

Self Career Management: Effectiveness of an Intervention Process



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ABSTRACT

Since the 20th century, careers have undergone crucial changes (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Parker & Inkson, 1999; Thite, 2001), becoming increasingly “boundaryless” and “protean” (e.g., Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 1996; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). Due to this dynamic nature of work organizations (King, 2001, p. 65), career management practices are becoming more and more needed at the different career periods of adulthood (Kidd & Killen, 1992; King, 2001; Watts, 1996). Nevertheless, while traditionally the responsibility for career management was equally distributed between organisations and individuals, nowadays, it seems that this accountability lies almost exclusively on the individual (*in* Sturges, Guest & Davey, 2000). In this context, this study, being part of a larger PhD research, aims to discuss the concept of self career management, derived from Vocational Psychology. In addition, it also intends to present results of the assessment of a self career management intervention efficacy, which was oriented to facilitate that process in workers, at a public university in the northwest of Portugal. The program designated “Personal Career Management Seminar”, invites participants to foster an optimistic vision of their future, to increase their self-knowledge, exploration of advanced training opportunities, employment creation and attainment, as well as, life-career planning and decision-making competencies. For measurement purposes of the intervention impact, it has been used the Career Exploration Survey (CES; Stumpf, Colarelli & Hartman, 1983; EEV, adapt. by Taveira, 1997) to assess the career exploration process, and the Adult Career Concerns Inventory (ACCI; Super, Thompson & Lindeman, 1985; IPC, adapt. by Duarte, 1997), to assess career concerns and valued life-career goals, at a pre and post-test. This measurement plan was administered to 60 research paid workers (38, 63.3% treatment group; 22, 36.7% control group) from both sexes (42, 70% women) with age ranging from 22-48 years old, ($M_{age}=28.12$, $SD_{age}=5.08$), developing their research activities in exact, social and human science domains. In general, the results suggest that at pre-treatment both treatment and control groups are partially equivalent with respect to the assessed dimensions. Furthermore, the outcomes of the post-treatment indicate that this intervention promotes career exploration and reduces the level of career concerns in the experimental group. Main implications for human resources management in work organizations are outlined.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sample

60 research paid workers (38, 63.3% in the treatment group and 22, 36.7% in the control group) developing their research activities at a public university in the northwest of Portugal. Of the sample, 42 (70%) were female, and 18 (30%) were male, ranging in age from 22 to 48 years, with mean age being 28.12 years ($SD_{age}=5.08$).

Table 1. Socio-demographic data

Sample	N	Sex	Age	Work mean time			Company mean time			Function mean time			Function change		
				Mean (SD)	Min.	Max.	Mean (SD)	Min.	Max.	Mean (SD)	Min.	Max.			
Total Sample	60	42	28.12 (5.08)	22	48	49.27 (53.02)	0	216	34.17 (35.94)	0	144	24.25 (28.51)	0	144	19 (31.7%)
Experimental Group	38	22	27.95 (4.47)	22	39	46.50 (50.94)	0	216	39.87 (53.37)	0	144	21.11 (21.00)	0	72	15 (39.5%)
Control Group	22	20	28.95 (6.64)	23	48	54.05 (57.81)	2	180	38.14 (41.99)	2	144	29.68 (38.61)	2	144	4 (18.2%)

Measures

Adult Career Concerns Inventory (ACCI; Super et al., 1985; IPC, adapt. by Duarte, 1997). IPC is a self-administered questionnaire that consists of 61 items, 60 of which organized into groups of 15, each corresponding to the group stages of career exploration (crystallization, specification, implementation; items 1-15), establishment (stabilizing, consolidating, advancing; items 16-30), maintenance (holding, updating, innovating; items 31-45), and disengagement (deceleration, retirement planning, retirement living; items 46-60). The 61st item is constituted of five statements which represent various stages of career change, for which the subject must select the one that best describes his/her current status.

Career Exploration Scale (CES; Stumpf et al., 1983; EEV, adapt. by Taveira, 1997). EEV is a self-administered scale designed to assess five beliefs about exploration (employment outlook, certainty of career exploration outcomes, external search instrumentality, internal search instrumentality and importance of preferred position), four behaviours of the exploration process (extent of environment exploration, extent of self-exploration, intended-systematic exploration, amount of acquired information), and three reactions to exploration (satisfaction with information, exploration stress and decision stress). It is composed of 54 items, 53 using a Likert-type response format, with five response categories in items 1 to 43, and seven response categories in items 44 to 53. The 54th item, using an open response format, allows individuals to specify the number of explored vocational domains.

Procedure and Analyses

The “Personal Career Management Seminar” is structured into three main periods: (a) an introductory session of the process of self-career management; (b) four sessions of 120 minutes each, weekly, in small groups (4 to 7 participants) dedicated to the analysis of the personal career path, the development of an accurate picture of interests, values, preferred life-style, and advanced training and employment opportunities, design of short, medium and long term goals, hypotheses testing, as well as, the improvement of a strategy designed to achieve those goals; and (c) a session of consolidation and conclusion of the seminar. The evaluative measures were applied immediately before and after the psychological intervention, according to a quasi-experimental design. The control group filled out the same questionnaires, in moments of time corresponding to the pre and post sessions of the treatment group. The accomplishment of both questionnaires, in both groups, took approximately 45 minutes. Statistical Program for Social Sciences for Windows – SPSS, Version 15.0, was used to make descriptive statistical analyses for the socio-demographic characteristics of participants, as well as, non-parametric statistical analyses (Mann-Whitney and Wilcoxon), to evaluate the presence or absence of noteworthy differences between groups and intra-groups.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The experimental and control groups were partially equivalent at the time of pre-test, except in five career exploration subscales - internal search instrumentality ($p=.04$), amount of acquired information ($p=.00$), satisfaction with information ($p=.00$), exploration stress ($p=.00$), and decision stress ($p=.01$), - and two career concern subscales - crystallization ($p=.00$), and specification ($p=.00$).

The experimental group achieved, at post-test, career exploration results above the mean score in the internal search instrumentality, external search instrumentality, importance of preferred position, amount of acquired information, satisfaction with information, environment exploration, self-exploration, and employment outlook subscales; and also career concern results above the mean score in all subscales, except in those of the disengagement scale. The control group achieved at post-test career exploration results above the mean score in the external search instrumentality, internal search instrumentality, importance of preferred position, satisfaction with information, and amount of acquired information; and also career concern results above the mean score only in the subscales corresponding to establishment and maintenance phases.

For the experimental group, the difference in the proportion of responses was statistically significant in eight subscales of EEV - employment outlook ($p=.00$), certainty of exploration outcomes ($p=.00$), internal search instrumentality ($p=.00$), self-exploration ($p=.00$), environment exploration, ($p=.00$) amount of acquired information ($p=.00$), satisfaction with information ($p=.00$), and exploration stress ($p=.00$) - and in one subscale of the IPC - innovating ($p=.00$). For the control group, the difference in the proportion of responses was statistically significant in one subscale of EEV - importance of preferred position ($p=.00$). No results in the IPC scale have proven statistically significant.

Table 2. Career exploration and concerns: frequencies and Mann Whitney and Wilcoxon non-parametric tests, by intervention group

Measures	Scales	Subscales	Mean Score	Experimental Group (n=38)												Control Group (n=22)												Mann Whitney	
				Pre-test		Post-test		Pre > Post	Pre = Post	Z	Sig.	Pre-test		Post-test		Pre > Post	Pre = Post	Z	Sig.	Z	Sig.								
				Mean	SD	Mean	SD					Mean	SD	Mean	SD														
Career Exploration Survey	Beliefs of Career Exploration	Employment Outlook	9	8.03	2.95	9.68	2.26	4	22	12	-3.525	.00	8.00	2.69	8.50	3.08	6	9	7	-.804	.42	-1.94	.05						
		Certainty of Exploration Outcomes	9	7.16	2.84	8.30	2.93	6	24	8	-3.207	.00	7.55	3.39	8.73	3.44	5	12	5	-1.993	.11	-4.41	.29						
		External Search Instrumentality	12	15.34	3.46	16.46	2.95	13	20	5	-1.628	.06	13.73	4.69	14.48	3.90	12	7	3	-.666	.95	-1.49	.25						
		Internal Search Instrumentality	30	36.63	5.95	43.05	5.69	1	34	3	-5.133	.00	31.41	9.21	35.44	10.32	7	14	1	-1.660	.11	-2.05	.04						
		Importance of Preferred Position	9	9.74	2.39	10.26	2.65	14	19	5	-1.739	.08	9.68	3.55	10.28	3.36	2	13	7	-1.950	.00	-4.00	.00						
	Behaviors of Career Exploration	Self-Exploration	12	10.97	3.94	12.74	3.61	11	22	5	-2.873	.00	11.30	4.20	10.36	4.37	10	6	6	-1.853	.06	-3.23	.00						
		Environment Exploration	15	14.39	4.64	18.55	3.43	8	28	2	-4.407	.00	14.34	3.75	13.95	4.46	13	7	2	-1.055	.27	-1.62	.87						
		Intended Systematic Exploration	6	5.68	1.96	5.42	1.78	10	17	11	-1.144	.25	6.05	2.59	5.68	2.26	12	6	4	-1.009	.31	-1.777	.08						
		Amount of acquired information	9	9.43	2.13	10.55	1.94	5	26	7	-3.767	.00	12.36	3.22	12.14	4.55	9	6	7	-.795	.44	-1.044	.00						
		Satisfaction with Information	9	9.34	1.86	11.24	1.84	4	25	9	-4.125	.00	11.64	2.42	12.14	1.89	7	13	2	-.679	.50	-3.554	.00						
Reactions to Career Exploration	Exploration Stress	16	11.39	3.98	14.03	4.12	7	25	6	-3.300	.00	9.23	3.94	10.98	4.18	12	2	1	-1.423	.16	-2.109	.04							
	Decision Stress	20	18.97	7.99	19.25	7.34	17	16	5	-1.013	.36	13.14	7.18	15.27	8.83	7	14	4	-1.305	.19	-1.659	.04							
	Crystallization	15	17.13	3.98	15.94	3.15	20	14	4	-1.752	.08	12.55	5.49	11.23	5.27	8	10	4	-.984	.33	-3.147	.00							
	Specification	15	17.02	4.04	16.95	3.13	24	13	1	-1.644	.10	13.90	4.62	12.28	5.56	11	6	4	-1.379	.17	-1.268	.03							
	Implementation	15	17.11	3.48	16.68	3.87	20	14	4	-1.602	.05	14.80	5.21	13.45	5.33	15	7	0	-1.240	.21	-1.615	.11							
Establishment	Stabilizing	15	16.86	3.44	16.26	4.21	19	12	7	-1.220	.22	16.86	5.99	17.14	5.76	11	10	1	-.157	.88	-.015	.99							
	Consolidating	15	18.61	3.49	17.71	3.66	20	13	5	-1.290	.20	18.86	4.51	18.27	5.01	11	7	4	-.868	.42	-2.77	.78							
	Advancing	15	17.39	3.94	16.48	3.05	21	15	2	-1.571	.12	17.73	4.58	16.95	4.79	13	9	0	-1.028	.30	-.377	.71							
	Holding	15	16.84	3.58	15.97	3.46	22	15	1	-1.325	.19	17.98	4.24	16.55	3.47	11	8	3	-1.723	.09	-1.034	.30							
	Updating	15	19.74	3.40	18.45	4.48	20	14	4	-1.597	.13	19.59	4.62	18.36	4.41	14	7	1	-1.258	.20	-1.62	.87							
Disengagement	Innovating	15	20.55	3.94	18.45	4.35	23	9	6	-2.944	.00	19.18	4.62	18.28	3.97	15	6	1	-.926	.35	-.864	.39							
	Deceleration	15	13.58	3.39	12.87	4.43	24	13	1	-1.257	.21	14.41	4.46	14.18	3.46	12	8	2	-.412	.68	-.678	.50							
	Retirement Planning	15	10.74	3.74	11.00	4.70	18	15	5	-.045	.96	11.27	4.88	9.96	3.72	12	6	4	-1.168	.03	-.739	.97							
	Retirement Living	15	13.74	5.58	12.84	5.41	23	12	3	-1.551	.12	11.95	6.71	10.77	4.69	11	8	3	-1.007	.31	-1.300	.19							

DISCUSSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

In general, results are indicative of the lack of statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups, suggesting that these groups were partially equivalent, in terms of career exploration and career concerns, at pre-test. This study also suggests that the self-career management seminar, offered to the research paid workers, was effective in promoting career exploration, as well as, in decreasing the level of career concerns. After the intervention, the experimental group had higher beliefs about the possibility of obtaining employment in the preferred area, of obtaining a favorable position in the labor market, as well as, about the possibility of the self information contribute to the achievement of career goals. It also had higher levels of personal information, and about employers, jobs and organizations, which resulted in a greater amount of information. There were also increasing levels of satisfaction with the information obtained, and the amount of stress related to the exploration process. It can also be noticed a concern and need to explore different activities and make them in a different way.

Based on the results, we can identify two major practical implications. First, it is important to stress the relevance of the psychologists' evaluation of their own career interventions. Similarly to a number of previous meta-analytic studies, this career intervention program has proven effective in this population, in a particular set of dimensions. Furthermore, and prior to assessment, the career professional should take into consideration that programs that are being developed and applied, are meeting the assessed needs and characteristics of a particular subgroup of the population. The higher the concern in meeting these needs and characteristics, the greater the intervention effectiveness level (Whiston & Buck, 2008). Moreover, despite all the changes that are occurring in the world of work put the responsibility focus for career management in the individuals, organizations should not be completely out of this task. It is a fact that organizations cannot meet the currently responsibility for the career management of each of its employees. However, they must be prepared to support them throughout this process. And, this can only be achieved by hiring career professionals able to develop career management tasks that best meet the individuality of each employee. Accordingly, we support the notion of shared responsibility by the aggregate of obligations that constitute the career management process.

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