2019, p.113). Thomas (2019) highlights the risk for researchers in narrative self-inquiry of making themselves vulnerable to improve practice, raising the ethical dilemma of how to protect the self as both the researcher and researched. I acknowledge feeling some vulnerability in sharing these personal experiences, and yet still feel compelled to offer this inquiry in the hope that it may also contribute to the scholarship of guidance counselling practice.

Selecting my research methods of recollections of conversations and observations at a conference and other events, I acknowledge that I cannot get informed consent. I am writing about these experiences as I recall and interrogate them, I recognise that they are not facts, they are my subjective narratives focusing on my individual learning and knowledge creation, constructed from my interactions with others. This inquiry is the unfolding of one practitioner's narrative into problematic experiences being deconstructed and reconstructed by reflecting on the influences of local and national narratives and indeed some international perspectives through engaging with current research. It is difficult therefore to argue for generalisability based on one person's story, instead I offer it as having the potential to make visible the lived experience of working in increasingly dynamic and complex systems which may also speak to other practitioners' experiences. Pino Gavidia and Adu (2022) argue that narrative inquiry approaches with its focus on lived experiences within systems through storytelling has the potential to make a contribution to policy to identify what may be hidden dynamics.

In positioning myself as 'client' at a career crossroads and in congruence with the narrative inquiry methodology, I chose narrative career theories as a framework of analysis to identify themes emerging from my research. Within this framework, I drew on several inter-related career theories in the form of System Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006); storytelling narrative career counselling approach (McMahon et al., 2012); and Narrative Therapy Informed Approach (NTIA) (Mate et al., 2024). These theories emphasise

the possibility of re-authoring practices through which individuals can deconstruct problematic past stories and reconstruct alternative more aspirational stories which allow for the exercising of agency.

Findings

Using these theories as my framework of thematic analysis of the data in my reflective journals, four key themes emerged. While they are presented separately here, in reality, they are dynamic and recursive (McMahon & Patton, 2016).

Theme 1: Changing context and its impact

In the early days of my research, seeking to understand these challenging experiences in my practice, I read about identity threat which Petriglieri (2011, p.644) defines as 'experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings or enactment of an identity'. She acknowledges that individuals can appraise an experience differently and that frequent exposure increases the likelihood of identification with identity threat. Threat to identity meanings can arise from experiences of either lack of change or having to make undesired changes and threat to identity enactment with experiences that can prevent or limit expression of the identity (George et al., 2023). Reflecting on this research gives insight and meaning to my experiences in practice of having to adapt my guidance interventions for increasing numbers of migrant learners, with sub cohorts having different entitlements to education. For example, by shifting interventions towards the signposting of information to cope with the large numbers. Engaging with the concept of identity threat helps to make sense of my experiences of struggling with having to make this change to my practice and the way that this led to feelings of inauthenticity. I recognised that despite the constraints on my practice, many migrant learners would have benefitted from more time for personalised guidance as they navigated language barriers, traumatising experiences and a new education and employment landscape.

Listening to a radio interview with a doctor (O'Connor, 2024) where she described becoming aware that she was feeling less empathy, more cynicism and having thoughts of 'no matter what I do'. This echoed my own feelings and thoughts about my practice. She came to understand that she was experiencing moral distress which led me to seek out what was being written about this in the guidance counselling field. In their research with Finnish social workers, Mänttäri-van der Kuip et al. (2024) describe moral distress as a complex and dynamic phenomenon which is related to, but distinct from, burnout. Olcoń & Gulbas (2021) clarify the while burnout is caused by large caseloads, moral distress is related to the nature of the caseloads that practitioners face and is particularly related to work with marginalised groups including migrants. Olcoń & Gulbas (2021, p.978) concluded that working with marginalised groups both 'produces and perpetuates providers' moral distress' because the interaction of systemic failures and compromised service quality leads to feelings of helplessness, dissatisfaction and disempowerment. 'This emotional toll in turn creates a cycle where providers' capacity to envision authentic, systemic change becomes limited' (Olcoń & Gulbas, 2021, p.978).

Engaging with these ideas provided a key learning moment as a hidden narrative became visible to me, revealing new knowledge of self. I recognised that a frightening sense of

hopelessness had begun to manifest in me when guidance counselling is about 'offering hope, dignity and strives for equity and equality for all' (Akkök & Hughes, 2023, p.3). Researching moral distress also shifted my focus towards structural barriers including lack of investment which limit my capacity to deliver a quality service.

Theme 2: Reconnecting with social justice

Researching moral distress through this inquiry reconnected me with social justice as a core value in my work. It helped me to reflect on the cost of adapting my practice in ways which run counter to my core belief in adult guidance counselling as working in solidarity with clients.

The lens of Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006) brings attention to the way in which organisational and national systems influence the therapeutic relationship. I recognise that I have been working in an emergency situation brought about by the displacement of large numbers of traumatised people because of war. I acknowledge that the response of the FET sector I work in was extraordinary on many levels. There was rapid expansion in the recruitment of additional tutors to meet the huge demand for English classes and additional staff were recruited to oversee the planning of and responding to the need for classes in their areas. However, in my experience there was not an equivalent expansion of guidance counselling capacity which left us as individual guidance counsellors to self-manage our own responses within existing resources. In the words of Fejes et al. (2021, p.350) guidance counsellors had to 'depend on their ingenuity and creativity when it comes to catering for needs that were not envisaged when institutional structures and practices were put into place'.

The NTIA lens provided a tool for me to reflect back on the origins of social justice in my life and reconnected me with the early days of my practice where I felt my work was more congruent with my values. Sultana (2011, 2018) has been a key influence on me from those early days and through this inquiry I reconnected with his work, gaining new knowledge about how to work with migrants in socially just ways. Sultana (2022) speaks to 'the how to' of working with migrants, addressing barriers including language, recognition of qualifications, culture shock and the lack of social capital and networks to help with sourcing employment. Also, attending to migrants' career identity linked to negative self-concept which can in turn impact on their efforts to establish their career identity in the new country. Supporting them to develop a sense of 'possible selves' (p.499) and the potential to flourish while having to adapt preferences. This re-engagement with social justice as a core value in my practice has been significant in the reauthoring of my narrative towards hope and agency.

Theme 3: Recommitting to self-care

Through this inquiry I have come to an awareness of the need to re-connect with self-care in 'protecting and preserving yourself in the face of challenging work' (BACP, 2018). The BACP (2018) definition of self-care also speaks to 'making a conscious effort to do things that maintain, improve and repair your mental, physical and spiritual wellness'. Experiencing mindfulness practice as part of group supervision on the Masters led me to seek out ways to bring mindfulness into my daily life as an intentional act of self-care. This created an agentic shift in prioritising self-care and intentionally seeking out related CPD.

Learning about compassion fatigue symptoms brought further insight, identifying with feelings of being overwhelmed, some reduction in empathy and seeking out more time

on my own (Oberg et al., 2023). Vu and Bodenmann (2017) identify organisational, professional and individual risk factors for compassion fatigue, I could identify with many of them including; insufficient staff resources and training, high workload/high intensity, and professional isolation (organisational); repeated exposure to trauma, and poor cohesion/ teamwork (professional); high expectations for quality of care, and some issues with coping with the job's requirements (individual). I realised I had internalised my experiences in part, as my not being able to cope, of not being adaptable enough. Through the acquisition of this new knowledge, which this inquiry has brought to my attention, I have begun to reframe my experiences, reauthor the story I was telling myself about my experiences, from a self-blaming one to recognising external structural and systemic factors.

Radey and Figley (2007) describe compassion satisfaction as an individual's sense of self-efficacy related to their helping profession and their sense of positivity and satisfaction regarding their helping work. Moving from compassion fatigue towards compassion satisfaction involves employing self-care strategies that manage stress and defend against compassion fatigue which allow attention to be focused instead on quality of life and the aspects of our work that are rewarding. Learning about compassion satisfaction reconnected me with the many times in my work that I have experienced this in the past (landscape of identity) and how it offers a more agentic reauthoring of narratives around working in challenging situations (landscape of action) (Mate et al., 2024). Reducing professional isolation is also helpful. I will return to this in the next theme on connectedness. New insights into self-care in working with migrant cohorts were also gained through learning about Bath's (2015) traumawise care approach as a more boundaried way to work with clients without having to feel responsible for providing total solutions. Recommitment to self-care brings movement to a landscape of action (Mate et al., 2024) and further strengthens a narrative of hope and agency.

Theme 4: Connectedness and collaboration in practice

Brimrose & Brown (2019) speak to the need for careers practitioners to adapt their practices and acquire new skills and competences to support clients with navigating significant transformations including increased migration, rapid technological changes and new forms of employment. These changes continue to significantly impact on career guidance counsellor processes and practices with multi-dimensional and cumulative impacts on professional identity. They also identify evidence of the development of professional identity through storytelling and sensemaking narratives with conversations amongst practitioners switching between three perspectives of 'skill development, the structures and contexts within which skills are developed, and careers (narratives) and identities' (Brimrose & Brown, 2019, p.766).

Bimrose and Brown (2019, p.766) identify five themes that emerged from practitioner participants on an online learning course: learning from others, the role of the community of interest, shifting professional identities, feelings of isolation, and the effects on organisations (p.766), all of which resonate strongly for me. This inquiry has brought to light a hidden narrative of loneliness and understanding that this is a consequence of changing structures which led to a lessening of connection with guidance colleagues. The storytelling narrative career counselling lens (McMahon et al, 2012) made visible that experiencing connectedness is integral to my own well-being and identity construction.

My decision to intentionally increase my connectedness with the guidance counselling community offered a strategy to change this narrative of isolation through connecting with

colleagues and attending professional association conferences and events. I also attended the recent inaugural networking event for the National Lifelong Guidance strategy 2024-2030 (Department of Education, 2023) where I experienced strong connectedness with the broader guidance counselling tribe. Becoming more active on LinkedIn also increased connectedness with the virtual guidance counselling community.

Using narrative self-inquiry reconnected me with past positive experiences of being a sole guidance counsellor within a multi-function team from previous roles. It also reconnected me with personal strengths including a capacity to collaborate and agentically create new experiences of team with non-guidance FET colleagues. Engaging in collaborative practice with FET colleagues I experienced that 'synergy created through collaboration can also trigger new ideas, initiatives and new ways of doing things which can work to the benefit of citizens' (Sultana, 2008, p.26). This has led to the co-creation of resources and approaches to working with migrant cohorts as well as innovating a person-centred pathway for young male early school leavers, giving them access to apprenticeships (McSweeney, 2024). In the process, this has further strengthened my narrative of hope and agency.

Discussion and implications for practice

This narrative inquiry self-study brings attention to how the need to adapt practice rapidly in response to structural changes impacts on professional identity and wellbeing. The experience of reforms to the FET sector and the Russia-Ukraine war provide particular examples, in the context of increased migration, rapid technological changes, and new forms of employment that this need for adaption is likely to continue (Brimrose & Brown, 2019). The issue of moral distress is particularly notable and worthy of further research in the guidance field.

This research also raises questions about how practitioners should be resourced appropriately to manage these kinds of challenges and transitions effectively. This inquiry points to the need to provide 'places' and 'spaces' for experienced practitioners to reflect on their own experiences and demonstrates how access to postgraduate professional development can enable reclaiming of one's professional identity (Neary, 2014). Some areas of focus are offered including working congruently with values, attending to self-care, increasing connectedness, and working collaboratively. Attention is also drawn to structural issues including the need for investment in resources and CPD for practitioners.

References

Adult Guidance Association. (2020). *Guidance counselling in the FET Sector - A vision statement*. https://www.adultguidanceassociation.ie/vision-document-2020/

Akkök, F., & Hughes, D.M. (2023). Career guidance for refugees and migrants. How can career guidance for refugees and migrants contribute in building more inclusive and resilient societies? *Veilederforum*. https://veilederforum.no/sites/default/files/public/2023-02/Akkok%20and%20Hughes%20-%20engelsk%20.pdf

Bath, H. (2015). The three pillars of traumawise care: Healing in the other 23 hours. *Reclaiming children and youth, 23*(4), 5-11. https://www.traumebevisst.no/kompetanseutvikling/filer/23_4_Bath3pillars.pdf

Bimrose, J., & Brown, A. (2019). Professional identity transformation: Supporting career and employment practitioners at a distance. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 47*(6), 757-769. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2019.1698008

Blix, B. H., Steeves, P., Caine, V., & Clandinin, J. (2025). Beginning in Multiple Midst: Living Alongside in Narrative Inquiry. Qualitative Inquiry, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004241308179

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). (2018). *Ethical framework for counselling professionals*. https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/ethical-framework-for-the-counselling-professions/

Chant, A., & Sundelin, A. (2022, April 28th). *Exploring effective approaches to career guidance with refugees*. https://youtu.be/RS3sHYR1kSk?si=2oc0iQqT-sPLeszu

Chase, S. (2011). Narrative Inquiry, Still a Field in the Making. In: N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, eds. *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage, 420-432.

Clandinin, D.J., & Caine, V. (2008). Narrative inquiry. In L.M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. (pp.542-545). Sage Publications. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n275

Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly. F.M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.

Clandinin, D.J., Connelly, M. (2004). Knowledge, Narrative and Self-Study. In: Loughran, J.J., Hamilton, M.L., LaBoskey, V.K., Russell, T. (eds) *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices.* Springer International Handbooks of Education, vol 12. Springer, Dordrecht. 575-600. Available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6545-3_15

Department of Education. (2022). *Developments in guidance counselling for schools*. https://careersportal.ie/news/developments-in-guidance-counselling-for-schools

Department of Education. (2023). *National strategic framework for lifelong guidance (2024-2030)*. https://assets.gov.ie/279193/8b0c3c0a-380f-4c82-9a7e-35af3432a318.pdf

Fejes, A., Chamberland, M. & Sultana, R.G. (2022). Migration, educational and career guidance and social inclusion. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 22*, 347–361. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10775-021-09493-0

Fitzsimons, C., & O'Neill, J. (Eds.). (2024). *Critical perspectives on further education and training*. Anthem Press.

George, M.M., Strauss, K., Mell, J.N., & Vough, H.C. (2023). When 'who I am' is under threat: Measures of threat to identity value, meanings, and enactment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 108*(12), 1952–1978. https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2023-93532-001.html

Glanton, N. (2023). Adult education in a neoliberal policy paradigm. *Irish Educational Studies, 42*(4), 787-803. https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2023.2259377

Hearne, L., Elftorp, P., de Paor, C., & Ryan, K. (2020). An exploration of adult guidance practitioners' experiences of policy and practice in the reformed further education and training (fet) sector in Ireland. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 50*(1), 128–140. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2020.1811838

Indecon (2019). *Indecon review of career guidance.* https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/01ce11-indecon-review-of-career-guidance/

Kitchen, J. (2019). Ethical Issues in reporting on teacher candidate perspectives in a cultural diversity course: Increasing trustworthiness, protecting participants and improving practice. In Brandenburg, R. & McDonough. S. (Eds.), *Ethics, self-study research methodology and teacher education* (pp.97–115). Springer. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-32-9135-5

Mänttäri-van der Kuip, M., Brend, D. M., & Herttalampi, M. (2024). The moral distress instrument (MDI): Development, validation and associations with burnout among Finnish social workers, *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 1–21. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17496535.2024.2312291

Mate, S., Gregory, K. & Ryan, J. (2024). Re-authoring career narratives: exploring identity in contemporary careers practice. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 52*(1), 7-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2023.2260557

McMahon, M., Watson, M., Chetty, C., & Hoelson, C.N. (2012). Examining process constructs of narrative career counselling: An exploratory case study. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 40*(2), 127-141. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2011.646949

McSweeney, J. (2024). 'There are many more young men like me out there': Creating person-centred learning pathways in literacy services for a growing cohort of young male early school leavers seeking apprenticeships. *The Adult Learner 2024*, 183-194. https://www.aontas.com/assets/resources/Adult-Learner-Journal/ALJ2024/AontasTheAdultLearner2024_web.pdf

Mulvey, M. (2019). Further education and training in Ireland: Eight decades to a unified sector [Doctoral dissertation, University of Sheffield]. Whiterose eTheses. https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/25110/1/Further%20Education%20and%20Training%20in%20Ireland%20M%20Mulvey%20(1).pdf

National Centre for Guidance in Education (2022). Supporting Refugees from Ukraine. https://www.etbi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/NCGE-FET-Supporting-Refugees-Ukraine-2022-V3-EN.pdf?x10791#:~:text=Expertise%20in%20(ETB)%20Adult%20Education,the%20Irish%20system%20and%20to

National Centre for Guidance in Education (2023). Output statement of the National Centre for Guidance in Education 2021. https://www.leargas.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Output-Statement-NCGE-2021-1.pdf

Neary, S. (2014). Reclaiming professional identity through postgraduate professional development: Careers practitioners reclaiming their professional selves. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 42*(2), 199-210. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2013.869790

Oberg, G., Carroll, A., & Macmahon, S. (2023). Compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress in teachers: How they contribute to burnout and how they are related to trauma-awareness. *Frontiers in Education, 8*, 1-10. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1128618

O'Connor, E. (2024, May 11). *Brendan O'Connor Show* [Radio Broadcast]. RTÉ Radio One. https://www.rte.ie/radio/radio1/clips/22394194/

Olcoń, K., & Gulbas, L. E. (2021). 'Their needs are higher than what I can do': Moral distress in providers working with Latino immigrant families. *Qualitative Social Work, 20*(4), 967-983. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325020919804

Patton, W., & McMahon, M. (2006). The Systems Theory Framework of Career Development and Counseling: Connecting Theory and Practice. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 28*, 153-166. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10447-005-9010-1

Petriglieri, J.L. (2011). Under threat: Responses to and the consequences of threats to individuals' identities. *Academy of Management Review, 36*(4), 641-662. http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.0087

Pino Gavidia, L. A., & Adu, J. (2022). Critical narrative inquiry: An examination of a methodological approach. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 21*, 1-5. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/16094069221081594

Radey, M., & Figley, C.R. (2007). The social psychology of compassion. *Clinical Social Work Journal, 35*, 207–214. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-007-0087-3

SOLAS (2014). *Further education and training strategy 2014-2019*. https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/920e2fa0b6/fetstrategy2014-2019.pdf

SOLAS (2020). *Future FET: Transforming learning: The national further education and training (FET) strategy 2020-2024*. https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf

Sultana, R. G. (2008). *From policy to practice: A systemic change to lifelong guidance in Europe*. European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/505/5182_en.pdf

Sultana, R. G. (2011). On being a boundary person: Mediating between the global and the local in career guidance policy learning. *Globalisation, Societies and Education, 9*(2), 265–284. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2011.577326

Sultana, R. G.(2018). *The right to guidance: a social justice challenge*. [PowerPoint slides]. National Guidance Forum, Dublin.

Sultana, R.G. (2022). The labour market integration of migrants and refugees: career guidance and the newly arrived. *International Journal of Educational and Vocational Guidance, 22*, 491–510. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-022-09529-z

Thomas, L. (2019). Risk taking in public spaces: Ethical considerations of self-study research. In R. Brandenburg, & S. McDonough. (Eds.), *Ethics, self-study research*

methodology and teacher education (pp.153-164). Springer. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-32-9135-5

Vu, F., & Bodenmann, P. (2017). Preventing, managing and treating compassion fatigue. Swiss Archives of Neurology, *Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, 168*(8), 224-231. https://baycrest.echoontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/A-systematic-review-of-the-literature-on-recommended-interventions-Preventing-managing-and-treating-compassion-fatigue.pdf

Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling
April 2025, Issue 54

Article

10.20856/jnicec.5410

A career domain approach to adolescents' hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing

Esther Anwuzia

Bournemouth University, UK

For correspondence:

Esther Anwuzia: eanwuzia@bournemouth.ac.uk

To cite this article:

Anwuzia, E. (2025). A career domain approach to adolescents' hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, *54*(1), 115-129. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5410

Abstract

The theoretical understanding and empirical measurement of adolescents' career wellbeing is limited to the hedonic dimension of wellbeing. Although valuable, a more integrated framework for assessing adolescents' career wellbeing that includes a eudaimonic wellbeing perspective is needed. This paper raises the following critical questions for adolescents' career development and wellbeing: What does career wellbeing mean from the eudaimonic perspective of wellbeing, and how is this different from the hedonic definition of career wellbeing? How can eudaimonic career wellbeing be measured or operationalised among adolescents? And What are the practical implications of an integrated framework for assessing adolescents' career wellbeing?

Key words: Adolescents, career wellbeing, hedonia, eudaimonia

Introduction

Adolescents' wellbeing has been assessed using global and domain-specific measures. While global wellbeing measures focus on adolescents' overall perceptions of their lives, typically operationalised in the academic literature as 'life satisfaction' (Diener et al. 1985; Hirschi, 2011), domain-specific measures of wellbeing have mainly centred on adolescents' subjective feelings about school, family, and peer relationships (Clarke, 2023; McLellan &

Steward, 2015). Few studies have extended this domain approach to the career domain. Adolescents' wellbeing in this domain, otherwise known as 'career wellbeing' is currently understood and measured as the degree of satisfaction with their career choice and the extent to which they experience emotional distress about choosing a career (Pesch et al., 2016). Following this definitional approach, two prominent measures of adolescents' career wellbeing have emerged, namely: *academic major satisfaction*, which measures adolescents' satisfaction with their choice of specialised subjects for their secondary school leaving exams, and *subjective career distress*, measuring emotional responses towards the career decision-making process such as feelings of anxiety, stress and depression, including perceived internal and external barriers such as self-doubt and disapproval from someone held in high esteem (Creed et al., 2016; Katz et al., 2018; Pesch et al., 2016).

Despite the value of developing an empirical measure of adolescents' career wellbeing, this paper argues that the construct, as currently operationalised, is limited to the subjective dimension of wellbeing as evident in both adults' and adolescents' career wellbeing studies (Creed et al., 2016; Larson et al., 1994; Pesch et al., 2016; Wilhelm & Hirschi, 2019). This suggests that career wellbeing is yet to be rigorously conceptualised and situated within the overarching wellbeing framework in positive psychology, comprising two dimensions: subjective or hedonic and psychological or eudaimonic wellbeing (Huta & Ryan, 2010).

Wellbeing from the hedonic perspective is understood as an individual's emotive state comprising either feelings of pleasure, enjoyment and happiness or dissatisfaction and angst resulting from activities, experiences and decisions. Eudaimonic wellbeing, on the other hand, is concerned with how activities, experiences and decisions contribute to an individual's fulfilment of their intrinsic nature and, ultimately, their self-actualisation (Huta & Ryan, 2010).

The current paper argues that for career wellbeing, a derivative wellbeing construct, to be adequately rooted in the science of wellbeing in positive psychology, it needs to include a psychological or eudaimonic dimension of wellbeing, which is currently lacking (Mansfield, 2024; Robertson, 2018). Such an integrated measure of career wellbeing will measure not only the presence or absence of satisfaction and depressive states concerning the career decision-making process but also how adolescents' career decision-making contributes to the development of their fullest potential and the realisation of their best selves (Disabato et al., 2016; Ryff & Singer, 2008).

This paper contributes to the literature on adolescents' wellbeing and career development by presenting an in-depth conceptual evaluation and framework for career wellbeing, which extends current theoretical understanding. Drawing from the wellbeing literature in positive psychology, it discusses the differences between the subjective and psychological dimensions of career wellbeing, described here as subjective or hedonic career wellbeing and psychological or eudaimonic career wellbeing. This paper will demonstrate the theoretical and practical implications of both wellbeing dimensions on adolescents' career development, highlighting the importance of measuring both dimensions in parallel (Henderson & Knight, 2012; Huta & Ryan, 2010; McLellan & Steward, 2015).

Using supporting arguments and evidence from the academic literature on wellbeing, the first section discusses adolescents' wellbeing from both subjective and psychological perspectives. It also examines career wellbeing as a domain measure of adolescents' wellbeing needing revision. The second section proposes vocational identity as a relevant

theoretical and empirical measure of psychological career wellbeing, though it has yet to be conceived as such in the academic literature. The final section presents implications and recommendations for future research, policy and counselling practice involving adolescents.

Adolescents' (career) wellbeing: How is it conceptualised and measured?

With the enactment of the United Nations Convention on Child Rights in 1989, wellbeing research has gradually expanded to include the wellbeing of children, adolescents, and young adults. Adolescence is generally conceived as the period between childhood and adulthood. Although theorists in developmental psychology, neuroscience, and social psychology have proposed different age boundaries that constitute adolescence, they mostly agree that adolescence begins at age 10 or 11, following the onset of puberty (Blakemore, 2008; Curtis, 2015). Other physiological and psychological changes, such as the heightened ability for abstract reasoning, decision-making, and goal-oriented and risk-taking behaviours, markedly differentiate adolescence from childhood (Abbott & Burkitt, 2023; Blakemore, 2008; Parker & Crabtree, 2020).

However, the end of adolescence and transition to adulthood is less clear and influenced by social and cultural circumstances and norms (Parker & Crabtree, 2020). While some researchers suggest an endpoint of up to 25 years, others have delineated different stages within the continuum from adolescence to adulthood as early (10 – 13), middle (14 – 17) and late adolescence or young/emerging adulthood (18 – 25). This paper defines adolescence as the typical age range for secondary school students, generally between 11 and 17 years. This period is further divided into early and late adolescence, corresponding to the two stages of secondary education: lower and upper levels.

Different disciplines use the phrase *being well* to represent the individual's health and quality of life across the physical, mental, and economic domains (McLellan & Steward, 2015). In positive psychology, the hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of wellbeing have framed the discourse (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Margolis et al., 2022; McLellan & Steward, 2015; Waterman et al., 2008). Hedonic wellbeing is concerned with the attainment of happiness or the search for pleasure while eudaimonic wellbeing is focused on how ultimate happiness is derived from the satisfaction of one's inherent talents and values (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Waterman, 1993).

Popular measures of wellbeing among adolescents, such as the positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS), the personal wellbeing index, the general health questionnaire, school-related burnout, and the satisfaction with life scale (Cummins & Lau, 2005; Diener et al., 1985; Katz et al., 2018; Watson et al., 1988) mainly assess adolescents' feelings and moods, and degrees of happiness or distress, in other words, their subjective wellbeing. In contrast, psychological wellbeing focuses on the meaningfulness of life, not just how satisfied one is (Margolis et al., 2022). It is concerned with an individual's sense of self-actualisation and attainment of inherent potential (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryff & Singer, 2008). As such, the measures of psychological wellbeing point to the satisfaction of innate psychological needs and intrinsic life goals (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryff, 1989).

Psychological wellbeing theories and measures emphasise the *process* or *means* of attaining happiness in life, for example, by satisfying essential psychological needs like autonomy, competence, relatedness, environmental mastery, and personal growth believed to constitute the basis of a well-lived life (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryff, 1989). Subjective wellbeing, on the other hand, is less focused on *how* happiness and life satisfaction should be attained (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Instead, happiness and life satisfaction are perceived as ends in themselves (Diener et al., 1999). A further justification for differentiating psychological from subjective wellbeing is that pursuing goals that are intrinsically motivated can result in subjective wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Tuominen-Soini et al., 2008). Hedonic satisfaction that includes eudaimonic elements can thus be considered *authentic* or *meaningful* happiness rather than just happiness (Baumeister et al., 2013).

Wellbeing, in general, has been considered an 'elusive' concept to measure (Gennings et al., 2021). However, compared to subjective wellbeing, measuring psychological or eudaimonic wellbeing is more challenging (Huta, 2020; Proctor & Tweed, 2016). It is, therefore, not surprising that most studies on adolescents' wellbeing have focused on hedonic wellbeing. One prominent measure of psychological wellbeing was developed by Ryff, (1989 and 1995) for adults and has been influential in the growth and understanding of psychological wellbeing. At first glance, the fundamental psychological wellbeing questions of what constitutes the 'ultimate good' and a life worth living or what it means to live authentically or purposefully (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Huta & Waterman, 2014) may seem abstract and challenging to contextualise among adolescents. A plausible argument for this is that adolescents are still in the formative stages of personal identity construction and fulfilling crucial developmental tasks and expectations like excelling at school, forming relationships with peers, and deciding on a career (Iovu et al., 2018; Stringer et al., 2012; Todorović et al., 2023). Therefore, such high-level abstraction of what it means to have a sense of purpose may not be immediately obvious or considered as timely.

I argue that despite its seeming elusiveness, the interest in psychological wellbeing should not be restricted to adults only (Ryff, 1995). Assessing the conditions that facilitate a sense of purpose, optimal functioning and flourishing among adolescents is crucial to satisfying developmental priorities like academic attainment (Clarke, 2023) and transition into adulthood.

To mitigate the measurement ambiguity and challenge of psychological wellbeing in adolescents' literature, this paper recommends that the meaning of psychological wellbeing as fulfilling one's potential or realising personal meaning and purpose should be concretised and operationalised within specific relevant domains during adolescence, making it more applicable to this developmental stage. For example, what does being authentic within the school, career and friendship domains imply during adolescence?

Some existing studies on subjective wellbeing have adopted this domain approach, but have focused largely on the school domain, assessing how adolescents' feel about being in school and the school environment. (Anderson & Graham, 2016; McLellan & Steward, 2015). While school is vital at this developmental stage, adolescents in the later years of secondary school are more curious and ambivalent about the relevance of the curriculum to post-secondary school goals and transitions (Hill et al., 2018). This suggests the value of a stronger focus on adolescents' wellbeing from the eudaimonic perspective through assessing how school activities are potentially *meaningful* for their future trajectories and career readiness.

To unravel the definition and measurement challenges associated with hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing, Huta, (2020) recommended four definition categories - (1) Orientation or motives for acting (2) Behaviours, actions, or activities (3) Experiences – affective or cognitive feelings and evaluation, and (4) Functioning. Investigating wellbeing from the orientation perspective will seek to understand which motives influence individuals' actions and behaviours – the *why* of acting. The behaviour perspective emphasises what people *do* to realise their preconceived motives. Experiences and Functioning are the expected outcomes from the joint effect of one's motives and chosen actions.

It would appear from the above classification that most definitions and explanations of subjective and psychological wellbeing are focused on the *outcome* perspective. While subjective wellbeing defines wellbeing as feeling happy and satisfied, psychological wellbeing defines wellbeing as a state of optimal functioning, human flourishing, and self-actualisation. However, unlike subjective wellbeing, the historical and theoretical approach to psychological wellbeing prescribes the preconditions for realising optimum psychological health (Steger et al., 2008), suggesting that eudaimonic wellbeing alludes to 'ideal' motives and behaviours essential for realising wellbeing.

Some studies have shown interest in differentiating hedonic from eudaimonic motives and behaviours. That is, which motives and behaviours result in hedonic or eudaimonic wellbeing outcomes? Studies in this area have suggested that hedonic motives relate to pursuing pleasure and enjoyment, influencing the adoption of hedonic behaviours like watching a movie or attending a concert. Eudaimonic motives, in contrast, relate to seeking to pursue personal ideals, investing time to learn a skill or providing service, prompting behaviours like goal setting or volunteering. Hedonic motives and behaviours are arguably present-focused and self-oriented, while eudaimonic motives and behaviours are future or other-oriented (see Huta, 2020 and Steger et al., 2008 for a full list of empirically tested hedonic and eudaimonic motives and corresponding behaviours). These studies have, however, mainly focused on global measures and have been developed among higher education students. Similar to outcome measures of wellbeing, domain measures of hedonic and eudaimonic motives and behaviours among adolescents are limited.

Studies have shown that career decision-making is a significant predictor of adolescents' wellbeing and impacts the attainment of personal goals and quality of life (Dietrich et al., 2012; Guay et al., 2006; Hirschi, 2011). In extending the theoretical understanding of psychological wellbeing to the career domain, this paper argues that *psychological career wellbeing* will aim at understanding *why* adolescents are satisfied with their career choice and attempt to suggest the most favourable conditions that can lead to greater satisfaction. Different from *subjective career wellbeing*, which measures purely satisfaction or dissatisfaction with career choice, and the level of stress and positive or negative self-appraisal regarding the career decision-making process, further insight into the conditionality of young people's career choice satisfaction is needed to understand and evaluate young people's career decision-making lens. For example, are career choices based on awareness of their interests, strengths and talents, personal goals and values? Are they based on prevailing life circumstances, realities, or future expectations and what is possible? (see Table 1 for an analytical distinction between subjective and psychological career wellbeing).

From Table 1, subjective career wellbeing aims to identify whether adolescents are happy about the career decision-making process and what is needed to make this experience more enjoyable and less frustrating. In line with the psychological wellbeing tradition of uncovering 'essence', 'value', 'quality', and 'meaning', an interest in adolescents' psychological career wellbeing will seek to understand and uncover what optimal career development or career *functioning* (as opposed to satisfaction) signifies among adolescents and what conditions hinder or promote its realisation. Like the qualitative distinction between work and *decent* or *quality* work, livelihood and *sustainable* livelihood, I argue that optimal or purposeful career development implies a higher-order classification of career outcomes and objective and universal criteria for strengthening human excellence and flourishing (Robertson, 2018). A pertinent research question in this regard is: How can adolescents experience or attain personal excellence and self-realisation as an outcome of career decision-making? (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Table 1. Analytical conceptual distinction between the subjective and psychological dimensions of adolescents' career wellbeing

Career Wellbeing		
Subjective Career Wellbeing (current measure of career wellbeing		**Psychological Career Wellbeing (underexamined measure of career wellbeing)**
Affective component	*Cognitive component*	
• Adolescents' emotive experience or subjective feelings associated with choosing a career or towards the career decision-making process. • Investigates how adolescents emotively describe the process. As stressful, burdensome, exciting? • The career decision-making process is evaluated in terms of how it maximises pleasure and minimises pain.	• Adolescents' mental assessment, evaluation or judgement about the career preparation process.	• Scrutinises the conditionalities linked to adolescents' emotive and cognitive states derived from career decision-making. Evaluates the *value* of these conditions beyond positive and negative affect and satisfaction. • Asks *why* adolescents feel however they do – content, sad, unhappy, or distressed about the career preparation process and proposes a yardstick for evaluating emotions; not just whether adolescents are happy or not but also enquires further: Happy because of…? Distressed because of…? • Investigates to what extent the process of career decision-making facilitates the experience of personal flourishing. • Aims at objective preconditions for adolescents to attain self-actualisation through the career decision-making process.

Proposing vocational identity as a theoretical and empirical dimension of adolescents' psychological career wellbeing

Vocational identity entails a clear conception and awareness of one's interests, goals, strengths and values (Creed & Hennessy, 2016). Beyond choosing a career path, vocational identity includes matching this choice with one's interests and strengths (Park et al., 2022). Achieving such a match has resulted in beneficial outcomes in adolescents' academic and psychological domains, like improved school engagement, academic adjustment, and perceived competence (Porfeli et al., 2011; Wong & Kaur, 2017). The emphasis on the synergy between one's sense of self and career pursuits suggests a theoretical link between vocational identity and the eudaimonic perspective of wellbeing. Although vocational identity was not explicitly mentioned, Waterman (1993) defined eudaimonic wellbeing as the cultivation of one's inherent 'skills and talents' (p. 679). The standardised measures of vocational identity and eudaimonic wellbeing are also alike. For example, the question 'I have a strong sense of who I am in relation to my career' in the Vocational Identity Measure (VIM) developed by Gupta et al., (2015) is similar to the question 'This activity gives me my strongest feeling that this is who I really am' in the Personally Expressive Activities Questionnaire, which measures psychological wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Waterman, 1993). Empirical studies have also found a positive relationship between vocational identity and concepts like meaning and purpose in life (Li et al., 2018; Strauser et al., 2008), further strengthening the possibility of repositioning vocational identity as a psychological dimension of career wellbeing.

Despite the promise of integrating vocational identity within the career wellbeing construct, it is important to acknowledge its potential empirical limitations and challenges among adolescents. Vocational Identity can be measured as a unidimensional and multidimensional construct. The unidimensional measure assesses whether a firm and certain career choice has been made (Holland, et al., 1980; Gupta et al., 2015). While suitable for young adults and adults, this measurement approach may not be developmentally appropriate during early adolescence. Given the career-specific focus of this paper, I define early adolescence as the period before students choose their subject specialisation areas, broadly understood as the lower secondary school years. Measuring their vocational identity in a unidimensional form at this time may lead to identity diffusion (a low level of exploration of interests combined with a low level of commitment to a career choice) or identity foreclosure (a low level of self-exploration but a high degree of career commitment). Both possibilities are considered maladaptive career decision-making outcomes, and the ideal outcome and developmental process would be for a thorough exploration of one's interests before a career decision is made, which should be encouraged and actively pursued during adolescence. (see Marcia's (1966) seminal identity status theory for a detailed analysis of the four identity categories during adolescence).

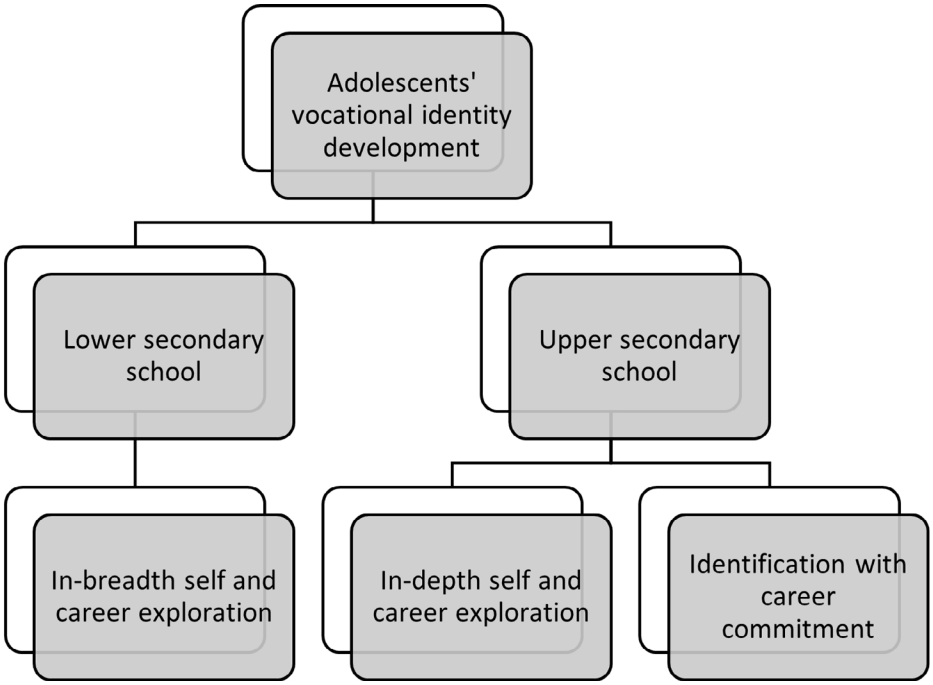
Rather than focusing solely on whether adolescents have committed to a career choice, the multidimensional measure of vocational identity allows for the following:

1. Greater flexibility in how the vocational identity development process is measured across different developmental stages.
2. Better monitoring of the extent and nature of adolescents' exploration within the different periods of adolescence (early – late adolescence).
3. A stronger justification for this paper's argument for vocational identity as a psychological dimension of adolescents' career wellbeing.

These three points will be expanded on using Porfeli et al.'s (2011) multidimensional measure of vocational identity. To achieve (1) and (2) above, I propose that during the lower secondary years, career scholars and practitioners examine the extent to which adolescents engage in a broad search of personal interests and information about potential careers and subject area competence. This is theoretically known as *in-breadth exploration*. Encouraging such behaviours during early adolescence, rather than emphasising a firm commitment to a career choice at this educational and developmental stage, may help reduce emotional and mental distress related to selecting subject specialisation areas in senior or upper secondary school. A sample question measuring in-breadth exploration is, 'I am trying to have many different experiences so that I can find several jobs that might suit me' (Porfeli et al., 2011).

To achieve (3) above, I propose focusing on these two constructs: *in-depth self and career exploration* and *identification with career commitment*. Compared to in-breadth exploration, in-depth exploration is the search for information about specific and preferred career interests, while identifying with a career choice suggests internalising this choice to achieve harmony with one's true self (Porfeli et al., 2011; Wong & Kaur, 2017). These two sub-dimensions of vocational identity are what I propose in this paper as the eudaimonic conceptualisation and measurement of adolescents' career wellbeing, which are most applicable to the later secondary school years. A sample question of in-depth exploration and identification with career commitment include 'I am learning what I can do to improve my chances of getting into my chosen career' and 'My career will help me satisfy deeply personal goals', respectively. Figure 1 below depicts this paper's proposed multi-dimensional framework for assessing adolescents' vocational identity development.

Figure 1. A proposed empirical multidimensional measurement framework for adolescents' vocational identity development



Conceptualising vocational identity as a measure of adolescents' psychological career wellbeing is the first step in achieving a congruence with the current layer of operationalisation of subjective career wellbeing (outcome-based). While subjective career wellbeing accounts for the emotional and cognitive sub-dimensions of subjective wellbeing

more generally by asking how adolescents feel about their career choice and how satisfied they are, psychological career wellbeing emphasises career functioning and flourishing based on how developed adolescents' vocational identity is.

To achieve a more integrated framework for adolescents' career wellbeing, I extend the position of this paper to recommend consideration of hedonic and eudaimonic career motives and behaviours, not just outcomes. Figure 2 adapts Huta's (2020) framework and presents a multi-level career-specific model for assessing adolescents' career wellbeing based on their career motives, career behaviours, and career outcomes, considering the hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing perspectives. Table 2 builds on this to proffer some recommendations for career motives and behaviours with support from existing literature on adolescents' career self-management, career adaptability, and career preparation.

By integrating the subjective and psychological wellbeing dimensions, this paper redefines adolescents' career wellbeing as the extent to which they attain optimal career functioning or flourishing and their degree of perceived satisfaction and distress about the developmental task of career decision-making. Following this definition, high or positive career wellbeing will likely entail the following: a strong commitment to a career that expresses an adolescent's interests and personal goals, accompanied by a high level of satisfaction with this career choice and a low level of negative affect comprising anxiety and self-doubt. In reverse, low or poor career wellbeing is likely to imply career indecision or uncertainty, which may be caused by the difficulty in discerning one's strengths, interests, and goals accompanied by a low level of satisfaction with one's career choice and a high degree of mental strain from the career decision-making process.

Figure 2. A three-dimensional measurement model of adolescents' career wellbeing

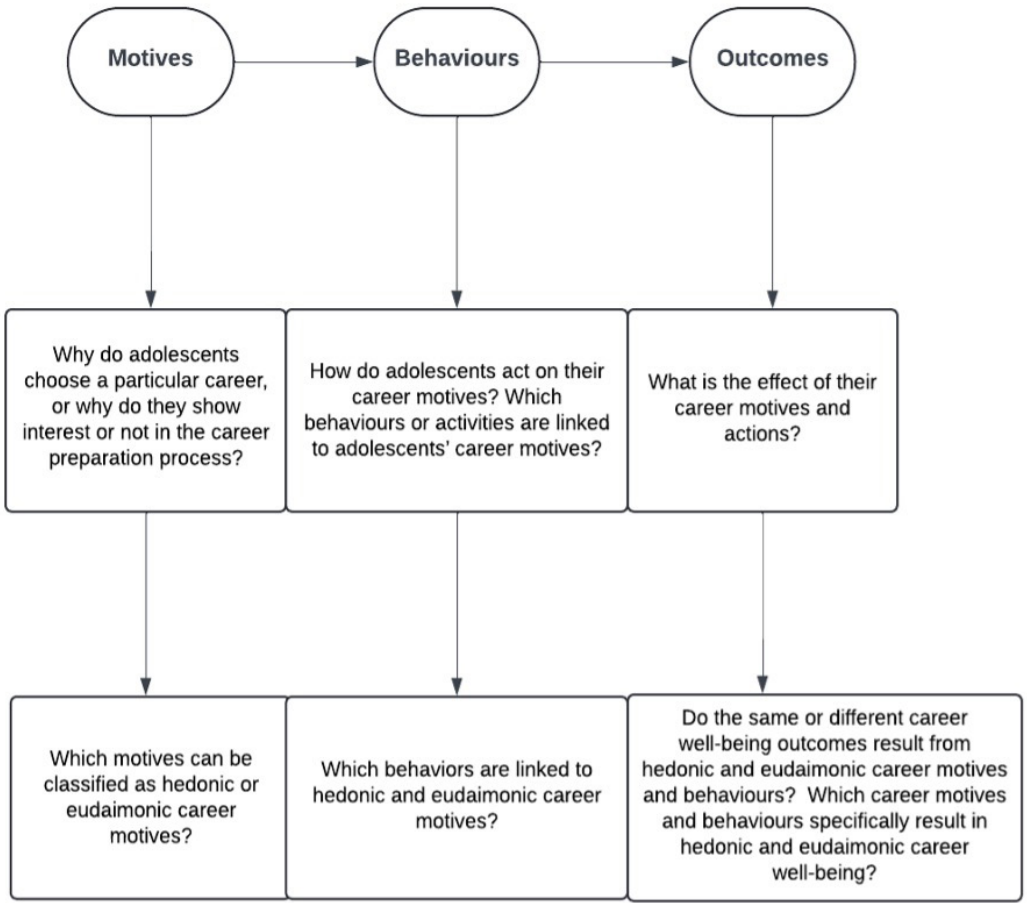


Table 2. An integrated measurement framework for adolescents' career wellbeing

Hedonic Perspective			**Eudaimonic Perspective**	
		Scale Examples		**Scale Examples**
Career outcome	Positive or negative feelings emanating from career choice or the career decision-making process and the degree of satisfaction with career choice.	Larson et al., (1994), Pesch et al., (2016)	Pursuit of vocational identity	Gupta et al., (2015), Hirschi, (2011), Porfeli et al., (2011)
Career motives	Seeking to enhance personal satisfaction, social status, recognition, and acceptance.	Katz et al., (2018)	Seeking to enhance self-acceptance and personal growth; develop career self-management; and pursue increased knowledge of inherent talents and abilities. Aligning career aspirations with pro-social motives like advancing one or more of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals	Ho, (2024); Katz et al. (2018), Wilhelm & Hirschi, (2019)
Career behaviours	Seeking the approval of others to authenticate career choice and choosing the same subject-area specialisation as friends. Implementing the working backwards approach to careers information search: starting from career or perceived career prestige and aligning with personal interests.	Katz et al., (2018)	Goal setting behaviours like writing down goals and keeping a record. Career exploration - internal and external, and in-depth and in-breadth. Volunteering, engaging in extra-curricular activities, taking psychometric strengths tests, networking, identifying a role model, and engaging in career conversations with professionals.	Beal & Crockett, (2010), Marciniak et al., (2021), Wilhelm & Hirschi, (2019)

Implications for future research, policy and practice

I recommend that future studies use the three-dimensional measurement model of adolescents' career wellbeing proposed in this paper to examine the relationship between career motives, behaviours, and outcomes from both the hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives. Further, to increase the validity and impact of future quantitative research on adolescents' career wellbeing, scholars should consider making clear the dimension (subjective, psychological or both) of interest and justify the study's choice in relation to its adolescent or young adult sample. In addition to vocational identity, other empirical measures of adolescents' psychological career wellbeing could be developed from future qualitative studies exploring how adolescents interpret and situate meaning and authenticity within the career domain, considering their social and cultural environment and influences.

This paper recommends that education policy strategies for students' career development in secondary school avoid a one-size-fits-all approach for all students or focus primarily on the transition period at the end of secondary school to post-secondary education. Instead, career policy interventions should be tailored to lower and upper secondary school students, taking into consideration this paper's recommendation to promote broad self and career exploration during early adolescence and more focused exploration and commitment to career choices during late adolescence.

Encouraging the exploration of interests and talents at these different periods can serve as a roadmap for individuals to assess their personal and career development during adolescence and beyond.

The integrated conception of career wellbeing presented in this paper strengthens career counselling strategies that begin with helping adolescents identify their strengths and, from there, gradually assist them in fashioning out a fitting career path. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals can be used as a practical tool to reinforce this practice (Ho, 2024), enabling career counsellors to help adolescents contextualise and explore how their interests and values relate to their local and global social and environmental contexts. By doing so, career counsellors move away from an overly individualistic or decontextualised view of the person, embracing instead the perspective that individuals are socially connected yet possess agency.

Conclusion

Integrating the subjective and psychological dimensions of wellbeing into the career wellbeing construct offers a balanced approach to evaluating adolescents' career development. On the one hand, researchers and counsellors can assess how adolescents feel about their career choices, using subjective career wellbeing as a measure of happiness and satisfaction with those choices. At the same time, acknowledging psychological career wellbeing helps in promoting strengths-based interventions that encourage adolescents to explore and appreciate their talents and abilities.

References

Abbott, R., & Burkitt, E. (2023). *Child development and the brain*. (2nd ed.). Policy Press.

Anderson, D. L., & Graham, A. P. (2016). Improving student wellbeing: Having a say at school. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 27*(3), 348–366. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2015.1084336

Beal, S. J., & Crockett, L. J. (2010). Adolescents' occupational and educational aspirations and expectations: Links to high school activities and adult educational attainment. *Developmental Psychology, 46*(1), 258. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0017416

Blakemore, S. J. (2008). The social brain in adolescence. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 9*(4), 267-277. https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn2353

Clarke, T. (2023). Do scores 'define' us? Adolescents' experiences of wellbeing as 'welldoing' at school in England. *Review of Education, 11*(1), e3393. https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3393

Creed, P. A., & Blume, K. (2013). Compromise, Wellbeing, and Action Behaviors in Young Adults in Career Transition. *Journal of Career Assessment, 21*(1), 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072712453830

Creed, P. A., Hood, M., Praskova, A., & Makransky, G. (2016). The Career Distress Scale: Using Rasch Measurement Theory to Evaluate a Brief Measure of Career Distress. *Journal of Career Assessment, 24*(4), 732–746. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072715616126

Cummins, R. A. & Lau, A. D. L. (2005). *Personal Wellbeing Index—School Children (PWI-SC) (3rd ed.)*. Deakin University.

Curtis, Alexa C. (2015) 'Defining adolescence' *Journal of Adolescent and Family Health: (7)* 2, Article 2. Available at: https://scholar.utc.edu/jafh/vol7/iss2/2

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Hedonia, eudaimonia, and wellbeing: An introduction. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 9*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-006-9018-1

Diener, E. D., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 49*(1), 71–75. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1207/s15327752jpa4901_13

Diener, E., Suh, E. M., Lucas, R. E., & Smith, H. L. (1999). Subjective wellbeing: Three decades of progress. *Psychological Bulletin, 125*(2), 276. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0033-2909.125.2.276

Dietrich, J., Jokisaari, M., & Nurmi, J.-E. (2012). Work-related goal appraisals and stress during the transition from education to work. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 80*(1), 82–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2011.07.004

Disabato, D. J., Goodman, F. R., Kashdan, T. B., Short, J. L., & Jarden, A. (2016). Different types of wellbeing? A cross-cultural examination of hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. *Psychological Assessment, 28*(5), 471. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/pas0000209

Gennings, E. K., Brown, H., & Hewlett, D. (2021). Constructing a definition: Adolescent wellbeing from the perspective of the child and expert. *International Journal of Wellbeing, 11*(1), 69–88. http://dx.doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v11i1.1461

Guay, F., Ratelle, C. F., Senécal, C., Larose, S., & Deschênes, A. (2006). Distinguishing developmental from chronic career indecision: Self-efficacy, autonomy, and social support. *Journal of Career Assessment, 14*(2), 235–251. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072705283975

Gupta, A., Chong, S., & Leong, F. T. (2015). Development and validation of the vocational identity measure. *Journal of Career Assessment, 23*(1), 79–90. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072714523088

Henderson, L. W., & Knight, T. (2012). Integrating the hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives to more comprehensively understand wellbeing and pathways to wellbeing. International *Journal of Wellbeing, 2*(3), 196–221. https://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30052305

Hill, N. E., Liang, B., Price, M., Polk, W., Perella, J., & Savitz-Romer, M. (2018). Envisioning a meaningful future and academic engagement: The role of parenting practices and school-based relationships. *Psychology in the Schools, 55*(6), 595–608. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22146

Hirschi, A. (2011). Vocational identity as a mediator of the relationship between core self-evaluations and life and job satisfaction. *Applied Psychology, 60*(4), 622–644. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2011.00450.x

Ho, C. T. (2024). Embedding the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into the Career Curricula. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling, 53*(1), 24-35 https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5304

Holland, J. J., Gottfredson, D. C., & Power, P. G. (1980). Some diagnostic scales for research in decision making and personality: Identity, information, and barriers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 39*(6), 1191. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/h0077731

Huta, V. (2020). How distinct are eudaimonia and hedonia? It depends on how they are measured. *Journal of Wellbeing Assessment, 4*(3), 511–537. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41543-021-00046-4

Huta, V., & Ryan, R. M. (2010). Pursuing pleasure or virtue: The differential and overlapping wellbeing benefits of hedonic and eudaimonic motives. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 11*(6), 735–762. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-009-9171-4

Huta, V., & Waterman, A. S. (2014). Eudaimonia and its distinction from hedonia: Developing a classification and terminology for understanding conceptual and operational definitions. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 15*(6), 1425–1456. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-013-9485-0

Iovu, M.-B., Hărăguș, P.-T., & Roth, M. (2018). Constructing future expectations in adolescence: Relation to individual characteristics and ecological assets in family and friends. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 23*(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2016.1247007

Katz, I., Cohen, R., Green-Cohen, M., & Morsiano-davidpur, S. (2018). Parental support for adolescents' autonomy while making a first career decision. *Learning and Individual Differences, 65*, 12–19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2018.05.006

Kracke, B. (1997). Parental behaviors and adolescents' career exploration. *The Career Development Quarterly, 45*(4), 341–350. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.1997.tb00538.x

Larson, L. M., Toulouse, A. L., Ngumba, W. E., Fitzpatrick, L. A., & Heppner, P. P. (1994). The Development and Validation of Coping With Career Indecision, *Journal of Career Assessment, 2*(2), 91–110. https://doi.org/10.1177/106907279400200201

Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego-identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3*(5), 551–558. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023281

Marciniak, J., Hirschi, A., Johnston, C. S., & Haenggli, M. (2021). Measuring Career Preparedness Among Adolescents: Development and Validation of the Career Resources Questionnaire—Adolescent Version. *Journal of Career Assessment, 29*(1), 164–180. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072720943838

Margolis, S., Schwitzgebel, E., Ozer, D., Martinez, R. L., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2022). Measuring eudaimonic and non-eudaimonic goods in the pursuit of the good life: The Riverside Eudaimonia Scale and the Rich & Sexy Wellbeing Scale. *International Journal of Wellbeing, 12*(1). https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v12i1.1575

Mansfield, K. (2024). Career Well-Being: Practical tools and ideas for organisations to support employees. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling, 53*(1), 68-79. https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.5307

McLellan, R., & Steward, S. (2015). Measuring children and young people's wellbeing in the school context. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 45*(3), 307–332. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2014.889659

Park, H. I., Lee, S., & Lee, B. (2023). Does the Attainment of Vocational Aspirations Make Youths Happy? *Journal of Career Assessment, 31*(3), 458-475. https://doi.org/10.1177/10690727221119800

Parker, J., & Ashencaen Crabtree, S. (Eds.). (2020). *Human growth and development in children and young people: Theoretical and practice perspectives*. Policy Press.

Pesch, K. M., Larson, L. M., & Surapaneni, S. (2016). Parental Autonomy Support and Career Wellbeing: Mediating Effects of Perceived Academic Competence and Volitional Autonomy. *Journal of Career Assessment, 24*(3), 497–512. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072715599392

Porfeli, E. J., Lee, B., Vondracek, F. W., & Weigold, I. K. (2011). A multi-dimensional measure of vocational identity status. *Journal of Adolescence, 34*(5), 853–871. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.02.001

Proctor, C., & Tweed, R. (2016). Measuring Eudaimonic Wellbeing. In J. Vittersø (Ed.), *Handbook of Eudaimonic Wellbeing* (pp. 277–294). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-42445-3_18

Robertson, P. J. (2018). Positive psychology and career development. *British journal of guidance & counselling, 46*(2), 241-254. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2017.1318433

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On Happiness and Human Potentials: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Wellbeing. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*(1), 141–166. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.141

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Publications.

Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological wellbeing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*(6), 1069.

Ryff, C. D. (1995). Psychological wellbeing in adult life. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 4*(4), 99–104. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.ep10772395

Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. H. (2008). Know thyself and become what you are: A eudaimonic approach to psychological wellbeing. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 9*(1), 13–39. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-006-9019-0

Steger, M. F., Kashdan, T. B., & Oishi, S. (2008). Being good by doing good: Daily eudaimonic activity and wellbeing. *Journal of Research in Personality, 42*(1), 22–42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2007.03.004

Strauser, D. R., Lustig, D. C., & Çiftçi, A. (2008). Psychological wellbeing: Its relation to work personality, vocational identity, and career thoughts. *The Journal of Psychology, 142*(1), 21–35. https://doi.org/10.3200/JRLP.142.1.21-36

Stringer, K., Kerpelman, J., & Skorikov, V. (2012). A longitudinal examination of career preparation and adjustment during the transition from high school. *Developmental Psychology, 48*(5), 1343. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0027296

Todorović, D., Sieckelinck, S., Manders, W., Van Der Linden, J., & Timmerman, M. C. (2023). Developmental needs of adolescents in the online lifeworld in the context of youth work. *European Social Work Research*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1332/OXMM1218

Waterman, A. S. (1993). Two conceptions of happiness: Contrasts of personal expressiveness (eudaimonia) and hedonic enjoyment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 64*(4), 678. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-3514.64.4.678

Waterman, A. S., Schwartz, S. J., & Conti, R. (2008). The implications of two conceptions of happiness (hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonia) for the understanding of intrinsic motivation. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 9*, 41–79. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-006-9020-7

Watson, D., Clark, L. A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: The PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54*(6), 1063. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-3514.54.6.1063

Wilhelm, F., & Hirschi, A. (2019). Career Self-Management as a Key Factor for Career Wellbeing. In I. L. Potgieter, N. Ferreira, & M. Coetzee (Eds.), *Theory, Research and Dynamics of Career Wellbeing* (pp. 117–137). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28180-9_6

News

Book reviews

10.20856/jnicec.5411

Title: A History of the Careers Services in the UK from 1999

Author: Edited by Dr Michelle Stewart

Publisher: NICEC via Lulu.com

ISBN: 9781446627750

Paper Back £20.00 ISBN 9781446625750

eBook £15.00 ISBN 9781446174142

Reviewed by **Siobhan Neary**, Head of iCeGS and Professor of Career Development Practice.

Dr Michelle Stewart has taken on the unenviable task of trying to encapsulate both the evolution of careers education and guidance within the UK since the millennium while simultaneously making it accessible to readers. This edited collection, written in the main by NICEC Fellows, starts where David Peck's 2004 book 'Careers Services, history, policy and practice in the United Kingdom' ended. Collectively the two books provide a comprehensive history of the careers service from 1902 to 2023.

A history of the Careers Services in the UK from 1999 explores the various parts of the careers sectors; young people, adults and HE using the lens of each home nation. This provides an in-depth exploration of the differentiation between the four home nations (England, Northern Ireland Scotland, and Wales) and how services have developed to meet local economic, social and education policy requirements. This is especially pertinent as three countries have designed systems that deliver all age guidance, and one that continues to have a differentiated model with services designed specifically for young people and adults (England). Through adopting a country approach the authors demonstrate the difficulties that exist when considering the career system in the UK, but also highlight the challenges that are endemic to public funded careers provision regardless of geographical location.

Each chapter, written by country experts, offers an historical perspective of the influences and policy that have shaped the establishment of the services as they are in 2023. They each focus on issues that are pertinent, impactful and influential to how the services have

evolved. England is the focus in chapter one and has an additional section which examines career related learning in primary schools, which was linked to policy dating back to the mid 1980's. The focus on Connexions, which was hugely influential on services in England, offers an insight into the aspirational goals of a government committed to addressing social disadvantage. The ripple effect of the service after it was disbanded is still felt, specifically in relation to professional training for career development practitioners. The chapter focusing on Northern Ireland draws a distinction with the other UK nations due to structural and service delivery arrangements as part of the Civil Service. It presents an interesting contrast to the other nations delivering all age guidance services. The chapter on Scotland outlines the strategic transition of Careers Scotland to Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the redesign to focus on economic growth and deliver high levels of employment. It exemplifies the relationship between policy and practice and the application of the SDS Career Management Skills Framework which aimed to inform and shape individuals demand for support. Within the chapter on Wales there is an interesting discussion about bilingualism and the need to provide services through the medium of Welsh. This required a dedicated investment in supporting careers advisers working for Careers Wales as well as in Higher Education to upgrade their language skills. The book ends with a postscript which considers what has happened since 2020, specifically the impact of Covid-19 on service and future policy focus.

Although this is a history book in many ways it is more than that. It offers a view of how neoliberal policies have been adopted and adapted to varying degrees within but differently across four nations. Through demonstrating how public funded services can be created and aligned to meet local policy needs we have a framework of models which work to a greater or lesser degree.

This book will be attractive to those of us who have an interest in the history and the identity of our profession. It is highly accessible and well written by authors who can help us to understand the policy imperatives and how they have been implemented. The structure focusing on the different countries works well, but an introduction to each chapter would have been welcome to set the scene for the country and the variations of topic that are addressed within each. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it, I learned a lot about our neighbours and the good practice which exists across the British Isles.

Title: STEM Careers (2nd Edition)

Author: Liz Painter

Publisher: Trotman Indigo Publishing Ltd

Publication Year: 2024

Number of pages: 172

ISBN: 9781911724186

Price: £22.99

Reviewed by **Dr Michelle Stewart**, NICEC Fellow.

STEM Careers is an up-to-date guide to career opportunities in science, technology, engineering and maths. Its author, Liz Painter is a qualified careers development professional who has transferred her skills and experience as a former science teach with great effect.

Logically structured over 12 chapters, the book provides everything you need to know about careers in science, engineering and maths, allowing the reader to quickly identify the information that is most relevant to them depending on where they are in their career journey. For those at the start of their journey it considers 'Is STEM for me?' with information about different pathways, while for those already decided it supports the exploration of alternative roles and the development of career research skills. Across the book references are made to useful websites, with many opportunities brought to life through the use of case studies (career stories) that include roles requiring different levels of qualification, from level 3 to doctoral studies. At the end of each chapter is a 'reflection' box to help the reader to think further about what they have learnt.

A strength of the book is the style and tone of the writing making it easily accessible to young people and adults, including parents/carers, teachers and career professionals. This also serves to actively encourage their participation in exploring careers in STEM, from finding out about the different sectors, to preparing personal statements and CVS. A further strength is the grouping of STEM sectors into 'making things' and 'helping others' reflecting the diversity of opportunities and the attraction to a range of personalities – not just the 'nerd.'

'STEM careers' is an excellent resource for those advising on career opportunities and for anyone considering a career in science, engineering or maths. The introduction for each chapter explains what it will cover and each sub-section has clear heading so those dipping into it can quickly find the information they need. With STEM at the forefront of solving global and local issues, this book will help to ensure that we do not lose the creative potential of those who could make society a better place but may currently think that a career in STEM is not for them.

ABOUT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The Career Development Institute (CDI) is the UK-wide professional body for the career development sector. We have a growing membership of 4500 individual members and affiliate organisations and speak with one voice for a lively and diverse sector.

We have a key role to play in influencing UK skills policy as it affects those with whom career development practitioners work and a clear purpose to improve and assure the quality and availability of career development services for all throughout the UK.

All CDI members subscribe to a Code of Ethics, which is supported by a strong disciplinary process, and subscribe to the principles of CPD.

Importantly the CDI is responsible for the UK Register of Career Development Professionals; the National Occupational Standards (NOS: CD); the first Career Progression Pathway for the sector; UK Career Development Awards; QCD and QCG/D qualifications; the CDI Academy; the Careers Framework and a UK-wide CPD programme.

Below are a few of our major achievements:

- A powerful brand supported by an evolving website **www.thecdi.net**; social media (Twitter and LinkedIn) presence; and quarterly magazine *Career Matters*;
- A schedule of CPD, skills training, webinars and conferences based on market analysis and members' training needs;
- A growing media and lobbying presence with the CDI recognised as the *expert voice* in the field; advising politicians, speaking at conferences and commenting on policy;
- The establishment of the UK Career Development Awards – ten sponsored awards including *Careers Adviser/Coach of the Year* and *Careers Leader of the Year and Lifetime Achievement Award*;
- Clear focus on professional identity and increasing the professionalism of the sector through our influence, ownership and development of the QCD and QCG/D and the CDI Academy including the new *CDI Certificate in Careers Leadership*.

ASSURING QUALITY

The CDI has a critical role to play in setting standards and articulating what quality looks like for the sector. Importantly we are an awarding body, managing the Qualification in Career Development (previously the QCG/D) and the UK Register for Career Development Professionals, which is pivotal to our ongoing quality agenda and is fast becoming recognised as the sector's equivalent to chartered status.

We are delighted to be working in partnership with NICEC on the Journal and the NICEC/CDI research-focused events which take place twice a year across the UK.

The Journal is made available to all CDI members via our website.

Contents

EDITORIAL

ARTICLES