

Turning to Narrative in the Training of Careers Education, Guidance and Advice Workers: Could this be a Way Forward?

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Introduction

In what is often described as a 'post-modern' and 'globalised' world, the work of career education and guidance practitioners has changed considerably. The training of those practitioners has also changed to reflect the demands they encounter in their current workplace. But, has that change gone far enough or do trainers still rely on established methods of learning, teaching and assessment? Across many disciplines there is what is termed a turn to narrative approaches for understanding human behaviour and action. The approach is seen as helping us as social actors to understand the diverse meanings given to action in a multicultural and interactive world. Working within an inclusive agenda, what can those involved in training do to introduce or extend narrative approaches into their courses? This article will make some tentative suggestions in the belief that focusing on the training arena is a good place to start. The article also aims to widen the debate and hopes others will respond and offer suggestions and criticisms to further our understanding of the potential of narrative approaches.

The turn to narrative

In the field of career counselling in the USA, Savickas (1997a) suggests that the turn to narrative approaches reflects a 21st century preoccupation with meaning in contrast to a 20th century focus on facts. In the UK there is a growing interest in the development of narrative approaches.

For example, Canterbury Christ Church University College held a conference in June 2002, entitled, 'Challenging biographies: relocating the theory and practice of careers work'. The aim of the conference was to introduce and explore biographical and narrative perspectives on the making of career. It sought to examine some of the tensions between what we viewed as narrow and overly classified approaches to guidance, which seem at odds with the dynamic realities of felt lives in a changing world. As the title suggested it set out to challenge our assumptions about career and how we train career education and guidance professionals. Three papers were presented at the conference, by Linden West, Bill Law and myself, followed by discussion groups and later, the publication (Edwards, 2003). The aims of the conference were grand! But, we knew we were opening a debate and had no illusions of our ability to provide definitive answers to the issues raised. The closing chapter in the publication is a dialogue between the contributors that sought to engage with the issues raised at the conference. It does not offer closure but reflects the evolving nature of this somewhat slippery discourse and a desire to take the debate further into the realms of practicality. To that end, this article focuses on one aspect of one chapter – namely the training of career education and guidance practitioners.

Preliminary considerations

Before progressing further, it may be useful to expand on three things. Firstly, what is meant by 'narrative and biographical approaches'? Secondly, what is the wider range of activities that could benefit from a narrative approach? And lastly, what is included in the training of career education and guidance practitioners?

An article of this length cannot explore what is meant by narrative and biographical approaches in any depth. In terms of career counselling, the work of Savickas (1997a, 1997b), Cochran (1997a, 1997b) and Peavy (2000) is significant. In the UK, Audrey Collin has also advocated the use of interpretative approaches for the understanding of career (Collin 1998, Collin & Young, 1992). Edwards *et al* (1998) have edited a collection of papers, which give interpretative perspectives on guidance and counselling. McLeod (1997) and Beesley (2002) have both written about narrative and counselling. A chapter on narrative and career guidance in the context of the inclusion agenda in the UK was included in an Institute of Career Guidance publication (Reid, 2002a).

So there is plenty to read but how can narrative be summarised here for the purpose of this article with its focus on training? What interpretative and narrative approaches emphasise is the need to explore 'meaning' by allowing the individual to construct a career narrative that resonates significantly with their values and interests for life, not just for work. What is being suggested here is a move away from rational or simplistic scientific 'matching' approaches to career interventions. People get to know and understand us by listening to the stories in which we reveal 'who we

are'. This idea of self is located in experience around significant life events. As a result we speak and we understand from a particular focal point. We also learn from stories and we construct stories to make sense of what happens to us. We can enter the world of someone else's story but our comprehension is always framed by our own culture and experience, derived from our socialisation which structures our view about what is normal, real or meaningful. The point is we need to understand our own stories in order to be aware of how we make sense of other people's stories.

There are times of course in guidance as well as in life, when we cannot make sense of other people's stories. When working with clients who we do not understand, because 'meanings' are not shared, we are not relating to their story, as our cultural experiences are different. And the concept of culture here is wider than ethnicity; we can experience this discursive confusion within our *own* culture. In other words our own stories are the vantage point from which we view the stories of others. What we see always depends on that vantage point. Perhaps what narrative and biographical approaches ask us to do is to stand somewhere else to look.

Introducing a narrative counselling approach in guidance work would require specialist training, but at the very least we need to give individuals time to tell their stories in their own way. For those who may find it difficult to articulate their stories, more time, and a variety of methods is needed. However, that does not mean that the rest of our clients or our students will find managing their career/life pathways easy. New approaches are needed here too to help them manage the biographical strains that modern (post-modern?) life places on them.

Horizons for change

In the area of research

So what is the range of activities that would benefit from a narrative approach? Linden's chapter (West, 2003) reflects on the risky nature of a 'post-modern' world and how this impacts on notions of 'career' and 'identity formation'. Within this he poses questions about the purpose of career guidance in an individualistic, life-long learning culture. Within a neo-liberal agenda, is guidance being used as a form of social control, masking 'ugly and increasing social and structural inequalities' by reinforcing the discourse of individual freedom and progression via education, training and employment? He points to how top-down policy impositions on guidance practice, with 'this overt intrusion of power and politics' is 'far removed from the values of Egan and Rogers' (West, 2003:10). Thus, Linden asks us to question where we want to position ourselves in terms of our own identity formation, our own professional narrative.

Linden's chapter uses four narratives taken from his own research projects. He has completed three major, what he terms, 'auto/biographical' studies over a period of ten years.

Biographical methods for researching professional contexts are a reflection of the growing interest in subjective accounts in the social sciences. The approach is collaborative, recognising 'that we cannot understand why people act and think as they do, without their active collaboration' (West, 2002:11). In so doing, the approach recognises that people act in, rather than merely react to, their circumstances, albeit that this often involves immense struggle. The approach gives greater prominence to the active role people play in shaping their own social processes.

What Linden advocates is an approach to research which moves away from trying to assert things scientifically. A narrative approach to research can organise understanding in a way that gives meaning to experience rather than mere description. It can illuminate our understanding of the social and psychological context of others through their own sense of what is real. And, as this work is collaborative and offers space for reflection, it can be the foundation for building a new story.

This is not, however, overlooking the influence of social structures and suggesting that the world can be changed at the individual level. A narrative approach recognises that individuals interact in a social world and does not seek to separate lives from a wider reality. Clough suggests, 'narrative is useful only to the extent that it opens up (to its audiences) a deeper view of life in familiar contexts: it can make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar.' (Clough, 2002:8).

Accordingly, for those of us commissioning or designing research, or those of us supervising research degree programmes, can we find out more and can we encourage students/colleagues to consider narrative and auto/biographical approaches for their research projects?

In the area of career education and guidance programmes

Moving on, Bill Law (2003) suggests that greater use of narrative-led methods could be used to change all aspects of careers work. In this he includes career education, personal and social education and their integration into mainstream curriculum in all sectors of careers work.

Bill also recognises that by their very nature narrative approaches are unlikely to appeal to those more interested in quantifiable logic. He refers to the 'fuzzy' nature of evidence as produced through story (see also Bassey, 1999, on fuzzy generalisations in research). He warns against didactic stories in educational settings, as the story needs to have enough interest to appeal to different people in different ways. In this we recognise that no two people take the same learning from the same story.

He explains how biographical writing can be used as a resource for the understanding of contemporary notions of career and career management. What is offered in Bill's chapter suggests significant potential for the development

of careers work in contemporary settings, within the agenda of Connexions, inclusion, citizenship, lifelong guidance and beyond! This approach also includes a range of media and should not be viewed as reliant on the written or even spoken word. If used in the way intended, it could be accommodated within the aims of the new National Framework for Careers Education and Guidance (DfES, 2003).

For example, as a starting point for development Bill views work experience and profiling as prime examples where the development of narrative approaches could be introduced. Like the other two authors Bill does not suggest a headlong rush in the use of narrative approaches, but suggests we need to point to ways we could implement the approach in some areas. As he states, 'what the field does about adapting the ideas... must be done in localities, adapting, fixing, creating' (Law, 2003: 76).

In the area of training for practitioners in career education and guidance

One locality is the area of training. And by trainers here I mean those involved in initial training in higher education settings and in workplace settings, and those involved in continuous professional development delivering training to experienced practitioners on internal or external courses in a range of workplace settings. The latter includes professional organisations concerned with the development of career and guidance practitioners. Training now also includes courses undertaken by a range of personal advisers as well as career guidance practitioners. The latter working in Connexions in England will be known as personal advisers as the title of careers adviser is, regrettably, being lost.

The training arena then offers the opportunity to work from the ground up. So what are the specific areas where aspects of a narrative approach can be introduced or extended?

Turning to narrative and auto/biographical approaches in the training of practitioners

In the way we support learners

The content of the Qualification in Careers Guidance (QCG), delivered by higher education institutions (HEIs), is governed by the aims and learning outcomes of the Institute of Career Guidance which is the awarding body. The main alternative to this initial qualification, the Scottish or National Vocational Qualification in Advice, Guidance and Advocacy at level 4 (VQ), is also governed by specific knowledge and performance criteria. That said those that deliver the training can give value added content or vary the methods used. But does this happen and if not, why not?

Within HEIs, the provision of extra activities is constrained by the hours given to the course and by the number of students. Changes that may be possible within those hours will be considered later, but where is the space to listen to

trainees' stories? For companies using the VQ training route it is problematic to find time to send trainees away from the workplace for training, to find time for someone to observe and assess the work and to find time to enable trainees to complete the qualification. Experienced practitioners are also hard pressed to find time to engage in continuous professional development when busy practice is demanding their attention.

So, how can we create some space for learners (at all levels) to reflect on their work in the context of their lives? On the QCG there is little time to learn about the wealth of experience that students bring to the course and even less time to utilise this, or discuss how the new learning is being incorporated into the old. Trainers may write about practitioners needing to find time to allow the client to tell their stories, and write about organisations needing to find time to for adequate support and supervision for their practitioners, but do trainers practise what they preach? Do we give trainees (QCG\NVQ\CPD and other Connexions courses) adequate pastoral and tutorial time, or are we all too busy getting on with the job of delivery? If we want to do more than pay lip service to the concept of the reflective practitioner, we need to create this space and then ensure that it does not get filled up with the rubble of other operational matters.

In the way we teach

In our training courses we could encourage practitioners to make creative use of narrative approaches for their guidance group work. There is safety in the use of pre-published worksheets but this often leads to 'death by worksheet' (Reid, 2000). In one-to-one work we need to be sure trainees can see the benefits and the limitations of a humanistic, client-centred approach and give them access to the material that will help them to incorporate both narrative and multicultural principles into their interviewing model (Sue *et al*, 1996).

Within education training, the use of narrative is understood as a valuable strategy for teaching and learning. But what about a specific example for use in the career guidance field? In career education sessions with clients we often use case studies but working with narrative can achieve far more than working with case studies. By using other people's stories, young people, who often have difficulty in articulating ideas about themselves, can be helped to identify their own life themes and interests. However, this is not restricted to work with young people, we all learn through hearing stories. We can encourage practitioners to use narrative by using the approach in our teaching. On the other hand, the difference between case study work and using narratives is not immediately apparent. What is the difference?

The authentic voice in a narrative has an immediacy that is lost when the story becomes written into a case study. The latter is often written to encourage the recognition of what

the trainer thinks is important. For example, when I write a case study for our students I will be considering particular learning points that I feel are essential and the story is 'manipulated' to these ends.

Working with case studies then is only engaging up to a point, according to the level of interest of the reader. In many respects this is because the presenter of the case study has already made an interpretation of the story. This may diminish the goal of active learning as the value of the story is weakened. Case studies are sometimes viewed by our students as difficult to work with, because they feel either constrained by the limits of the interpretation, or irritated that they have only a partial story.

Narratives, however, appear to provoke a different response. The narrative voice has a veracity that situates the reader as direct recipient of the story. Put another way, the story speaks uniquely to each listener. Un-interpreted, the raw story opens up thinking to the possibility of further and often deeper interpretation. It is difficult to argue with; clarity, ambiguity and first-voice speech give authenticity. We need to recognise of course that language is not neutral, but culturally determined. However, the language in narratives is original, connections and meanings are explanation-free and are not forced upon the reader in the same way as in case studies (Merttens, 1998).

When using narratives rather than case studies our students appeared far more interested and engaged. They produced perceptive comments, less held back by feelings that they were being tested in some way.

An example will illustrate this – here we were considering vocational choice theory

(This extract is taken from Reid, 2003:57-8)

First, a case study with questions (not included) to guide group discussion

Mark is a young person in care who has a record as a young offender involved in repeated car theft and 'joy-riding'. Lately Mark seems to have gained some maturity and now has a better understanding of rule-governed behaviour. For example he can now see the point of car insurance and how reckless driving can cause injury to others. However, Mark does not consider himself to have been a 'crazy' joy rider and feels he does know how to drive properly. He is now taking proper driving lessons and when he passes his test, he says, will probably buy a car.

Before he was placed in care, Mark tells you, he had problems at home and often broke the rules. He knows it is hard 'getting back on the straight and narrow'. In care there are house rules, he tells you, that you have to abide by and you have to sign an agreement. He speaks of his Mum with affection but is aware that his behaviour at home was sometimes silly, but disruptive nonetheless.

He asks you, with momentary indignation, if you understand that people have different upbringings, which makes them behave in different ways with their mums.

What follows is Mark's story, told by Mark

As you get older you come to realise, know what I mean, that you shouldn't do it, it's not worth it. I didn't realise before about insurance, running someone over, but I weren't one of those crazy ones, you know. I can drive properly. I ain't not getting into a car and going Brrwhrrrrrrrr (Mark made extremely loud and realistic car revving noises) 90 miles round the corner and all that. I drive like a proper driver. Fair enough, you think (he interpreted my thoughts rightly) 'they all say that!' but you know, most people in a car, they go speeding. That's what joyriding is all about. For me it weren't like that. For me it was more getting used to being in a car and driving the car. I'll take my test now, I'm learning, and then I'll probably buy a car. ...

It's hard getting back on the straight and narrow. Here they've got house rules. You have to abide by them, sign an agreement. There is rules at home but I break them. Sounds silly. Bang doors... I love my Mum but I've had problems all over my life, it's not easy (Mark raised his voice, as if indignant). People have different upbringings, do you understand. Some people are different towards their mums from others, know what I mean – so there you go (and he seemed to relax again). ...

Sarah Curtis (1999:60) *Children Who Break the Law*, London: Waterside Press, quoted in Law, B. (2000) *Autobiography: The people's career development research?* The Career-Learning Network, unpublished.

How much more powerful and engaging is Mark's story told by Mark! There is a sense of the real, active voice, which speaks more directly than the case study. You have to work with it, ask your own questions, and make your own interpretations. When using this story (and a contrasting story) on training courses, our active engagement with the material and the enjoyment and ownership of the learning that took place appears significant. Certainly by not determining what to learn, it seemed that more learning took place (Thorpe *et al*, 1993).

We all know Mark or someone like him. Trainees and experienced professionals have many tales they can tell which help to relate the theory of a training course to the practice they experience. We can all tell stories and can adapt real stories (whilst protecting confidentiality for our clients) to open up our thinking, our interest and our ability to learn from one another.

Designing training

So when designing training can we ask ourselves, what do we do already that could be developed into a narrative approach? Bill Law calls this the 'easier stuff'. And what

else could we do to increase our use of narrative and create auto/biographical opportunities for learners? Bill calls this the 'bigger stuff'. And it doesn't matter if it's a piecemeal and somewhat tentative start when trying to decide if this is indeed a real opportunity to be more effective.

In the way we assess

Standards have to be met: guidance practitioners need to be able to communicate effectively in writing. However, there are other ways of assessing knowledge and understanding that trainers already incorporate into their courses. Practical skills are usually assessed by observation and other areas of professional development are frequently assessed by portfolio work. But, not everyone finds writing a reflective portfolio enjoyable or even helpful, and this can often feel like 'trial by ordeal'. It is possible to achieve this in different ways other than via some endless paper chase. Can course requirements encompass creative ways of doing this?

One approach already used in NVQ work is the use of the professional discussion (Reid, 2002b). The professional discussion is **not** a question and answer session. As the title suggests it is a discussion, a guided conversation about the work that provides the opportunity for learning to take place. As such it aims to be reflective and evaluative and can be used for formative as well as summative assessment. And, the assessor learns too, as the nature of a guided conversation is such that the discussion is collaborative. The reflective nature of the professional discussion fits with the need for practitioners to have or develop the higher thinking and creative problem solving skills that are needed, alongside the practical knowledge and skills.

Anything that is shown to the assessor during the recorded discussion is assessed at that point and will not need to be included in the portfolio – the recording is the evidence. It is surprising the amount of evidence that is revealed in this 'rich', narrative discussion. Of course, recording technology can be used in other ways to provide evidence of knowledge and understanding. Although discussed here as an addition rather than a replacement for more conventional means of assessment, there is an obvious application for learners who may have additional needs.

Alternative approaches to assessment can also include peer review and self-assessment, all of which can increase involvement, ownership, reflection and learning. These need to be integrated into any scheme of assessment and not used as a 'bolt-on' activity to solve an assessment problem for the trainer. Telling the story of your development and discussing assessment issues can be less threatening when shared with peers. This does need to be at the right time of development when individuals have enough knowledge to be able to give feedback to their colleagues and accept feedback from them.

Such techniques can help to develop collaborative ways of working which in turn can enhance an inclusive ethos. Preparation is important, along with a clear contract about the aims and objectives of such work. In 'working alongside one another', we can help to lay the foundations for supporting colleagues in the work place and for participating actively in support and supervision sessions or peer review and appraisal. It may also be another way of helping practitioners to develop their ability to work holistically with their clients. But like any other opportunity to tell your story, it needs an adequate investment of time in order to be meaningful.

Conclusion

This article has tried to reflect the opening up of a space in my thinking about the way we train practitioners. It has asked for trainers to consider enhancing or introducing narrative and auto/biographical approaches within their courses. It has looked at the three areas of tutorial support, teaching and assessment. It suggests that we need new ways of thinking that challenge our existing methods. In this respect, this is a reflection of the guidance world our practitioners navigate. It does not however, offer a cookbook of recipes on how to do this, but has suggested that a piecemeal approach is OK, for now. Time will tell if the approach is useful in the wide field of career education and guidance practice – I'm hopeful, but what do other people think?

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Towards a Situated Learning Theory for Careers Education and Guidance

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Over many years, a range of learning theories has sought to inform career education, development and guidance practice. In other fields of education, situated theories of learning (particularly those espoused by Vygotsky, 1978 and other neo-Vygotskian writers) have come to the fore, but their impact on the field of career learning has been insignificant by comparison. This article examines career learning theories published to date and puts forward the beginnings of a situated view of career learning, which emerged following a study carried out with sixth-form students making their university choices. Key concepts in a situated approach are defined and their application to career learning is discussed. The work concludes with some pointers to the application of Vygotskian ideologies to career learning.

Introduction

For many years the professional fields of careers education, development and guidance have all been informed by theories of learning. An examination of theoretical approaches shows that psychological and sociological debates have been ongoing, and the degree to which an individual has control over their future, or has their future mapped out for them according to societal norms, is still a hotly contested question. Writers from the psychological school, arguing that individuals are agents in control of their own destiny, face criticisms on the grounds of naivety; and those from the sociological school, arguing that individuals have little choice, but simply do what society allows, face criticisms on the grounds of negativity and pessimism. As a result many writers have put forward theories appertaining to the 'six of one and half a dozen of the other' school of thought, in an attempt to take both points of view into account.

In response to debates around change, writers have put forward career learning theories which discuss the need for individuals to adapt to change and learn about career in an ongoing way. Such theories can also be seen to fall into either the psychological camp, with an emphasis on the individual working out a way forward (symbol processing), or the sociological camp, where individuals learn from and adapt to what goes on around them (social learning).

In other fields of study in education, such debates about learning are enhanced by perspectives from a situated view, which seek to integrate the individual and society, and here the work of Vygotsky (1978) has been particularly influential. Such perspectives, although mentioned in literature, have been sorely lacking in the career education, development and guidance field. In order to address this issue, a study into the career learning of a group of sixth form students was carried out, which sought to explore the possible application of a situated approach, and in particular the work of Vygotsky, to career learning.

Career learning theories so far published

Three different perspectives on career learning have been developed in recent years (Law, 1996; Krumboltz, 1979; Hodkinson et al, 1996), each having different theoretical origins, but all seeking to discuss how individuals learn in order to make career decisions in an ever-changing world.

First, most practitioners in the UK will be familiar with Law's (1996) career learning theory. This approach stems from a symbol processing approach to learning and is described as a largely psychological process where individuals work things through in their minds whilst interacting with their community. This involves a process of sensing, sifting, focusing and understanding, most of

which goes on inside the head of the learner; but Law acknowledges that 'dealing with points of view' does mean 'career learning cannot occur in a social vacuum', and that individuals interact with their community in order to reach conclusions about the way forward.

A second approach is Krumboltz's (1979) learning theory of career counselling, the origins of which lie in the work of Bandura, which, as Herr (1989) points out 'has its roots in reinforcement theory and classical behaviourism'. According to this approach, an individual's personality and behaviour arise primarily from their unique experience, rather than from their innate characteristics. Two types of

learning experience are identified by Krumboltz; *instrumental*, where individuals learn from their own experience and behaviour and in response to feedback from others, and *associative*, where they learn from observing others. Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996) argue that learning involves the cognitive analysis of 'positively and negatively reinforcing events' and that these events are influenced by factors in the environment, many of which are beyond the control of the individual. Society can be seen as dictating to individuals, with individuals responding towards positively reinforced events and against negatively reinforced ones.

The third approach to career learning is described by Hodkinson *et al.* (1996) and Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) in their writing on the concept of the learning career. The work is written from a social constructivist perspective, where learning is described as 'a profoundly social and cultural phenomenon, not simply a cognitive process'. The learning career is described as 'a career of events, activities and meanings, and the making and remaking of meanings through those activities and events, and it is a career of relationships'. The study found that young people constructed their career in an ongoing way through both activities and the relationships they had with those around them. The work emerged following a longitudinal study of young people in further education, and it is argued that young people show varying dispositions to learning which are affected positively, in terms of enabling progress and negatively in terms of inhibiting it by matters of identity and situation. Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) relate these dispositions to Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus: a portfolio of dispositions to all aspects of life, largely tacitly held, which strongly influence actions in any situation - familiar or novel' and argue that people make varying amounts of progress in relation to their learning career, because of their habitus.

A new situated approach and some key concepts

In order to consider what a situated view of learning may have to offer to perspectives on career learning, and in particular, the possible application of the work of Vygotsky to career learning, three key aspects were explored. These were the zone of proximal development (hereafter ZPD), the ways in which the experienced person helps the learner to learn within the ZPD (termed scaffolding in Wood [1988] and guided participation in Rogoff [1990]) and the cultural context in which learning takes place. The concepts involved are defined below.

The ZPD

In his own research with children Vygotsky identified two developmental levels: the actual developmental level of the child based on achievement tests and the level of potential development as shown through assisted problem solving. Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZPD as 'the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential

development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers'. The ZPD is described by Wood (1998) as 'the "gap" that exists for an individual (child or adult) between what he is able to do alone and what he can achieve with help from one more knowledgeable or skilled than himself', and is an indication of learning potential. Put simply, the ZPD can be defined as the difference between what a student can achieve alone, and what they can achieve with a skilled helper (personal adviser or careers adviser).

Within the ZPD, 'activity' on the part of the learner is at the heart of the learning process, and this activity, undertaken in a social setting in interactions with a skilled helper, enables the learner to construct new knowledge. Vygotsky saw this relationship in the ZPD as a partnership where the learner becomes more independent as time goes on and the overall goal of learning in the ZPD is to enable the learner to acquire more skills and knowledge and ultimately achieve things alone. In order to reach this point, new knowledge needs to be internalised on the part of the learner, and activity theory emanating from the work of Vygotsky and others suggests that active involvement on the part of the learner is necessary to enable this to happen.

Scaffolding

In the context of the ZPD, learning is an interpersonal, dynamic social event (Santrock, 1998) where people construct meaning via a process of social interaction, and a key concept involved in this process is scaffolding. As the helper works with the learner, focusing on those things that the learner can do with help, the helper scaffolds new concepts onto the learner's existing knowledge and understanding, thereby taking the learner from what they know already, to what they need to learn next. Wood (1988) describes scaffolding as focusing the attention of the learner on 'relevant and timely aspects of the task ... highlighting things they need to take account of. It also breaks the task down into a sequence of smaller tasks'. Scaffolding is interpersonal in nature, and enables the learner to 'achieve heights that they cannot scale alone'. The study explored activities within the guidance process that could be described as scaffolding in order to seek to define it in this context.

Guided participation

The term guided participation is used by Rogoff (1990) to describe activity within the ZPD and, as the word participation suggests, 'is intended to stress shared activity with communication'. Rogoff's work focuses on very young children and she views them as apprentices in thinking, who are 'active in their efforts to learn from observing and participating with peers and more skilled members of their society, developing skills to handle culturally defined problems with available tools, and building from these givens to construct new solutions within the context of socio-cultural activity'. All of this activity is carried out with a focus on problem solving, which 'emphasises the active nature of thinking', and this shared activity comes in the

following forms. Guided participation builds bridges between things that are familiar to the learner from their present understanding and level of skills to reach across to new understanding and skills. It also involves arranging and structuring the learner's participation, in order to both support and challenge the learner, regulating the level of difficulty of the tasks, so that the learner is enabled to move forward in their development and learn new things in a safe yet challenging environment. This support can then be withdrawn as the learner masters things for themselves and becomes independent. Rogoff views guided participation as a wider term than scaffolding as it takes place in a whole variety of different contexts which are not necessarily viewed as being directly related to teaching and learning. Data from the study was analysed in order to seek to interpret the concept of guided participation in a career guidance context.

The cultural context of learning

Vygotsky (1978) argued that learning processes take place via cultural signs and tools which mediate between the stimulus and response. His work is therefore built on the premise that an individual's intellectual development cannot be understood without reference to the society in which they are embedded (Rogoff, 1990), and is, thereby, a situated view of learning. In Vygotsky's work, the individual and their society cannot be viewed separately but are integrated to an extent where they become inseparable. As Rogoff, (1990) asserts, 'the child and the social world are mutually involved to an extent that precludes regarding them as independently definable'. In other words, the individual self grows and develops in its cultural milieu, becoming infused with culture in such a way as to make the self inseparable from its society. In Vygotsky's (1978) work, the mind develops *in* society, via processes of communication, which are mediated through the operation of cultural signs and tools, and the ZPD 'provides the setting in which the social and the individual are brought together' (Daniels, 1996).

In Vygotsky's work, culture is not seen as static, but as operating on two levels. At one level, culture shapes the minds of individuals (Bruner, 1996), and at another level individuals transform culture as they pass it on from one generation to the next (Rogoff, 1990). Culture is, therefore, constantly changing as societies progress and develop. In this study the possible impact of cultural signs and tools on the career guidance process was explored as students articulated some of the reasons for their choices and perceptions.

The case study

In order to seek to examine the possible application of Vygotsky's work to career guidance, a case study of the career learning of a group of students in a sixth form college was carried out. Students were interviewed before their guidance interview (the pre-interview), regarding their position at that time and what they hoped to learn from it. Their

guidance interviews were observed and recorded, and students were interviewed immediately afterwards (the post-interview), regarding both what they felt they had learned and how. All the verbal data was then analysed in order to try to establish evidence for the ZPD and the other associated concepts discussed above. All students in the study were in Year 13 and in the process of making applications for higher education.

Findings

Much of the data gathered in the study confirmed the potentially useful application of the concept of the ZPD in a career guidance context. It was clear from comparisons of data from the pre- and post-interviews, that students had made progress in their thinking about career, and that this had been facilitated by the careers adviser in a number of ways. All students expressed ways in which they had learned more about their university choice by collaborating with the careers adviser, whom they saw as someone 'more knowledgeable or skilled' than they were (Wood, 1998).

In the study, the career learning observed was certainly interactive, and the careers adviser spent much time discussing many aspects of university choice with the students. These discussions prompted students to ask questions, reflect on their current position and think about a range of possible scenarios. All of this helped the students to gain an enhanced understanding of probability assessment, risk management and strategic planning which served to enable them to put themselves in the best possible position to succeed in gaining a university place of their choice. Without such knowledgeable and skilled help their chances of success may well have been less although this was not tested out as part of the study.

The application of the ZPD concept also gives some unique insights into the focus of work with learners, which must be within their ZPD and thereby within their grasp. Many guidance practitioners can experience frustration when clients return following previous interviews having made little progress in thinking and action. An understanding of the ZPD on the part of careers advisers should help them to question and assess the learning potential of the client, and as a result to focus on those things that are achievable within the ZPD and not things that are either beyond it, or already grasped (Bokarie, 2002).

There was much evidence in the data to suggest the useful application of the term scaffolding to describe activity undertaken within the ZPD and students spoke of things that they now felt they were equipped to do having had their career guidance interview which they could not do before. Examples of these are active research, the assessment of probabilities, risk management and strategic planning. It is also clear that learning was taking place at two levels. Not only did students speak of being clearer about their choices, but they also understood more about how to think about them constructively and to their best advantage. In

this way, they appeared to be learning how to learn, and to be engaging in a process of metacognition as they began to learn how to manage their own career.

The study revealed some potentially useful insights into the concept of guided participation in a career guidance context. The interviews observed were clear examples of such shared activity, with the students and the careers adviser sharing a process of examining university choices from a whole variety of different perspectives. This shared activity was particularly evident in the active research observed which appeared to enable students to problem-solve the whole area of university choice. The careers adviser also helped the students to build bridges between things that were familiar that they knew and understood already, and to reach across to new understanding and skills in making university choices.

Evidence from the study appeared to point to the likely impact of cultural signs and tools on the career guidance process. Many students spoke of 'a good university' and this notion appeared both to be communicated and reinforced by the language (spoken and written) used by various parties involved in the process. These messages were communicated via the language of many people involved (e.g. students, teachers, employers, etc.) and through other media (e.g. prospectuses, books, websites, etc.) The study showed that the speech of both students and the careers adviser, and other media (e.g. prospectuses) are infused with cultural messages.

These cultural messages related to both internal and external aspects of development. Cultural messages regarding such things as 'my possible job prospects' (tools) and 'my worth as an individual' (signs) were communicated through the notion of a good university. Not only does the notion of a good university affect what an individual might achieve in the future, it also affects the way in which they think about themselves and their level of self-esteem. Hence, students in the study aimed to achieve places at universities that they perceived to be good, sometimes even in the face of apparently difficult odds.

The beginnings of a new situated career learning theory

As a result of the study, a new theory of career learning from a situated perspective is beginning to emerge, and some key points are summarised here.

- The essence of the ZPD is that people can achieve more with the help of someone more skilled and knowledgeable, than they can alone. Working with clients in the ZPD offers new insights into the concept of client-centredness. The study points to the need for guidance practitioners to focus on working with clients within their ZPDs, which can be seen as a new facet of working in a client-centred way. Working in the ZPD involves focusing on those things where the client can do with help, that is, not things they can do already, nor
- things that are far beyond their current reach. This entails asking the client to work on things that will challenge them and will be within their reach and scope of interest.
- Career learning in the ZPD is both active and interactive with students engaged in problem solving processes.
- Career learning within the ZPD must have the overall goal of enabling the learner to become independent. This has clear links with the notion of empowerment and could be particularly useful when examining the ways in which guidance practitioners can work in order to encourage independence on the part of clients. Career learning within the ZPD fosters and indeed actively encourages independence gained through purposeful activity in problem-solving with support.
- A situated view of career learning means that the individual can no longer be separated from their context, as the one cannot exist without the other. The integration of self in society brings both individual and societal perspectives to the fore where individual needs and wishes are fused together with cultural norms and practices through the media of signs and tools.
- If culture is growing and changing, people can be formed by culture, and can also choose to have an impact on it, rather than simply feeling that they are victims of the status quo. By working with clients in the ZPD, guidance practitioners can expect to play a part in enabling individuals to break through barriers and bring about cultural change through emancipatory career guidance practice.

Further research and questions to be addressed

It is accepted that whilst a case study can be a useful vehicle for gathering in-depth data regarding phenomena in a particular context, the findings should not then simply be applied to people more generally. However, it seems fair to assume that how students learn in the guidance process, in the particular sixth-form college in question, could tell us something about how other students in similar circumstances might learn. As Yin (1994) argues 'case studies are ... generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes'. The insights gained into the career learning of the students in the study have been used in formulating the beginnings of a career learning theory based on Vygotsky's work, which can now be tested in, and applied to, other career learning situations. This points to the need for further research into career learning in different settings and with different clients. Anyone interested in exploring the ideas presented here and the opportunities for further research is welcome to contact the author for a discussion.

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Just Postponing the Evil Day? Understanding the Guidance Needs of Full-time, UK-resident Masters Students

Helen Colley and Helen Bowman

Introduction

This article reports initial findings from a research project on career progression and employability for full-time, UK-resident Masters students, funded by the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU). We have now tracked 24 students through six taught Masters courses at both pre- and post-1992 universities. We have used semi-structured interviews with the students at the start and at the end of their course, with significant others (family members, partners, personal tutors, or careers advisers) who influenced their career decisions, with their course directors, and with several HE careers advisers. The data generated has allowed us to begin developing in-depth case studies. These tell us about students' life histories and social backgrounds, the processes of their career decisions and transitions up to and including entry onto a Masters course, their relations with the labour market, and their views on guidance provision.

Focusing on Masters students

This may seem like an unusual area for research, at a time when guidance policy has become very sharply focused on those who are 'at risk' or excluded from education in the 14-19 age range. There are also large numbers of part-time and overseas Masters students, whose career decisions and progression are similarly under-researched. But there are three important reasons why this project has been commissioned:

- There is little existing research on career decision-making or progression for Masters students, so we know almost nothing about their experiences.
- The continuing growth in graduate numbers sets a premium on those who can demonstrate 'something extra', but paradoxically it is becoming more difficult for universities to recruit full-time, UK-based Masters students in some subject areas. This is reducing the pool of potential PhD candidates, which may have knock-on effects in recruiting future lecturers of a sufficiently high calibre.
- The bulk of funding for HE Careers Services is for work with undergraduates, and there is specific funding for services to work with PhD students and contract research staff, but there are (with rare exceptions) no dedicated resources to provide guidance for this group.

This article reports interim findings, based on the first round of interviews, about the guidance needs of Masters students. We describe how they perceive and use existing guidance provision, and how careers advisers view their work with this client group. We offer one possible framework for analysing their guidance needs, and some (as yet) tentative suggestions about how careers education and guidance provision might be enhanced for them. First of all, we begin with some more detail about the participating students.

The students and their Masters courses

We began to select our sample (all details are anonymised to protect confidentiality) by seeking a range of courses from a pre-1992 and a post-1992 university, which are promoted as having varying degrees of vocational relevance:

- Interpreting, Applied Sciences (pre-1992 university)
- Graphic Art, Business (promoted as a 'conversion' course, not an MBA) (post-1992 university)
- Philosophy, Classics (pre-1992 university).

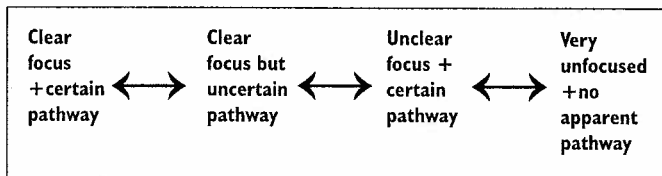
We have worked with four students from each course, aiming for a broadly representative sample in terms of age, gender and ethnicity, while also including some exceptional students. Almost all of the students come from middle-class backgrounds. They rely heavily upon their parents to fund them through the year of the Masters degree, with parents paying course fees (ranging from £2,700 to £4,800), and contributing towards living expenses in most cases.

Our analysis of their career decision-making, in choosing to do a Masters course, revealed three main patterns: 'staying on', 'moving on', and 'coming back'. (These are discussed in more detail in our first consultation paper.) Almost half of our sample, 11 students across all the courses except the Business conversion course, were staying on at the same university to study the same subject as their first degree immediately after graduation. Entering the Masters course has not felt like a major career transition to these students, and for some of them, it has partly been a way of deliberately postponing their transition into the labour market. This is not to suggest that their reasons are negative, though. Most of them had a powerful, intrinsic motivation to continue studying a much-loved subject, and this was often closely linked to their evolving sense of personal identity and desire for self-actualisation. A much smaller group of four students were moving on to a new subject and/or a new university straight after their first degree, and choosing a different career direction. A complex combination of social, cultural, economic and personal factors have influenced their decisions. The remaining nine

students were coming back into HE after a period of employment. Their decision to do a Masters course was often driven by dissatisfaction with their experiences in the labour market, and a desire to find more fulfilling and/or high-status work.

Diagnosing students' guidance needs

In trying to understand these students' guidance needs, we analysed their first interviews again, looking through a more diagnostic prism at their accounts of deciding to do a Masters course. We drew on elements of one common model of guidance, Bedford's (1982) 'FIRST' approach (FIRST is an acronym for diagnosis of clients' vocational focus, information, realism, scope and tactics). Some patterns seemed to emerge around their degree of vocational focus, combined with the degree of relative certainty that they appeared to ascribe to the Masters course as part of a coherent career pathway. Such an analysis produces the following typology along a spectrum:



Before describing this classification in more detail, a number of cautions are necessary. Firstly, we do not wish to suggest that a concept like 'vocational focus' is a conscious consideration for these students. It is a construct of guidance theory and practice that we are applying, to try and illuminate ways in which guidance provision serves them or might do so better. Secondly, typologies always oversimplify the complexity of individuals' situations, and we should beware of them becoming stereotypes. Moreover, we anticipate that student beliefs and actions may well alter during their year on the Masters degree. Course contexts (including in relation to the labour market) may shift, happenstance may intervene, and initially clear plans may be re-focused or go out of focus. Thirdly, 'certainty' about the Masters course as part of a vocational pathway is, at this stage, only an aspect of the students' beliefs, often related to the way the course is marketed. Further data will tell us how certainly any of these courses might lead to any expected career, and how student dispositions and actions by them and others may shape their direction. Accordingly, the following 'diagnoses' are tentative.

Vocationally focused, certain pathway

Some of the students, particularly on the Applied Sciences course, are among those who are clearly focused on a highly specialised career, which is strongly associated with their academic and personal identity, and for which the Masters degree appears to offer a relatively certain pathway. Their career interests have focused progressively since choosing A Levels. They have considerable knowledge of the industry they wish to enter, acquired through their studies, through

effective careers research, and in some cases through previous employment. They are aware of the competitive nature and economic uncertainties of the industry. Their tutor controls the allocation of industry bursaries, and is well-connected with the industry. He claims to be able to provide networking possibilities, and even placement into jobs, through his personal contacts, many of whom are alumni of this Masters course. It remains to be seen how secure this vocational focus and apparent fast-track into the industry will be, particularly for the female students who are entering a very male-dominated occupation.

Vocationally focused but less certain pathway

Most of the students studying Interpreting and Graphic Arts also begin their Masters with relatively clear vocational focus, again closely bound up with their own sense of identity and non-traditional lifestyles. Both groups enjoy the creativity as well as the risk-taking element of their work. They appear to display well-developed career management skills, being aware of the need to profit from opportunities the Masters course presents for understanding and networking in their chosen field, as well as to showcase their work. They are well aware of the risky and uncertain nature of the freelance careers they are likely to enter. However, since their view of these difficulties results mainly in an intense determination to succeed, it is no surprise that they have not formulated alternative plans in case of failure to establish themselves.

More certain pathway, but vocationally unfocused

This group mainly comprises students taking the Business conversion course. Having chosen their first degree subject with little focus, or deliberately in order to keep wider options open, they perceive that 'business' is the largest single area of graduate employment. They have very little idea of what specific occupations it might entail, or of their own suitability for these occupations. They hope that the Masters course will provide them with specific knowledge of business management, which they believe employers require, and that this will lead them into employment. However, they have little self-awareness, cannot represent their experiences in terms of employability, and are unable to interpret careers information and guidance, or contacts with employers. They expect the Masters qualification will provide them with an advantage in the graduate labour market, but their obvious lack of career management skills may make it difficult for them to capitalise on their extra credentials.

Vocationally unfocused, no apparent pathway

Some of the students with least vocational focus are those studying the academic Masters degrees – Philosophy and Classics. As we have already noted, most of them have a deep intrinsic motivation to continue studying their subject. They have few clear career ideas for the future, and many explicitly resist pressures to make a definite career decision. Two students refer to the 'dreaded question' – 'What do you do want to do?' – posed by parents and (they assume) careers

advisers. Given their generally negative perceptions of the graduate labour market, one element of their decision-making is to delay their entry into employment and find more fulfilment through further study. Some are considering future options such as an extended period of travel, voluntary work, or playing in a band. They are often anxious that their decision to study a non-vocational subject for an extra year will be seen as frivolous or hedonistic by family, friends and employers. However, their parents are usually supportive of the Masters option, believing it will give them enhanced prospects in the labour market. The students also express this hope, along with the hope that they will discover rewarding occupations to enter, but their lack of career management skills may limit their ability to generate more focused career ideas or to 'cash in' their extra credentials.

We suggest that this range of attitudes – which overlaps with particular courses, but by no means precisely – implies a variety of guidance needs among the students, rather than a blanket approach to Masters students in general. (If anything, our simplified typology underestimates the variation in needs.) This in turn has implications for guidance provision. Let us turn next to different views of the provision on offer.

Masters students' perceptions of career guidance provision

In our interviews with the students, we explored their perceptions and use of career guidance provision, which we interpreted broadly. Most students had used the Internet as their major source of careers information, although none had used their university careers website or the Prospects website (of which the large majority were unaware). This had been effective for those searching for specific Masters courses, and some then made further decisions based on the nature of e-mail responses from course tutors. As part of a broader 'guidance community', tutors' encouragement was often a crucial factor in deciding to do the Masters, although academic, personal and institutional interests may be at play here. Parents were highly influential, too, both in financing the Masters year, and in valuing postgraduate study as an option. Friends' and siblings' positive reports of postgraduate study, and negative reports of employment experiences, could also be influential.

Within course-based provision, different subjects offer different levels of access to careers education and guidance within the first degree and the Masters course. This is also related to their location in a pre- or post-1992 institution. In the technical Masters degrees, such as Applied Sciences and Interpreting (both based in the pre-1992 university), employers may recruit directly from these courses without advertising publicly, and tutors have close links with the industry. Moreover, the pre-1992 university enjoys privileged access to major employers in comparison with the post-1992 university. In courses such as Graphic Arts

and Business, tutor liaison with the sector may again be crucial, fostering opportunities for students to network if it is effective. These are both located at the post-1992 university, where careers education and guidance are thoroughly embedded in the curriculum of first degrees, thanks to various academic and resource-related incentives. However, there are no such drivers at Masters level. The data suggests that the Graphic Artists, who are all 'staying on' in the same department after their first degree, are benefiting from the career management skills they developed earlier. Some Business conversion students, on the other hand, are less well equipped, three of them having 'moved on' from other institutions.

We were struck, however, by students' very different perceptions of the guidance on offer at their university careers service. This seemed to relate partially to our diagnosis of their 'vocational focus'. Of the students with little vocational focus, several explain that they deliberately avoid any contact with career guidance services or careers fairs, while others describe their contacts as desultory, perhaps picking up leaflets but avoiding conversations. They tend to see the careers service as a placement service geared to graduate careers in business – opportunities they do not wish to pursue. One of the Classics students provides a comment that is typical among this group:

I have never been to the careers service. I went once when my girlfriend went, and even then I just stood outside [laughs]. I get a nervous twitch when there is a careers fair in the union. It terrifies me.

The few vocationally unfocused students who actually have made use of their university careers service describe it as 'unhelpful'. They perceive careers interviews, or referral to computer-aided guidance packages such as Prospects Planner, as an unwelcome 'matching' process, directing them towards jobs they do not want.

By contrast, those students with clearer vocational focus see formal guidance provision as irrelevant to them now, as they have a clear goal, regardless of the certainty of their chosen career path. However, they generally have a more positive view of their previous experiences of careers education and guidance, and have found it helpful. One Applied Sciences student in particular benefited from highly specialised information and guidance provided by a careers adviser with inside knowledge of the industry, who was able to identify the Masters course as the only route into his chosen occupation.

This leaves us with a paradox. Students who have little vocational focus believe careers services are irrelevant to them, since they only provide a matching and placement service for those who know what they want to do. Students with clear vocational focus think careers services are irrelevant, because the service is there to help people who are still unsure what they want to do.

Meeting the guidance needs of Masters students

Careers advisers we interviewed were emphatic in their views that most Masters students do not have fundamentally different guidance needs from undergraduates. They argue that most will be entering the same sectors of the graduate labour market as those holding first degrees, and therefore the same provision and approach in careers guidance is appropriate for both client groups. The Prospects website also carries numerous references to this issue, advising students that a Masters qualification in itself may not carry any advantage in the eyes of employers.

There just isn't a generic market for Masters. People that recruit graduates of any discipline, they recruit graduates of any discipline at whatever level.

(Careers adviser, pre-92 university)

So if Masters students are reading the careers press, they may feel that they've been there, done that as an undergraduate, so don't bother with that. I don't know if that's their view or not. But the graduate press is as relevant to them, by and large, and they should be looking at our regular jobs bulletin.

(Careers adviser, post-92 university)

With the exception of highly technical courses like Applied Sciences and Interpreting, the careers advisers do not generally believe that a Masters degree gives students the advantage they hope for in the labour market. They are aware that Masters students see themselves as distinct from undergraduates. But they believe that, like any other graduate, Masters students will have to demonstrate that the Masters degree has developed their employability. A 'gap' year after the first degree might be equally useful, and a poorly-presented Masters year might actually be a disadvantage.

Careers advisers are concerned that they are reaching only those students who already have the focus and career management skills to know they need help, and that those who are unfocused – and in greatest need of guidance – are not being attracted to use the available provision. This concern seems to be borne out by the evidence we have already presented. Together with the lack of course-based careers education provision or specific careers service resources for taught Masters students, these issues pose an important question: can the guidance needs of Masters students be better met simply by 'badging' existing (undergraduate) provision for them?

I suppose what I am saying is: I don't think that Masters students really need anything different [*from undergraduates*]. They need help and support to help them to be autonomous decision-makers in the same way that anybody else does. But as a group they think they need something different. Now, if we badge it differently, is that confirming their idea that they need something different, and are they then disappointed if they don't get something very different? And if they are right and

they do need something very different, then we need them to tell us and we need to work on it from that angle rather than the assumptions I am making at the moment.

(Careers adviser, pre-92 university)

The problem with focusing on such an analysis of Masters students' needs is that it centres on the point of transition into employment, reflecting the instrumental notion of the purpose of career guidance which has come to dominate UK government policies on both HE and guidance. It is an approach which views guidance as a 'market-maker', facilitating interactions between the supply and demand sides of the labour market. However, the ethical base of career guidance since the 1970s has been a more person-centred approach, embracing much looser purposes of assisting clients to pursue self-actualisation in their own terms. The careers adviser at the pre-1992 university, where 'pure academic' courses are predominantly located, expressed the dilemma this creates:

A lot of them are postponing the evil day, they quite like being at university, they are enjoying what they are studying, so they thought they might as well carry on for a year... I suppose in a professional sense I tend to feel that there *should* be something later, but why? I mean, it is their prerogative, and if that's what they want to do and that fits in with their current objectives, then, you know, that's fine... We tend to put decisions into a long-term plan, and sometimes there isn't a long-term plan, and why should there be?

(Careers adviser, pre-1992 university)

The issue of delaying labour market entry needs careful and non-judgemental consideration. Hodkinson et al's (1996) previous work on careership, together with the data from our project, suggests that decision-making is a complex process embedded within the social and cultural lifecourse of the student. Career decisions are neither narrowly economically rational nor irrational, but pragmatically rational as they express the ongoing interplay between students' dispositions and their 'horizons for action'. Positive decisions to pursue Masters level study for its own sake may coincide with uncertainty and doubt about perceived opportunities in employment, and these are in turn entwined with students' perceptions of what courses of action are possible for them, and how these fit their own developing identities.

A technician approach to guidance, which primarily offers matching or placing, is likely to alienate such students. Guidance that acknowledges the positive decision-making entailed in delaying employment and choosing the Masters might at least encourage these students to seek guidance in the future. At best, they might acquire more career management and transition skills, and increase their ability to meet the challenge of moving on from full-time education. However, we acknowledge that adopting such non-technician approaches would represent a significant challenge for guidance providers in the current climate. We

end by considering a few of the questions this raises for policy and practice.

Issues for policy and practice

Our findings so far indicate that there may well be a marketing issue for HE guidance provision, which goes beyond the question of specific 'badging' with the Masters label, and is rooted in more profound issues about the nature of guidance. Policy-makers need to re-think their emphasis on the placement role of HE careers provision and the economically instrumental purposes they ascribe to guidance, given the way that this can impact negatively on both the perceptions of potential clients, and upon practitioners' ethics. The lack of resources for careers education and guidance for Masters students also needs to be addressed by government and universities.

Guidance providers – local HE careers services and national services such as Prospects – might better address the needs of vocationally unfocused students in particular by explaining more clearly the relevant help they can offer, taking into account students' rejection of what they perceive to be a job-search facility for the already-focused. Questions relating to how students feel about leaving university may be more appropriate introductions to the service than questions about occupational choice and labour market entry. Egan's (1994) staged problem-solving approach is highly relevant to this group: beginning by getting clients to 'tell their story', then helping them develop their own preferred scenarios, and finally devise strategies to 'get there'. For some clients, this need will be best met by an in-depth face-to-face interview, with an element of counselling, although it is becoming increasingly hard for under-resourced services to offer this.

There are, however, other ways in which new modes of guidance delivery in HE might be adapted to incorporate a more person-centred approach. In particular, ensuring a strong needs-based element in career guidance websites (see Offer, 2003) might be helpful. For example, 'further study' sections in websites generally do not address the complexities of the decision-making process that our study reveals. They appear to assume that the decision has already been made, and therefore simply provide information about available provision. A needs-based element could also take advantage of new 'narrative' approaches being developed in careers work with younger clients (Law, 2003), where clients are invited to think through careers issues raised through others' stories. Our research project data could provide useful material in constructing such narratives.

Where does the study go from here?

We are currently nearing the end of the first phase of the project, which has concentrated on the students' decision to do a Masters degree, their experiences on the course, and their perceptions and experiences of the labour market so far. We hope to obtain funding for a second phase, which

would allow us to track our sample of students beyond the Masters course. We already know from our latest round of data collection, as students complete their Masters degree, that some difficult transitions and major changes of career decision are in store for some, while others appear to have achieved their immediate ambitions. Most importantly, we hope that pursuing a longitudinal aspect will tell us much more about the impact of the Masters degree on their career trajectories than our initial study can show.

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Notes

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Readers can obtain a more detailed consultation paper and/or short briefing papers about the project findings from Helen Bowman at the address below or via www.leeds.ac.uk/lli/.

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Meeting the Challenge of Connexions - Reflections on Organisational Change in a Careers Company

Gill Morrison

The pace of change in the careers companies providing services to Connexions Partnerships shows no signs of slowing down. They are starting to develop new strengths as well as drawing on existing ones to rise to the challenge of Connexions. Since they were established in the mid-1990s, careers companies have shown considerable flair for innovation, flexibility and responsiveness to meet changing client and customer needs. This article examines leadership and management in a careers company during the transition process from 'careers service' to 'partner and sub-contractor in a local Connexions Partnership'.

Introduction

Careers Management Kent & Medway (CMKM) is an organisation currently in transition as a result of both internal and external factors. The most influential of these is probably external with the recent introduction of the Connexions Service for young people, a government initiative 'to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood, citizenship and working life' (DfES, 2001) through connecting up the various support agencies available for young people. The careers guidance work that the company delivers as part of this support has become subject to a sub-contracting arrangement with the local Connexions partnership, rather than a direct contract with the regional government office. These contractual changes are having an impact on business planning, targets and objectives, job roles, work practices, inter-agency working, and the size and make-up of local teams. In response, the company has created two new management support roles in each locality team. At the same time, there have been internal structural changes as a result of a corporate job evaluation exercise which has given new responsibilities to 'D' grade careers advisers. As a result of these and other changes, the demands on middle managers are changing significantly both in terms of role priorities and management styles, and it has become an organisational concern to support and develop these 'key players' through the transition process.

This article explores some key concepts of management and leadership to help explain how CMKM is changing and what else needs to happen to enhance organisational effectiveness through the transition process. In particular, it will look at some of the benefits of transformational leadership for an organisation undergoing rapid and significant change. These will be discussed in the context of four current issues which emerged from an analysis of interviews held with seven senior and middle managers, namely: delegation, role clarity, communications and team work. The interviews generated data about the effects of change on managers and their staff, and on perceptions of changing management practices and styles.

Key concepts and frameworks

The McKinsey 7S framework (Carnell, 2003 p.313) is one of a number of models that can be helpful in describing and analysing organisations. It was selected in this case as it considers both 'hard' and 'soft' features and shows graphically the interrelations between them. As an organisation with strong shared values from its tradition of public service and its ethical principle of client-centredness, CMKM can readily identify with a model which shows this as the crucial 'glue' that keeps everything together. An analysis of features plotted within the framework (see Figure 1) can become a powerful descriptor and aid for organisational analysis and development.

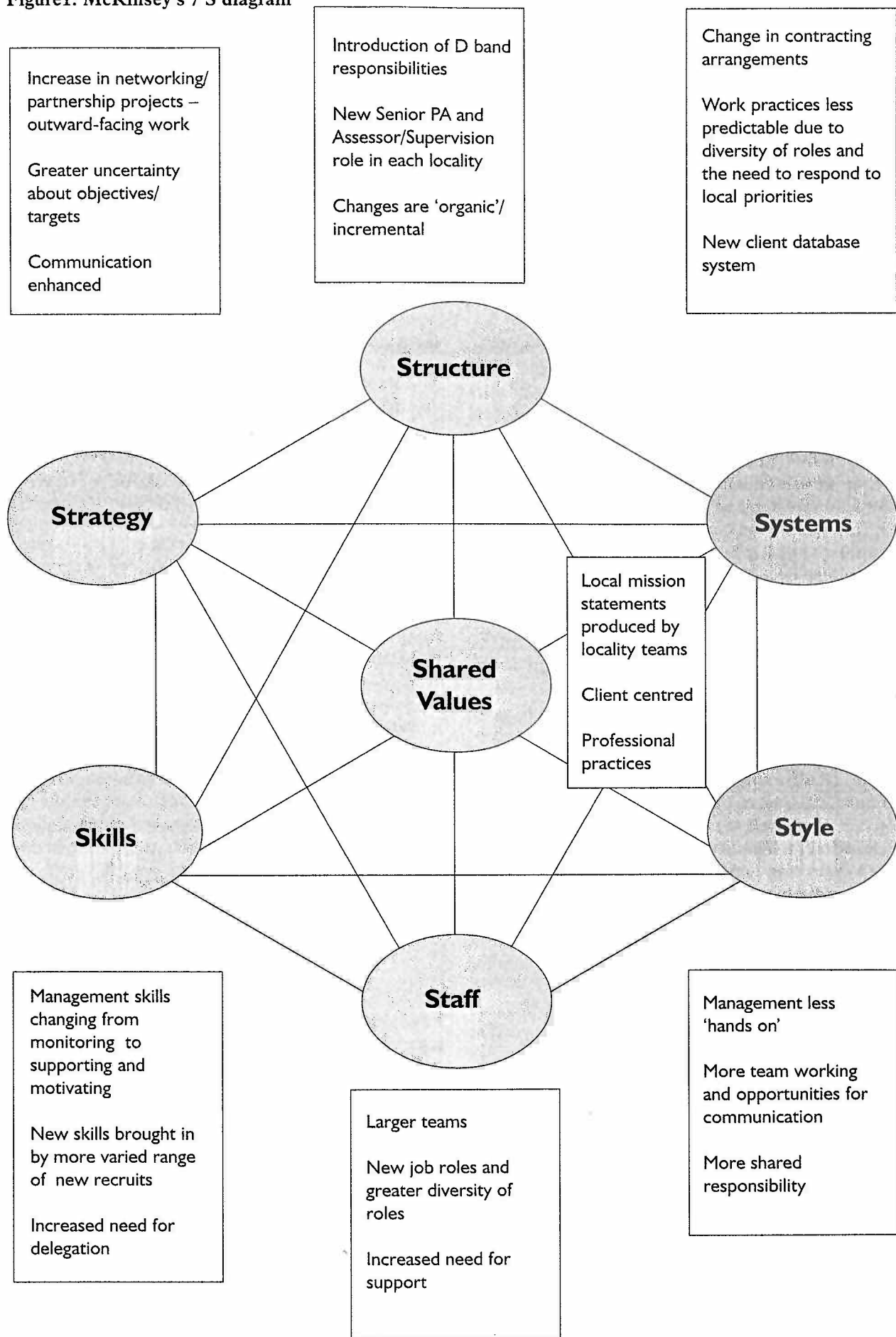
Older definitions of management focused on what managers do, e.g. 'planning, organising, directing and controlling' (Rollinson and Broadfield, 2002 p.60); and suggested a scientific set of skills and competencies aimed at maximising

efficiency through these processes of planning, implementing and monitoring. However, a more flexible and useful definition in this context is framed by Pearce and Robinson (1989) in Hannagan (1998, p.4) as:

'the process of optimizing human, material and financial contributions for the achievement of organisational goals'. It moves away from earlier 'administration and control' descriptions which are more appropriate to a stable organisational environment; and towards a more dynamic and innovating model, more appropriate to 'increasingly complex organisations and a rapidly changing economic and social environment' (Hannagan, 1998, p.5).

'Leadership is a slippery thing to define' (Parkin, 2003, p.12), but Buchanan & Huczynski (1997, p.606) suggest that it is 'a social process in which one individual influences the behaviour of others without the use or threat of violence'

Figure 1: McKinsey's 7 S diagram



towards a common aim. Its value within an organisation is as a 'cheaper, less obtrusive and more effective means of control than simply directing people's efforts and maintaining compliance' (Rollison & Broadfield, 2002, p.363) since leadership styles can 'directly impact on motivation, effort and performance' (Bass & Avolio, p.202). The contingency model of leadership 'suggests a requirement for leaders to develop a portfolio of leadership styles' (Bush & Glover, 2003 p.13), selected to suit 'specific circumstances and key situational variables' (Rollison & Broadfield, 2002, p.377). These include not only the relationship between leader and group, and the nature of the task, (Felder, in Rollison & Broadfield, 2002) but also environmental factors (House, in Rollison & Broadfield, 2002).

There is also an interesting 'contractual' element to leadership in that it 'is acknowledged and effectively "granted" by others' (Law & Glover, 2000, p.23). 'Leaders become so because other people confer the authority to influence their behaviour, ... - leadership is conferred from below, not above' (Rollinson & Broadfield, 2002 p.361). There is an unwritten contract, independent of job title, whereby followers agree to follow. This is an interesting concept for organisations, offering them opportunities to diffuse influence widely beyond specific job titles, and also highlighting the need to monitor the value systems, goals and influence of emerging 'informal' leaders.

The notion of 'transformational' as opposed to 'transactional' leadership is particularly relevant to the current discussion. Transactional leaders identify the needs of their subordinates and adopt an appropriate contingent style; but, based as it is on the exchange relationships between leader and follower, it 'depends heavily on a stable situation' (Rollinson & Broadfield, 2002 p.394). Transformational leaders, on the other hand, 'help followers develop to higher levels of potential' (Bass & Avolio, 1997, p.203), based on their ability to envision and communicate this new social vision to the group. This type of leadership seems a particularly appropriate model for an organisation in transition. In promoting learning and change, transformational leadership has the potential to 'move followers to go beyond their self-interests to concerns for their group or organisation' (Bass & Avolio, 1997, p.202). The four 'I's of effective leadership (see figure 2) will figure in the analysis which follows, exploring how far they might offer useful evaluation tools or ideas for further leadership development.

Figure 2: The four 'I's of effective leadership (Bass and Avolio, 2000)

- Influence or charisma
- Inspirational motivation
- Intellectual stimulation
- Individual consideration

It is widely recognised that managers and leaders play a crucial role in culture creation. Their 'anxiety-containing function' (Schein, 1997, p.375) is especially relevant during periods of change and learning and can mean that 'learning' leaders assume a perpetually supportive role as followers go through the traumas of growth. Within 'moving' (as opposed to 'stuck') organisations, leaders will enable the acceptance of uncertainty, risk-taking and creativity (Law & Glover, 2000 p.121). Since culture is also a source of identity for an organisation, it becomes increasingly important as collective vulnerability increases in transition, and leaders must 'recognise their own role in creating, embedding and developing a transforming culture' (Schein, 1997, p.377).

Methodology

Middle and senior managers were interviewed for this enquiry including three Area Careers Managers (ACMs) (one of whom also carried an Assistant General Manager designation), a Senior Personal Adviser (PA), two Assistant General Managers (AGMs) and the General Manager (GM), giving a range of strategic and operational views. Brief semi-structured interviews explored perceptions of organisational and role change, and personal reflections on management styles. The interviews consisted of two main questions (figure 3) and were conducted at the end of May 2003, seven months after the launch of the Connexions Partnership in Kent & Medway, to give an insight into how both the preparation for and early effects of this change were affecting CMKM. Following reflection on the first interview, a third question was added in order to elicit perceptions of management style as well as role

Figure 3 – Interview schedule

- How has the ACM role changed over the last year in response to the transition process?
- What would help you/ACMs to operate even more effectively in the current environment?

Third question added following the first interview:

- How has your management style changed?

Key Issues emerging from the data

There was considerable agreement among interviewees on a number of common themes, firstly, that the introduction of 'Connexions (was) broadening the range ... of what we're suppose to do' (AGM 2) and that many of our changes were a 'response to the much more complex environment that we're in now' (GM). There was also little doubt among all interviewees that the growth in networking and inter-agency activities with partner organisations which pre-dates Connexions has had a huge impact on the ACM role, both in terms of time pressures ('I could spend every day going to meetings' - ACM 1) and the nature of the role ('it's gone from an inward to an outward facing role' - ACM 3).

As a result, delegation emerges as a common concern, with managers 'thinking (more) about how tasks can be delegated' (AGM1 and most other interviewees), often connected with comments about 'implicit trust in staff to ... know they'll get on with it' (ACM/AGM 3). Alongside this run concerns about making the 'D' grade roles work effectively (Senior PA, ACM 1), and looking forward to the introduction of the two new part time management roles in the locality – a permanent Senior PA and a Supervision/Assessment Co-ordinator (SAC).

The increasing diversity of staff was also a universal theme, associated with the need for role definition – 'actually developing the posts ... from scratch' (AGM1) – and 'enhanced support' (Senior PA) for staff in new situations. There was a clear tension between the reduced availability and visibility of managers and the increased need for support to staff.

Several interviewees commented on the decline in emphasis on monitoring. Whereas previously 'ACMs were able to be just overseeing' (Senior PA), 'now we can't just adopt a monitoring style because there are things that are not easily monitored' (AGM 2) – the nature of targets and objectives have changed significantly from counting activities to ensuring a contribution to wider objectives. Hence, there were also comments on the greater uncertainty among staff about objectives and the need for greater clarity – 'to ensure that what we need to be doing is really explained, shared and looked at locally' (Senior PA); and 'the need for SMT to be clearer about key priorities for area managers' (AGM 2).

Some individual perspectives should also be highlighted. The GM spoke of having a conscious communication strategy and the importance of shared values. One manager made reference to a 'model' of managing – a quality cycle of fourteen steps (ACM 3), akin to the 'interact ... and see what the outcome is' strategy of Rajan (in Barnard, 2003, p.15) - reviewing and revising after each move in unpredictable territory.

Analysis of key issues

Based on interviewees' comments, the analysis that follows will explore how CMKM is changing, and how the four 'I's of transformational leadership (figure 2) might enhance development on four fronts: delegation, role clarity, communication and team working.

An organisation in transition

The evidence from the research suggests an organisational going through complex structural, systems and cultural change with a corresponding need for managers to demonstrate leadership as well as management skills. As Kotter notes (in Carnall, 2003, p.147) 'management is about

coping with complexity. Leadership is about coping with change'. Organisational characteristics and changes within CMKM, plotted on the McKinsey 7 S framework (figure 1) show how change in one area influences another, e.g. the growth in locality team sizes (Staffing) has influenced the new posts created (Structural). The changes in targets and objectives under 'Strategy' have given rise to an increased need for support, and a requirement for different management and leadership 'Skills'. The 'Shared values' were not articulated by any respondents, possibly an indication that they are acknowledged as all pervasive, that there has been little change in this section, just a reinforcement through the production of locality mission statements.

There is also evidence that CMKM is losing some of its classical and bureaucratic features (e.g. a lone manager in each locality and prescribed targets and work practices) in favour of more organic and contingent characteristics (e.g. collegial management, team working and innovation to meet local needs). Human resource considerations have always been a strong characteristic of the organisation and the current transition has served only to strengthen this feature.

From the analysis of interview data, significant features of the CMKM transition process can be deduced (figure 4).

Figure 4: The CMKM transition process	
Pre-Connexions	Connexions era
Contracted directly with a government agency, with a track record of contract negotiation	Subcontracted to an newly formed, local agency, responding to central government agenda
Employed mainly technically trained, usually experienced, qualified staff	Employs a range of unqualified/trainee staff with wide range of different backgrounds
Management based on technical expertise, experienced in monitoring/counting, 'doing things right'	Management of change New leadership styles? 'Doing the right thing'?
Comprehensive QA system gives policy, practice papers, procedures	New activities and work practices do not necessarily 'fit' procedures
Little diversity in job roles, one major contract to deliver Diversity of new roles responding to Connexions agenda, variety of additional contracts	Diversity of new roles responding to Connexions agenda, variety of additional contracts

It is in the light of these changes that the organisation has had to ask itself 'Are we organised effectively to deliver in this new environment?'

Delegation

Comments about delegation were unanimous, although there was no data on the models managers used and little on what tasks were delegated. The need to delegate has grown with larger teams; greater support needs for new, trainee and 'uncertain' staff; and with the requirement for managers to spend time networking outside the organisation. Time pressures and a more diverse management role have thus created the need to share more management functions, - not only planning, organising and monitoring; but also supporting, motivating and developing staff. Senior managers have identified and responded to this need, and structural change has created new posts in each locality with the aim of sharing management responsibilities, co-ordinating caseload supervision and support for trainee staff. These roles will further distribute leadership through all levels of the organisation. As in schools, leadership 'can occur at a variety of levels' (Murgatroyd & Reynolds, in Law & Glover, 2000, p.37). In his recent book, John Adair writes that 'leadership is a personal journey that all are capable of' (quoted Radford, p.37, *Management Today*).

In the absence of specific mention of delegation strategies, one suggestion to enhance effectiveness of this new development, might be to explore possible models with both experienced and newly appointed staff, promoting a shared understanding and common language in this new context. It will be important for ACMs to be clear about what is to be delegated, aims and objectives, and how much freedom of action is being given. For example, the Tannenbaum/Schmidt leadership continuum (in Wilson, 2000, p.43) could be a useful tool for managers. They could select a style, along a scale from autocratic to democratic, depending on the levels of managerial authority needed and freedom to be granted to act on initiative, based on the nature of the task and the skill level of the individual.

Delegation as a function of transformational leadership, should also be based on the needs of staff to develop their potential (Bass & Avolio, 2000, p.202), as well as on the needs of the organisation, thus contributing to the 'intellectual stimulation' element of the indicators. In delegating, transformational leaders encourage 'a questioning of old ways of doing things, a breaking with the past' (Bass & Avolio, 2000, p.204) helping followers to think about old problems in new ways and to consider creative ways of developing themselves. They will be looking to provide learning opportunities through 'individual consideration' of delegated tasks, building trust and motivating, by agreeing attainable goals and empowering the individual.

Role clarity

Some uncertainty was indicated amongst staff--an expected by-product of the transition process, but also intensified by changes in the nature of business plan objectives, the new contracting process with the Connexions Partnership and the proliferation of new Personal Adviser roles. Both interviewees and their staff were looking for more clarity in objectives and a clearer definition of roles, whether newly created, or subject to changing priorities, or responding to new demands.

According to Morgan (1986, p.23), tools and instruments for clarifying and communicating role tasks 'are mechanical devices invented and developed to aid in performing some kind of goal-oriented activity'. CMKM's response to the need for greater role clarity has been to develop a new format for performance review paperwork which allows individuals to see how their targets contribute to team and organisational objectives. It has also included more directive support materials for NVQ trainees, giving specific development tasks on a monthly basis, and increased emphasis on induction materials.

However, while bureaucratic controls may provide clarity on paper and assist progress reviews, there is a danger that checklists will stifle creativity. It will be through the mediating action of transformational leadership that the meaning of work roles can be clearly communicated using these tools. Bass & Avolio's second indicator of 'inspirational motivation' could also be a fruitful field for exploration in terms of all managers recognising appropriate symbols and images which might usefully be incorporated into communication of the company vision.

Communication

Communication was highlighted by the General Manager as a conscious strategy in response to the transition process and indeed is fundamental to all formal and informal processes within an organisation, e.g. performance review, induction, professional assessment, continuous improvement groups, team meetings and the informal transactions between team members. It 'has meaning beyond mere words and is a key attribute possessed by successful leaders' (Law & Glover, 2000, p.81). It is fundamental to the promotion of vision and its quality will either promote or hinder transformation.

Messages to staff need to be, like those of G.W. Bush (Thew, in Brown, 2003, p.15), 'clear, simple, consistent and sincere'. And as well as giving clarity about what we do, 'big picture messages' could also help to communicate the vision that CMKM is a learning organisation, successfully coping with change, through transformational processes embedded at all levels.

Effective leadership and communication depends on process skills – active listening, empathy and authenticity – to motivate, to promote reflection and self-development and to enable goal setting. At times of change, when there seems to be so much to *tell* staff, listening – “an active search for meaning” (Robbins, 1997 p 135) – becomes even more important. This was recognised early in the transition process and regular opportunities for sharing and listening were introduced, e.g information sharing and collective work planning became an important element of team meetings and staff days. Locally produced mission statements were encouraged, and senior managers made themselves available to listen to, and act on, concerns raised at team meetings.

Interviewees did not explicitly mention feelings and emotions, although the increased need for support to staff was clear. A leader needs to understand how people feel as they travel through the change process (Pollard, 2002) by picking up on spoken, or unspoken, cues. And, like a good career guidance practitioner, a leader will start from where staff are now, allowing them to grieve or celebrate before helping them to build energy for change by focusing of a future vision. Carnell (2003, p.255) describes this as the need to ‘feel their way forward in a period of change’. This empathy, or use of emotional intelligence, allows a leader ‘to sense the unstated feelings of everyone in the group and to articulate them for the first time’ (Goleman, 2002, p.36) and thus build the trust and respect required for Bass & Avolio’s ‘idealized influence or charisma’ (2000, p.202).

Team work

Team work was the subject of few comments by interviewees. This is possibly because it is such a fundamental aspect of the organisation and thus taken as read, or possibly because its strengths as a transformational strategy, and a source of support and learning, are not being fully exploited. It is included here as a key issue because a team based approach ‘typically increases the adaptability of organisations in dealing with their environments’ (Morgan, 1997, p.54), and is a ‘sign of a more organic, less mechanistic organisation’ (Morgan, 1997 p 34). It has also been suggested that ‘effective teams are often a sign of an effective leader’ (Law & Glover, 2000, p.84). Murgatroyd & Gray (in Law & Glover, 2000), ‘identify four criteria related to the quality of the relationships which they see as important in evaluating ... the work of teams – empathy, warmth, genuineness and concreteness.’ These should be readily recognised by guidance workers, as they are also key to effective rapport-building with clients.

Much has already been done to strengthen the operation of teams within CMKM including the recognition of functional groups through designations, like ‘the Community Guidance Team’; support and leadership from senior and middle managers for a wide variety of teams

across the company; and time officially set aside for team meetings. Effective interaction between team members can promote a range of ‘healthy’ outcomes, including role definition with reference to others, reflection and learning from practice (Schon, 1996), providing support and appreciating the capabilities of others. Woodcock (in Law & Glover, 2000) ‘likens the team to a family which ... generates commitment and provides a “place to be”, so meeting a basic human need to belong’. Effective teamwork could satisfy one concern raised in the research data about staff who operate remotely from company premises for much of the time – there is still the need for them to feel and be an integral part of the organisation.

The encouragement of team work is an important development strategy. It ‘diffuses influence and control, allowing people at the middle and lower levels of an organisation to make contributions’ (Morgan, 1997, p.54); and it provides a sense of belonging, of support and facilitates learning from colleagues.

Conclusions

Like career theory, management theory ‘can be seen as a mongrel form of social science, borrowing as necessary (from a range of disciplines, including social and psychological) and, because it is concerned with people and their behaviour, there is an element of unpredictability about the whole process’ (Hannagan, 1998, p.7). For this reason, successful leaders (and guidance practitioners and jazz players) have to improvise (Barnard, 2003). Like career theory, management and leadership models are being reappraised in these ‘post-Newtonian, chaos times’ (Barnard, 2003, p.15) and interpretivist rather than positivist approaches are being adopted (Killeen, 1996).

Transformational leadership takes organisations beyond the mechanistic management processes of planning, implementing and monitoring; and into territory where an unpredictable environment make vision, learning and feelings, influence and trust, humility and charisma, respect and consideration all major concepts and qualities for leaders to understand and harness. For CMKM, transformational leadership will be the key to enhanced organisational effectiveness in the Connexions era.

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