

PROMOTING CAREER MANAGEMENT SKILLS THROUGH SEMINARS: EVALUATIVE STUDY WITH PORTUGUESE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Over recent years, several Vocational Psychology authors (e.g., Luzzo, 2000; Lalande, Hiebert, Magnusson, Bezanson, & Borgen, 2006; Whiston & Sexton, 1998) have been drawing attention to the need of career counselors become involved in evaluating their interventions. The present study evaluates the effects of two forms of a preventive Personal Career Management Seminar (PCMS, forms A and B; ; GPC A/B, Taveira et al., 2006) on several facets of the career exploration process (CES; Career Exploration Survey, Stumpf, Colarelli & Hartman, 1983, adapt. by Taveira, 1997) of college students. The GPC-A is designed for undergraduate students in the intermediate years of first and second cycles of a university curriculum integrated in the European Higher Education area (adequated to 1999 Bologna's compromise) and functioning with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), while the GPC-B is designed for PhD students in the intermediate years of their PhD program. Total participants in the study were 140 young adults, from both sexes (38.6%, 54 men and 61.4%, 86 women), with ages ranging from 19 to 48 years old ($M=24.43$, $SD=4.75$). Analyses of covariance of the difference between post-and pre-test measures of career exploration were performed, to test differences between the experimental groups of undergraduate and PhD students, and their respective control groups, having as covariate the pre-test results. On the average, results demonstrate sufficiently robust beneficial effects of GPC seminar on college career exploration.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants

Table 1. Socio-demographic data

Sample	N	Sex		Age	
		Men (%)	Women (%)	Mean (SD)	Min-Max
Experimental Group – A	40	29 (72.5%)	11 (27.5%)	22.42 (2.06)	20-29
Experimental Group – B	40	18 (45%)	22 (55%)	27.52 (3.87)	22-39
Control Group – A	40	5 (12.5%)	35 (87.5%)	21.15 (2.24)	19-27
Control Group – B	20	2 (10%)	18 (90%)	28.80 (6.63)	23-48
Total	140	54 (38.6%)	86 (61.4%)	24.43 (4.75)	19-48

Measures

Career Exploration Survey (CES; Stumpf, Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983; EEV, adapt. by Taveira, 1997). This self-administered scale is an adapted research version for Portuguese young developed. It is composed of 54 items, organised into three major career scales: beliefs of career exploration (employment outlook, certainty of career exploration outcomes, external search instrumentality, internal search instrumentality and importance of preferred position), behaviours of career exploration (extent of environment exploration, extent of self-exploration, intended-systematic exploration, amount of acquired information), and reactions to career exploration (satisfaction with information, exploration stress and decision stress).

Procedure and Analyses

The Personal Career Management Seminar (PCMS, forms A and B; GPC A/B, Taveira et al., 2006) is a programmed career intervention which offers opportunity to: i) increase self understanding; ii) access and explore information about post-graduations, the occupational world, and employment opportunities; iii) enhance personal career management skills. PCMS-A is for undergraduate students of intermediate years of first and second cycles of master Bologna's curricula. It comprises a total of 9 sessions, of 90 minutes each, one per week, in small groups of 8 participants. PCMS-B is for PhD students in the intermediate years of their PhD program. It is composed by 6 sessions, of 120 minutes each, weekly, in small groups of 4 to 7 participants. The evaluative career exploration measures battery was applied in pre- and post- sessions and took approximately a total of 15 minutes each, in all four groups. Statistical Program for Social Sciences for Windows – SPSS, version 16.0 was used to make descriptive analyses for the socio-demographic characteristics of participants, as well as, analyses of covariance of the difference between post-and pre-test in both experimental and control groups.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Table 2. Career exploration: frequencies and t test, by intervention group

Subscales	Mean Score	PCMS - A												PCMS - B													
		Experimental Group						Control Group						Experimental group						Control Group							
		Pre-test		Post-test		T test		Pre-test		Post-test		T test		Pre-test		Post-test		T test		Pre-test		Post-test		T test			
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t
Employment Outlook	9	7.85 (1.85)	9.68 (1.93)	4.78	39	.00	7.6 (2.45)	9.08 (2.45)	3.60	39	.00	8.1 (2.73)	9.75 (2.22)	4.34	39	.00	8.5 (2.26)	8.65 (2.92)	.311	19	.80	7.4 (2.95)	8.9 (3.32)	1.74	19	.09	
Certainty of Exploration Outcomes	9	6.4 (2.56)	7.6 (3.15)	2.70	39	.01	6.8 (3.03)	7.5 (3.33)	1.46	39	.15	7.2 (2.78)	8.4 (2.85)	3.77	39	.00	7.4 (2.95)	8.9 (3.32)	1.74	19	.09						
External Search Instrumentality	12	41.4 (5.09)	43.53 (5.36)	2.13	39	.04	37.32 (6.75)	36.98 (5.94)	-.34	39	.73	15.53 (3.22)	16.35 (2.99)	2.02	39	.05	14.15 (4.37)	14.3 (3.99)	.13	19	.90						
Internal Search Instrumentality	30	16.75 (2.48)	17 (2.32)	.54	39	.59	14 (3.14)	13.65 (3.19)	-.708	39	.48	36.98 (6.01)	43.55 (5.98)	9.79	39	.00	33.45 (8.95)	35.85 (10.16)	.96	19	.35						
Importance of Preferred Position	9	9.4 (2.12)	9.55 (2)	.38	39	.71	9.45 (2.16)	9.2 (2.32)	-.58	39	.57	9.98 (2.47)	10.38 (2.69)	1.26	39	.22	9.6 (2.23)	11.25 (2)	3.58	19	.00						
Self-Exploration	12	17.23 (4.44)	19.4 (3.55)	3.64	39	.00	14.20 (3.56)	15.76 (3.79)	2.4	39	.02	14.83 (4.89)	18.73 (5.48)	2.97	39	.01	14.2 (3.59)	12.8 (5.43)	-1.19	19	.25						
Environment Exploration	15	11.15 (3.6)	15.88 (2.73)	9.48	39	.00	11.45 (3.17)	12.5 (3.05)	1.97	39	.06	11.2 (3.94)	12.88 (3.57)	5.6	39	.00	11.55 (4.21)	10.6 (4.51)	-1.62	19	.12						
Intended-Systematic Exploration	6	4.88 (2.33)	6.48 (2.05)	4.77	39	.00	5.6 (1.72)	6.68 (2.06)	3.01	39	.00	5.2 (1.99)	5.48 (1.78)	1.1	39	.28	6.05 (2.31)	5.75 (2.36)	-.81	19	.43						
Amount of acquired Information	9	8.13 (2.12)	10.55 (1.68)	8.68	39	.00	10.21 (2.17)	10.55 (1.87)	.94	39	.35	9.46 (2.08)	10.58 (1.91)	4.64	39	.00	12.35 (1.27)	12.15 (1.31)	-.85	19	.41						
Satisfaction with Information	9	8.38 (2.25)	10.6 (1.86)	6.64	39	.00	9.55 (1.66)	10.65 (2.08)	3.09	39	.00	9.45 (1.91)	11.23 (4.73)	2.35	39	.02	11.75 (2.05)	12 (1.86)	.48	19	.64						
Exploration Stress	16	15.48 (4.77)	14.73 (4.34)	-1.01	39	.32	14.3 (4.36)	15.6 (4.52)	1.88	39	.07	11.6 (4.27)	14.25 (4.14)	3.7	39	.00	9.45 (4.06)	11.1 (4.04)	1.48	19	.16						
Decision Stress	20	20.25 (5.97)	17.18 (5.99)	-3.69	39	.00	13 (5.42)	13.05 (6.16)	.055	39	.96	19.15 (7.75)	19.49 (7.28)	.35	39	.73	13.35 (7.51)	14.95 (8.11)	1.21	19	.24						

Table 3. Personal Career Management Seminar forms A and B. Differences between experimental and control groups

Subscales	GPC A		GPC B	
	Mean Difference (Experimental-Control)	Sig.	Mean Difference (Experimental-Control)	Sig.
Employment Outlook	.513	.27	1.32	.02
Certainty of Exploration Outcomes	.35	.57	-.38	.58
External Search Instrumentality	5.03	.00	1.47	.08
Internal Search Instrumentality	2.20	.00	5.76	.00
Importance of Preferred Position	-.36	.44	-1.13	.03
Self-Exploration	2.32	.00	2.5	.00
Environment Exploration	3.5	.00	5.68	.00
Intended-Systematic Exploration	.11	.79	.28	.49
Amount of acquired Information	.84	.03	.33	.44
Satisfaction with Information	.41	.35	.075	.95
Exploration Stress	-1.44	.10	2.38	.03
Decision Stress	-.256	.85	.64	.69

PCMS-A

In the experimental group, the differences between post and pre-tests were statistically significant in the following subscales: Employment Outlook (.00); Certainty of Exploration Outcomes (.01); External Search Instrumentality (.04); Self-Exploration (.00); Environment Exploration (.00); Intended-Systematic Exploration (.00); Amount of acquired Information (.00); Satisfaction with Information (.00); and, Decision Stress (.00). In the control group, the difference in the proportion of responses was statistically significant in four subscales: Employment Outlook (.00); Self-Exploration (.02); Intended-Systematic Exploration (.00); and, Satisfaction with Information (.00).

The mean difference analysis between experimental and control group, having the results of the pre-test moment as co-variation variable, reveals statistically significant differences in the following dimensions: external search instrumentality, internal search instrumentality, self-exploration, environment exploration, and amount of acquired information, with better results in the experimental group.

PCMS-B

For the experimental group, difference in the proportion of responses was statistically significant in Employment Outlook (.00); Certainty of Exploration Outcomes (.00); External Search Instrumentality (.05); Internal Search Instrumentality (.00); Self-Exploration (.01); Environment Exploration (.00); Amount of acquired Information (.00); Satisfaction with Information (.02); and, Exploration Stress (.00). The control group attained differences between post and pre-tests statistically significant only in the Importance of Preferred Position subscale (.00).

The mean difference analysis between experimental and control group, having the results of the pre-test moment as co-variation variable, reveals statistically significant differences in the following dimensions: employment outlook, internal search instrumentality, importance of preferred position, self-exploration, environment exploration, and exploration stress, with better results in the experimental group. However, this is not so, to the importance of preferred position dimension, with lower results in the experimental group.

DISCUSSION

This study suggests that personal career management seminars are effective in promoting gains in some career exploration cognitive, behavioral and affective dimensions of graduation and post-graduation students. After attending such a seminar, both graduates' and post-graduates' experimental groups present a higher level of beliefs about the possibility of achieving an approving position in the labor market, and about the possibility of exploring the professional world in order to achieve certain career goals. Besides, there are yet favorable results about personal information, about jobs, employees, and organizations information, as well as satisfaction with explored information. The analyses of covariance of the difference between post-and pre-test, in both experimental and control groups, also evidences that, each experimental group, when compared with the respective control group, registers more favourable career exploration results, after PCMS intervention. It would be important to pursue this line of research in order to explain which clients' conditions and intervention process variables contributed to these pattern of results.

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