Connecting Career and Mental Health Counseling: Integrating Theory and Practice

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Career, Work, and Mental Health

- Individuals seeking career counseling often present a complex array of issues, and thus it is difficult for counselors to separate career satisfaction and development from other mental health issues...

Career and Mental Health Issues are Inextricable in Many Cases

- Linda is depressed because she has not done well in high school and she has been very discouraged about her options after she graduates. Is this a career problem or a depression problem?

- Alberto is worried about getting into medical school. He is not sleeping well at night and has become upset because his family and girlfriend are putting pressure on him. Is this a career problem or a relationship problem?

- Fred returns home after work each day burdened with insoluble problems and the victim of a punitive supervisor. He feels sexually impotent with his wife. Is this a career problem or a problem of sexual dysfunction?

(Adapted from Krumboltz, 1993)
Unemployment, problematic work relationships, and stressful work conditions play significant roles in the development of physical and mental health problems and many times are indicators of the onset of mental illness.¹

Work and family factors interact and influence job and marital satisfaction.²

Stressful life events, including those career-related, have been repeatedly identified to precede the onset of mental illness. Stressors can trigger underlying biological, physiological, and psychological illness.³

Clients who present for career concerns also feel the need to address education-related issues and egodystonic emotions related to work.  

Personality factors that affect mental health are also related to career choice, career progression, and work behaviors and that these personality traits are hereditary and remain stable over the course of the lifespan.


V. Zunker, 2008

- Holds two fundamental assumptions for conceptualizing and integrating clients’ career and personal development:
  - Holism; Whole-Person Approach
  - Biological, psychological, and social/cultural influences; Integrative Approach
The incredible potential for facilitating change through Career Counseling

“There is continuing acknowledgement that the influences upon career choice and adjustment throughout the life span are complex and psychological, as well as social, political, and economic. Such a reality gives growing credence to viewing career counseling as a therapeutic modality that goes beyond dispensing and discussing information or focusing on one’s work life as an isolated piece of behavior.”

(Herr, 1989, p.13)
Program Implementation: The Institution

- Institutional history
- Policies & procedures
- Administrative structure
- Space
- Records
- Tools & resources
Program Implementation: The Personnel

- Professional identity
- Staff credentials
- Supervision & training
- Liability
- Specializations
Synthesis of three career services dimensions: client needs, intervention complexity, staff competencies

A. Level of Client Needs

B. Level of Career Intervention Complexity

C. Level of Competencies and Skills of Counselors and Staff

Case Example: FSU Career Center

Key elements--
- mission
- theory base
- staff credentials & expertise
- access to students in accredited counseling programs at Master’s & PhD level
- nature of training provided
Mission

The mission of The Career Center is to:

- Provide comprehensive career services
- **Train career service practitioners**
- Conduct life/career development research
- Disseminate information about life/career services and issues to the university community, the nation, and the world.
Career theory connected to practice

- Use of cognitive information processing (CIP) theory
- Connection to other counseling theories and interventions (e.g., Beck)
- Constructs from Holland’s theory that point to mental health issues, e.g., profile elevation, low vocational identity—“I am unsure of myself in many areas of my life”
CIP Theory
Pyramid of Information Processing

- Thinking About My Decision Making
- Knowing How I Make Decisions
- Knowing About Myself
- Knowing About My Options
CASVE Cycle

Communication
Identifying the problem - the gap

Analysis
Thinking about alternatives

Synthesis
Generating likely alternatives

Valuing
Prioritizing alternatives

Execution
Taking action to narrow the gap
Executive Processing Domain

- Metacognitions
  - Self-talk
  - Self-awareness
  - Control and monitoring
Screening

Readiness--

The capability of an individual to make appropriate career choices taking into account the complexity of family, social, economic, and organizational factors that influence career development.

Levels of Service Delivery

- Self-Help Services
- Brief Staff-Assisted Services
- Individual Case-Managed Services
CIP Readiness Model

**Complexity** (high)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capability (low)</th>
<th>Complexity (low)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low readiness</td>
<td>Moderate readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High degree of support needed</td>
<td>Moderate to low degree of support needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Individual Case-Managed Services)</td>
<td>(Brief Staff-Assisted Services)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate readiness</td>
<td>High readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate to low degree of support needed</td>
<td>No support needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Brief Staff-Assisted Services)</td>
<td>(Self-Help Mode)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(low)
Staff

- PhDs on site for training, consultation, & supervision
- Access to students enrolled in counseling, counseling psychology, career counseling programs
- Training materials
Assessment Issues

○ How are career assessments influenced by mental health status?

○ What are examples of assessments that bridge career and mental health domains?

○ How are these used in developing an individualized learning plan?
Career/Mental Health Assessments

- Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI)
  - High career/low mental health
- Problem Space (re-named Decision Space) Worksheet
- MMPI
  - Low career/high mental health
What is the CTI?

- Self-administered
- Objectively scored
- 48-Item measure of dysfunctional thoughts in career choice
Theoretical Basis of the CTI

- Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) Theory
- Beck’s Cognitive Theory
Career Thoughts Defined

Outcomes of one’s thinking about

- assumptions,
- attitudes,
- behaviors,
- beliefs,
- feelings,
- plans, or
- strategies

related to career choice
The CTI in Needs Assessment

- Identifying the specific nature of negative thoughts
- Three CTI Construct Scales
  - Decision-making Confusion (DMC)
  - Commitment Anxiety (CA)
  - External Conflict (EC)
- Specific career interventions can be related to specific construct scores
Mental health constructs directly correlated with dysfunctional career thoughts

- indecision
- neuroticism
- anxiety
- angry hostility
- depression
- self-consciousness
- impulsivity
- vulnerability

Using a Decision Space Worksheet (DSW)

- Cognitive mapping task
- Helps clients reveal all thoughts, feelings, persons, circumstances associated with the career decision
- Helps clients prioritize importance of contextual influences
Decision Space Worksheet

- Page 1: list elements
- Page 2: draw circles within a given circle in proportion to the importance of an element
Typical Issues Revealed

- Financial
- Family
- Education
- Interests
- Self doubt
- Employment
- Quality of life
MMPI-2 in Career Counseling

- Assesses personal and social adjustment
- Measures clinical syndromes that may interfere with or block effective decision making
- Used following screening measures such as CTI, DSW, and interview
Key MMPI-2 Scales

- K (Correction)
- Depression (D)
- Psychopathic deviate (Pd)
- Psychasthenia (Pt)
- Schizophrenia (Sc)
- Hypomania (Ma)
- Social introversion (Si)
CASE STUDY: Ned

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

- Intake Interview
- Decision Space Worksheet (formerly called Problem Space Worksheet)
- Career Thoughts Inventory
Ned’s List of Elements

Problem Space Worksheet

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. 

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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 Score: T=61
- Decision-Making Confusion (DMC): T=60
- External Conflict (EC): T=60
- Commitment Anxiety (CA): T=69
Ned’s ILP

**Individual Career Learning Plan**
The Career Center
Florida State University

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

*Goal #2* Improve networking skills

*Goal #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>
</tr>
</thead>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Self-Directed Search</td>
<td>Enhance self knowledge</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore available graduate degree programs</td>
<td>Enhance knowledge of options</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete MMPI</td>
<td>Enhance self knowledge; explore factors affecting career decision; gain experience in interactions</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice interacting with other people at work and in neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive restructuring techniques and reality testing (Revised)</td>
<td>Learn to manage anxiety in certain situation</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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

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

MMPI Profile of Ned
Ned’s Counseling Outcomes

- Identified areas of concern beyond the presenting career decision
- Formulated counseling goals that integrated career and mental health issues
- Involved helping services beyond the career center
- Improved his quality of life related to career goals and peer and family relationships
Using CIP to integrate career and mental health counseling

- Provides a framework or model
- Encourages client involvement
- Identifies areas for exploration
- Builds on existing knowledge
- Enhances the counseling relationship
Using the CTI in practice

- Allows for a holistic approach
- Recognizes the complexities of the process
- Raises client awareness of issues
- Recognizes the impact of other life and mental health concerns
Summary

- Clear support in the literature for integrating these areas
- Important to consider organizational and programmatic issues
- Implementation requires attention to staff resources, internal & external factors
- Theory base can guide decisions about integrating career and mental health counseling
- Assessment tools influence extent to which these factors might be considered
- Unique issues to consider in private practice settings