

Tailoring the Career Counselling Model to the Needs of Clients

Tina Sirois-LeBlanc, University of New Brunswick, Counselling Services
Jeffrey Landine, University of New Brunswick, Counselling Services

University of New Brunswick
Fredericton, NB Canada

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Introduction

Career development issues and, more specifically, career indecision have garnered increased attention in university and college settings over the past decade, perhaps as a result of retention concerns and a steady increase in the number of students (Jurgens, 2000). Career decision-making is a developmental process that appears to be key at times of transition, such as the university years, when someone prepares to embark on a new career path (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). Many university students seek counselling for support and direction in their career planning process. Each year, the University of New Brunswick (UNB) Counselling Services sees approximately 350 students with career difficulties. In 1981 the Counselling Foundation of Canada provided a SEED grant to develop a Career Resource Centre within Counselling Services. This grant provided, in addition to materials and resources, for the hiring of a Coordinator of Career Programming and a Career Library Assistant. All of this was done in response to the pressing need to help students in their career development process. In the time since that step was taken, Counselling Services' role has expanded to include even more diverse career activities. Attention has been paid to the quality of these services, and, more recently, the role has expanded again to include participation in the advancement of research in the field of career development. We feel that this expanded role is very appropriate as a student service department in an academic setting. This paper will outline the steps taken by UNB Counselling Services to enhance its career counselling model by including a career needs assessment, an increase in career services offered through workshop format, and continuous research to assure quality of services and further development.

The Need for a New Career Counselling Model

The need to alter the career counselling model at UNB Counselling Services came from a realization that there were gaps in the previous delivery of career services. These gaps were discovered through the constant informal review of the services throughout the years and the study of different counselling models used at the university level. The Director of Counselling Services led the way by requiring a shift in our philosophy as a counselling centre, going back to a developmental model, which was the centre's dominant theory in the 70s. In order to utilize a developmental model, our centre would need to implement interventions based on theories that help us understand the developmental tasks facing our particular student population (Chickering, 1993). When it comes to career planning, UNB Counselling Services thought it would be fitting to change the career intake process and delivery of services in order to fulfill the requirements of a developmental model, thereby helping students master the tasks required in the career planning process.

The previous career counselling model consisted of three major elements: an initial intake interview, a tour of the Career Resource Centre, and the possibility of accessing individual career counselling. Although this model was functioning adequately, it was clear that having a developmental focus would be more effective for the students. The difficulties with our old model can be summarized in two points. First, no career needs screening assessment was used in the initial contact with Counselling Services, which meant that the identification of the particular needs of a client relied solely on the counsellor's judgment during the initial interview. This subjective assessment strategy led to inconsistencies in our services because of the different perceptions of each counsellor. According to Gati, Krausz and Osipow (1996) "... identifying the unique difficulties that prevent individuals from reaching a (career) decision is an essential step in providing them with the help they need (p.510)." This task is easier to accomplish with the use of a career needs assessment in addition to the counsellor's expertise. The second difficulty was an inefficient use of our human resources, where the counsellors were offering only individual counselling. As a result of the need for career counselling exceeding our counsellor capacity, a waiting list developed. Although students were introduced to our Career Resource Centre at the initial interview, which they could use independently while waiting for individual career counselling, we recognized that adding a group format for delivering our career services would be effective in meeting the needs of more students in a timely manner and could be an excellent avenue to focus on key developmental tasks. With much of the current research on career development among university students focused on defining effective means of delivering career services and determining how to match services to the particular needs of these clients (Austin, Dahl, and Wagner, 2003; Gribben and Keitel, 1992; Jurgens, 2000; McAuliffe, Pickering, and Calliotte, 1991), a new career model was proposed, piloted and implemented at UNB Counselling Services in September of 2003. This new career model, which will be further detailed in this paper, now includes a career needs screening assessment, additional delivery of services offered through groups focused on career developmental tasks, and ongoing research to evaluate the quality of our services.

Choosing a Needs Assessment Inventory

The first undertaking of our career planning model was adding a career needs assessment to our intake procedure. Extensive research was conducted to discover the different career assessments available and to decide which would best correspond to our needs as a counselling service, taking into account utility, validity, reliability, administration time, and cost. After two assessments were piloted with students during the summer of 2003, The Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ) (Gati & Osipow, 2002) was chosen as the assessment that best met the centre's needs since it satisfied all five criteria considered.

The CDDQ is a measure of career indecision that was developed to test a theoretical taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties. Gati, Krausz and Osipow (1996) identified decision-making difficulties from theory, empirical literature, and the input of experienced vocational psychologists. The hierarchy they developed distinguishes between difficulties experienced prior to and during the decision-making process. Prior difficulties include Lack of Readiness, a category comprised of Lack of Motivation, General Indecisiveness, and Dysfunctional Beliefs. Difficulties encountered during the process are categorized either as Lack of Information (About the Decision-Making Process, About Self, About Occupations, and About Ways of Obtaining Information) or as Inconsistent Information (Unreliable Information, Internal Conflicts, and External Conflicts). The CDDQ has been researched with a variety of populations (especially at the university level) and has shown to be a valid and reliable measure in research and practice (Osipow & Gati, 1998). Most importantly, for this line of research, the CDDQ has proven useful in comparison to other measures of career indecision in defining the specific problems experienced by individuals around career decision making (Gati, Osipow, Krausz, & Saka, 2000; Kelly & Lee, 2002). Other studies (Gati, Osipow, Krausz, & Saka, 2000; Jurgens, 2000; Austin, Dahl, & Wagner, 2003) have examined the effectiveness of matching career interventions to the particular needs of clients and at least one of these (Gati, Osipow, Krausz, & Saka, 2000) used the CDDQ and determined that it is effective in assessing a range of specific difficulties which become the focus of the counsellor's attention and interventions. Since the primary goal of Counselling Services was to have a screening tool to help identify specific career difficulties in order to better tailor interventions and develop appropriate workshops, the CDDQ was determined to be the most appropriate assessment.

In addition to these advantages, the CDDQ has a short administration time (10-15 minutes), the printed feedback is immediate, clear and complete (no need to send in the results or do hand scoring), and the author can authorize reprints of the CDDQ free of charge. The CDDQ is also available on-line, which can be very convenient for some organizations. To explore the CDDQ and the printed feedback, or to obtain more information on its theoretical background, validity and reliability, visit the authors' website: <http://go.to/cddq>.

The Delivery of Career Services Through Workshops

Jurgens (2000) asserts, based on her research, that on-campus career counsellors can confidently offer a variety of treatment modalities with the knowledge that combining several interventions has proven effective in assisting students with career concerns. UNB Counselling Services developed five workshops based on the counsellors' perception of the immediate needs of the clients (the career difficulties that seemed to come up more often on the CDDQ), and these were piloted during the 2003-2004 academic year. A needs assessment was conducted after the accumulation of the CDDQ data during that year. Some adjustments were made to the workshops according to these results, the workshop feedback given by the students who participated, and each workshop facilitator's observations and awareness of career developmental tasks. In the future, with more resources, additional workshops would be offered (one to address each career difficulty identified by the CDDQ), but considering time and resources, the following series of five workshops was implemented for the 2004-2005 school year.

After completing the CDDQ as a screening instrument, students are referred to any or all of the workshops as directed by the CDDQ results and the expressed needs of the student at the initial interview with the counsellor. Elevated scores on Dysfunctional Beliefs, Internal Conflicts, and/or External conflicts will prompt a referral to the "Taking the fear out of making a career choice" workshop. The objective of this workshop is to recognize and understand the fears, irrational thoughts, and career myths that often cause anxiety, which in turn block students in their career decision-making process. The workshop activities are based on a fun "bird typology" that has been developed by two counsellors at the college level (Farladeau & Roy, 1999), which compares the different types of students to different birds and explores the fears they have around career decision-making. Elevated scores on Lack of Information about Self suggests that any or preferably all of the "Developing self-awareness" workshops (What can I do and what will make me happy?; Let's talk about interests; What does my personality have to do with my career?) may be warranted. These workshops are developed to complement each other since they focus on identifying four essential areas of understanding for career decision-making: skills, values, interests and personality. One workshop leads the student through an

experiential activity that highlights life experiences and the resulting skills and work values. The two other workshops use explorative activities in addition to formal assessments to explore the students' interests (Strong Interest Inventory) and personality type (Myers Briggs Type Inventory). In this series of self-awareness workshops the information gathered is always complemented by a brainstorming of possible career paths to help the students process the information they are gathering about themselves and then link this knowledge to possible career options. Finally, high scores on Lack of Information about Occupations and Lack of Information about Additional Sources of Information prompt a referral to the "Career information: Finding your way through the maze" workshop. It is recommended that the career information workshop be the last one taken since it introduces students to the Career Resource Centre where they can explore career options by finding desired career information on different career alternatives. This final workshop helps students process the information accumulated from all the workshops in order to continue their career planning process and choose between appropriate alternatives.

These five workshops (each workshop approximately two hours in duration) are offered by counsellors and the career resource centre assistant and occur on a weekly basis throughout the academic year. There is continuity between the workshops so that the students understand the career planning process and how each workshop is linked together in helping them make a more informed career decision. It is understood that the workshops are only a beginning and that students will need to continue to gather career information in the Career Resource Centre, or through other means such as informational interviews, job shadowing, or volunteering. Some of the students need help in processing the information acquired from the workshops; hence individual career counselling is always available to them. It has been our experience that very few students have come back for individual counselling since these workshops began two years ago.

The feedback received from the students since the beginning of the workshops has been very positive. In general, students enjoyed the workshops and cited that these helped them move forward in their own career planning. For UNB Counselling Services, the workshops were invaluable in addressing the resource shortage. Since the workshops have been implemented, it has greatly impacted the length of the waiting list and the level of active engagement of counsellors and students in the various career development activities.

Evaluation of Services and Ongoing Research

With the new career counselling model involving changes in the intake procedure and the delivery of services, it was crucial to evaluate the outcome of the modifications, as well as use the results in the advancement of career research. Although the feedback from the students and the counsellors facilitating the workshops was positive, we decided that the CDDQ could also provide a more formal method of evaluation of the services, as well as a means to explore other career questions. Hence, a research component of this project was undertaken, starting with the formation of a research team with diverse skills and interests, representing a number of faculties on campus. The purpose of the research team was to plan and implement the research model and assess the resulting data. After obtaining approval from the UNB research ethics board of review, the initial stage of research, for the academic year 2004-2005, was aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the workshops at meeting the specific career decision-making needs of our clients.

In order to test our main hypothesis (UNB Counselling Services workshops are effective in helping clients resolve their career decision-making difficulties), the CDDQ was administered pre and post intervention. The resulting data will be examined in the summer of 2005. We will be able to conclude a positive impact of the workshops if the scores on each student's CDDQ (looking at each career decision-making difficulty separately) are lower (showing a significant positive change) after completing the recommended career workshops. It is also expected to see a drop in the level of difficulty around "Lack of information about the decision-making process" since we have made changes to include this aspect in all of our workshops, without developing a specific workshop to attend to this issue. Analyzing the CDDQ data will also help us identify which difficulties are more appropriately addressed through our workshops and which needs, if any, aren't addressed adequately. This will help us further enhance the content of our workshops and may possibly lead to developing new workshops to address other career difficulties.

Finally, as part of the ongoing research effort, the team has identified age, gender, years of education, family involvement in career choice, and additional career development/exploration processes as variables of interest. As research continues more variables of interest will be considered and other research questions will be explored. UNB Counselling Services is committed to the continuous use of the research data to enhance our career services, as well as to expand on this research project in the upcoming years and share the results of our findings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper outlined the process taken by UNB Counselling Services in changing its existing career counselling model, which consisted of an initial interview, career information resources, and possible on-going individual counselling, to an enhanced developmental model, which included a screening career assessment (CDDQ), the initial interview, and additional services offered through workshops. The workshops were developed based on the theoretical framework of the CDDQ, which takes into account key developmental tasks in career decision-making. Students are referred to relevant workshops according to their reported career difficulties identified by the CDDQ. Finally, it was noted that evaluation of this new model is in progress and will hopefully confirm the main hypothesis that UNB's Counselling Services' career workshops have a significant and positive impact in addressing career difficulties of university students.

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