Problem Mapping in Career Counseling: The Nexus of Career and Mental Health Counseling

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Common Questions from Clients in Career Counseling

- What should I major in?
- What jobs or occupations are suitable for me?
- I’ve just been laid off and need a job. Can you help me?
How can a counselor and client acquire a full appreciation and common understanding of the life context out of which these questions arise?
Problem Mapping

A projective technique that enables a client to construct elements of the problem space
Career Problem Space

All cognitive and affective components contained in working memory as individuals approach a career problem-solving task.
Problem Space Worksheet

- A list of all elements in the problem space
- A spatial representation of elements in the problem space
The Purpose of Problem Mapping

- A screening measure used in intake assessment
- An assessment of complexity in readiness for career counseling
- An exploration of the Communication Phase of the CASVE Cycle
- A component in the development of an ILP
Procedures

- **STEP 1:** Elicitation
- **STEP 2:** Construction
- **STEP 3:** Elaboration
- **STEP 4:** Individualized Learning Plan
STEP 1: ELICITATION

- Compose elements of the problem space
STEP 2: CONSTRUCTION

- Draw a spatial representation of the space
STEP 3: ELABORATION

- Explore
  - Influence of each element
  - Relative influence of each element
  - Relationship among elements
  - Relationship to other assessments
  - Elements that require further exploration
STEP 4: ILP

- Develop an Individualized Learning Plan
CASE STUDY: Ned

- 24 year-old computer programmer
- Married, no children
- Complains of boredom, monotony
- Wants a more exciting career path
Screening Assessments: Ned

- Interview
- Problem Space Worksheet
- Career Thoughts Inventory
Ned’s List of Elements

Problem Space Worksheet

Name: NED  Date:

The career decision you are considering: CAREER / POSTGRAD STUDIES

The Problem Space can be thought of as the mental and emotional environment in which an individual approaches a problem or task. Below, please list all thoughts, feelings, circumstances, people, or events that bear on the career decision you are considering.

1. INTERESTS
2. FEAR OF BOREDOM / TENDENCY TO GET BORED EASILY
3. FAMILY
4. AVAILABILITY OF JOBS
5. JOB LOCATIONS
6. BOREDOM AT PRESENT JOB
7. FEAR OF NETWORKING
8. ETHICS
9. ANXIETY / UNCERTAINTY
10. 
The large circle below represents the Problem Space of your career decision. Draw circles within the large circle to represent each item on your list. Use the size of the circles you draw to represent the relative importance of each item. Be sure to label each circle.
Ned’s CTI

- Total: T=61
- Decision-Making Confusion: T=60
- External Conflict: T=60
- Commitment Anxiety: T=69
Individual Career Learning Plan  
The Career Center  
Florida State University

**Goal(s) #1** Explore options for a graduate degree

**Goal(s) #2** Improve networking skills

**Goal(s) #3** Increase social interactions among family members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Purpose/Outcome</th>
<th>Estimated Time Commitment</th>
<th>Goal #</th>
<th>Priority</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual career counseling</td>
<td>Enhance knowledge of Self and career options</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complete Self-Directed Search</td>
<td>Enhance self knowledge</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explore available graduate degree programs</td>
<td>Enhance knowledge of options</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complete MMPI</td>
<td>Enhance self knowledge; explore factors affecting career decision;</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice interacting with other people at work and in neighborhood</td>
<td>Gain experience in interactions</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive restructuring techniques and reality testing</td>
<td>Learn to manage anxiety in certain situation</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Revised) Consult with university psychiatrist regarding chronic anxiety and depression</td>
<td>Improve quality of life and improve outlook</td>
<td>One week</td>
<td>1 &amp; 3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This plan may be modified by either party based upon new information learned in the activities of the action plan. The purpose of the plan is to work toward a mutually agreed upon career goal. Activities may be added or subtracted as needed.

NED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student/Client</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Career Counselor</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</thead>
</table>

**Figure 2. Ned’s Individualized Learning Plan**
Ned’s MMPI

MMPI Profile of Ned
Population Characteristics of Problem Mapping Task

- Participants were students enrolled in an undergraduate career planning course
  - n=95
  - 47 males, 48 females
  - 18-23 years old (m=20)
  - 59% Caucasian, 14% Hispanic-American, 14% African-America
  - 37% Business majors, 12% undecided
Procedures

- Group Administration
- Informed Consent
- Instructions Read Aloud
- 5 Minutes Recommended to List Factors
- 3 Minutes Recommended for Mapping
- Maximum Time Used: 11 Minutes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRINCIPLE DIMENSION</th>
<th>CONSTRUCT DEFINITION</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Quality of Life      | The manifestation of values in the work environment to which an individual aspires.                                                                                                                                       | - Happiness  
                        |                                                                  | - Prestige  
                        |                                                                  | - Leisure Time  
                        |                                                                  | - Travel  
                        |                                                                  | - Variety  |
| Money               | Factors pertaining to the financial costs and benefits associated with a given career choice.                                                                                                                         | - Salary  
                        |                                                                  | - Benefit packages  
                        |                                                                  | - Cost of Education  |
| Family              | Issues surrounding members of the nuclear or extended family, individually or as a unit.                                                                                                                              | - Mother  
                        |                                                                  | - Parents  
                        |                                                                  | - Uncles  |
| Education           | All factors relating to the acquisition of the knowledge necessary for a given career choice.                                                                                                                                 | - Major  
                        |                                                                  | - Length of program  
                        |                                                                  | - Difficulty of coursework  |
| Interests           | The emotional arousal associated with the career domain being considered.                                                                                                                                              | - Interesting  
                        |                                                                  | - Not boring  
                        |                                                                  | - I enjoy working with computers  |
| Self-doubt          | Any statements that reflect an individuals’ insecurity regarding their character or abilities.                                                                                                                           | - Can I do the job?  
                        |                                                                  | - Am I smart enough?  
                        |                                                                  | - I always change my mind  |
| Employment          | All statements referring to obtaining the desired career position.                                                                                                                                                     | - Job market  
                        |                                                                  | - Can I get a job after graduation?  
                        |                                                                  | - Advancement opportunities  |
# Normative Distribution Across the Code

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of Problem Space</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Mean Area Used (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
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<td>21.2</td>
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<td>Self-Doubt</td>
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<td>Location</td>
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<td>Skills</td>
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<td>Significant Others</td>
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<td>Spirituality</td>
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<td>0.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unclassified</td>
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Modal Student Taking a Career Planning Course

- Education: 12.6%
- Employment: 6.6%
- Interests: 8.4%
- Self-Doubt: 8.0%
- Family: 11.9%
- Money: 14.3%

Quality of Life: 21.2%

Correlation coefficients: r = -0.34**, r = -0.29**, r = -0.27**, r = -0.11,
### Correlation with CTI Total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of Problem Space</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>$r$</th>
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<td>Work</td>
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<td>-0.00</td>
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</table>
Variety of Maps

Random Placement

Bull’s Eye

Pie Shape
Interesting Examples

Problem Space Worksheet

Name __________________________ Date _______________

The career decision you are considering ____________________________

The Problem Space can be thought of as the mental and emotional environment in which an individual approaches a problem or task. Below, please list all thoughts, feelings, circumstances, people, or events that bear on the career decision you are considering.

1. Religious beliefs
2. Need to make good money
3. Want to be a homemaker - not driven towards career
4. Fear won't find a husband
5. Fear won't enjoy dentistry
6. Not very good at science
7. Want everyone to be proud of me
8. Want to be the best I can
9. Need to succeed in my career
10. Wonder I won't find the right career for me

Contradictions

Problem Space Worksheet

Name __________________________ Date _______________

The career decision you are considering ____________

The Problem Space can be thought of as the mental and emotional environment in which an individual approaches a problem or task. Below, please list all thoughts, feelings, circumstances, people, or events that bear on the career decision you are considering.

1. Moving away from family
2. Afraid I will do a bad job
3. Always traveling with my job
4. Leaving my friends
5. Finding a significant other in Tallahassee before I leave?
6. Entering the real world
7. Supporting myself - paying back loans
8. __________________________
9. __________________________
10. __________________________

Underlying Themes
Strengths and Advantages of Problem Mapping

- Holistic Appraisal
- Full Range of Factors
- Externalizes the Problem
- A Means for Organization of Thoughts
- Circumscribing Affect
- Common Mental Model
- Inexpensive and Easy to Administer
Limitations and Caveats

- Here-and-Now Perceptions
- Invokes Strong Emotions
- Counselor’s Own Projections
- Unused Space
- Client’s Level of Involvement
- Counselor’s Level of Involvement
Questions?