

## BACKGROUND

Following recommendations for vocational intervention (e.g., Lent, 2001; Savickas, 2001; Fouad, 2001; Vondracek, 2001), and based on career theory and research, the mission of the Career Counseling Unit - Centre for Counseling Psychology and Human Development, in the Department of Psychology, University of Minho, is:

- To facilitate scientific understanding of career choice and development
- To translate career theory and research into practice
- To promote Psychology students' and professionals' training in career counseling issues

In this context, the study of career intervention outcomes and process have been recently incorporated into our applied research activity. Outcome effects might be improved by conceptualizing and diagnosing individual intervention goals and decision-making and difficulties, and by tailoring intervention efforts to these goals and difficulties (Brown & McPartland, 2005).

## PURPOSE AND HYPOTHESIS

In this paper the conceptualization and diagnose of career problems at the Career Counseling Unit of the Centre for Counseling Psychology and Human Development, (CCU-DPUM) in the Department of Psychology, University of Minho – are presented and discussed, considering that clients sources for their career decision-making difficulties and their reasons for seeking career counseling are not uniform, and that it may vary as a function of clients gender and age as well as a function of psychologists classification.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Five diagnostic models are used more frequently in career counseling: behavior-analytic (Kanfer & Saslow, 1965), developmental (Crites, 1969; Super & Crites, 1982), ability-focused (Gottfredson, 1986), person-environment interactive (Holland, 1985), and problem-focused (Campbell, Cellini, Shaltry, Long & Pinkos, 1973, 1979) – (see Spokane, 1991).

This study explores the advantages of using the problem-focused diagnostic model with young and adult career counseling clients, based on the use of the *Diagnostic Assessment of Career Development Problems* developed by Campbell et al. (1973). This taxonomy provides a framework emphasizing problem identification, analysis, and evaluation in career interventions, especially for adults. Problem categories identified were: Problems in career decision-making, Problems in implementing career plans, Problems in organizational/institutional performance, Problems in organizational/institutional adaptation (see Table 1).

The study's sample included a total of 168 clients (96, 57.1% women and 72, 42.9% men) with ages between 13 and 34 years old ( $M=17.22$ ,  $DP=4.5$ ), attending individual (106, 63.1%) group (57, 33.9%) or mixed (5, 3%) modalities of career counseling at the CCU-DPUM, during the academic year of 2006-2007. And also, a total of 9 female psychologists, with different years of practice, who diagnosed their clients according to the mentioned problem-focused taxonomy (group 1, with 3 years of experience, who classified 78, 46.4% of the clients sample; group 2, with 1 or 2 years of experience, who classified 66, 39.3% of the clients; and group 3, with less than 1 year of experience, who classified 24, 14.3% of the clients)

Table 1. Diagnostic Taxonomy Outline

### Problem Categories and Subcategories

#### 1.0 Problems in Career decision Making

##### 1.1. Getting Started

- 1.1.1. Lack of awareness of the need for a decision
- 1.1.2. Lack of knowledge of the decision-making process
- 1.1.3. Awareness of the need to make a decision, but avoidance of assuming personal responsibility for decision-making

##### 1.2. Information Gathering

- 1.2.1. Inadequate, contradictory, and/or insufficient information
- 1.2.2. Information overload
- 1.2.3. Lack of knowledge as to how to gather information
- 1.2.4. Unwillingness to accept the validity of the information (e.g., disagreement with self-concept)

##### 1.3. Generating, Evaluating, and Selecting Alternatives

- 1.3.1. Difficulty in deciding due to multiple options
- 1.3.2. Failure to generate sufficient career options due to personal limitations (e.g., health, resources, ability, and education)
- 1.3.3. Inability to decide due to the thwarting effects of anxiety (fear of failure, social disapproval, and/or of commitment to a course of action)
- 1.3.4. Unrealistic choice (e.g., aspiring too high or too low, based upon criteria such as aptitudes, interest, values, resources, and personal circumstances)

- 1.3.5. Interfering personal constraints which impede a choice (e.g., interpersonal influences and conflicts, situational circumstances, resources, and health)
- 1.3.6. The inability to evaluate alternatives due to lack of knowledge of the evaluation criteria (e.g., values, interests, aptitudes, skills, resources, health, age, and personal circumstances)

##### 1.4. Formulating Plans for Implementing Decisions

- 1.4.1. Lack of knowledge of the necessary steps to formulate a plan
- 1.4.2. Inability to utilize a future time perspective in planning
- 1.4.3. Unwillingness and/or inability to acquire the necessary information to formulate a plan

#### 2.0 Problems in Implementing Career Plans

##### 2.1. Characteristics of the Individual

- 2.1.1. Failure of the individual to undertake the steps necessary to implement his/her plan
- 2.1.2. Failure or inability to successfully complete the steps necessary for goal attainment
- 2.1.3. Adverse changes in the individual whose plans are disrupted by a physical disability

##### 2.2. Characteristics external to the individual

- 2.2.1. Unfavorable economic, social, and cultural conditions
- 2.2.2. Unfavorable conditions in the organization or institution central to the implementation of one's plans
- 2.2.3. Adverse conditions of or changes in the individual's family situation

#### 3.0 Problems in Organizational/Institutional Performance

##### 3.1. Deficiencies in skills, abilities, and knowledge

- 3.1.1. Insufficient skills, abilities, and/or knowledge upon position entry
- 3.1.2. The deterioration of skills, abilities, and/or knowledge over time while in the position due to temporary assignment to another position, level, and/or lack of continual practice of the skill
- 3.1.3. The failure to modify or update skills, abilities, and/or knowledge to stay abreast of job changes

##### 3.2. Personal Factors

- 3.2.1. Personality characteristics discrepant with the job (e.g., values, interests and work habits)
- 3.2.2. Debilitating physical and/or emotional disorders
- 3.2.3. Adverse off-the-job personal circumstances and/or stressors (e.g., family pressures, financial problems, and personal conflicts)
- 3.2.4. The occurrence of interpersonal conflicts on the job which are specific to performance requirements (e.g., getting along with the boss, coworkers, customers, and clients)

##### 3.3. Conditions of the Organizational/Institutional Environment

- 3.3.1. Ambiguous or inappropriate job requirements (e.g., lack of clarity of assignments, work overload, and conflicting assignments)
- 3.3.2. Deficiencies in the operational structure of the organization/institution
- 3.3.3. Inadequate support facilities, supplies, and resources (e.g., insufficient lighting, ventilation, tools, support personnel, and materials)
- 3.3.4. Insufficient reward system (e.g., compensation, fringe benefits, status, recognition, and opportunities for advancement)

#### 4.0 Problems in Organizational/Institutional Adaptation

##### 4.1. Initial Entry

- 4.1.1. Lack of knowledge of organizational rules and procedures
- 4.1.2. Failure to accept or adhere to organizational rules and procedures
- 4.1.3. Inability to assimilate large quantities of new information (e.g., information overload)
- 4.1.4. Discomfort in a new geographic area
- 4.1.5. Discrepancies between the individual's expectations and the realities of the institutional/organizational environment

##### 4.2. Changes over Time

- 4.2.1. Changes over the life span in one's attitudes, values, life style, career plans, or commitment to the organization which lead to incongruence between the individual and the environment
- 4.2.2. Changes in the organizational/institutional environment which lead to incongruence between the individual and the environment (e.g., physical and administrative structure, policies, and procedures)

##### 4.3. Interpersonal Relationships

- 4.3.1. Interpersonal conflicts arising from differences of opinion, style, values
- 4.3.2. The occurrence of verbal or physical abuse or sexual harassment

Source: *The Diagnostic Assessment of Career Development Problems* developed by Campbell et al. (1973) OH: National Center for Research in Vocational Education. In A. R. Spokane, 1991, *Career intervention* (pp.299-310). NJ: Prentice-Hall.

## RESULTS

• **Statistical Analyses:** Descriptive, Chi-square tests and One-way analyses of variance were performed (SPSS, version 15.0), in order to (a) characterize sample and psychologists diagnostic assessments, (b) analyze the association between gender and diagnostic assessments, (c) analyze age and professionals' level of experience group differences, respectively. Table 2 presents a summary of the main results obtained in the study.

• **Results summary:** Career decision-making problems were the most frequent difficulties observed and registered by psychologists. But for 1.3.5. (*personal constraints to choice*;  $\chi^2=4.296$ ,  $p=0.031$ ) and 2.1.2. (*inability to successfully complete the steps for goal attainment*;  $\chi^2=5.901$ ,  $p=0.018$ ): (with boys in disfavor), the association between diagnostic assessment categories and gender were not statistically significant. Several career problem categories were differentially expressed and diagnosed among the three age groups analyzed: when compared with the older ones, more younger clients were diagnosed as expressing career decision-making difficulties; moreover, when compared with the younger ones, more older clients were diagnosed as expressing career decision implementation, work performance and work adaptation problems. Career problem subcategories were differentially diagnosed among different professionals groups, with group 2 assessing more frequently career decision making difficulties, when compared with groups 1 and 3 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Results of Diagnostic Assessment

Diagnostic Subcategory	Frequencies (%)	Percentage
1.0	78	46.4
1.1	31	18.5
1.1.1	11	6.5
1.1.2	19	11.3
1.1.3	1	0.6
1.2	44	26.2
1.2.1	11	6.5
1.2.2	14	8.3
1.2.3	17	10.1
1.2.4	2	1.2
1.3	16	9.5
1.3.1	16	9.5
1.3.2	0	0
1.3.3	0	0
1.3.4	0	0
1.3.5	0	0
1.4	0	0
1.4.1	0	0
1.4.2	0	0
1.4.3	0	0
2.0	66	39.3
2.1	10	6.0
2.1.1	10	6.0
2.1.2	0	0
2.1.3	0	0
2.2	16	9.5
2.2.1	16	9.5
2.2.2	0	0
2.2.3	0	0
3.0	24	14.3
3.1	11	6.5
3.1.1	11	6.5
3.1.2	0	0
3.1.3	0	0
3.2	0	0
3.2.1	0	0
3.2.2	0	0
3.2.3	0	0
3.2.4	0	0
3.3	13	7.7
3.3.1	13	7.7
3.3.2	0	0
3.3.3	0	0
3.3.4	0	0
4.0	0	0
4.1	0	0
4.1.1	0	0
4.1.2	0	0
4.1.3	0	0
4.1.4	0	0
4.1.5	0	0
4.2	0	0
4.2.1	0	0
4.2.2	0	0
4.3	0	0
4.3.1	0	0
4.3.2	0	0
4.4	0	0

Group age diff: \*  $p < .000$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ . Psychologists experience differences: \*\*  $p < .000$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .05$

## CONCLUSIONS

• Assessment of career problems and difficulties based on a problem focused diagnostic model evidenced individual differences in clients career counseling motives and career decision making difficulties, as well as counselors individual differences in diagnostic assessment as function of their level of practical experience. This knowledge should be used to adjust career interventions to clients' characteristics and surpass the more common belief on the uniformity of career indecision sources among different groups of clients

• Several models of diagnostic assessment can be used in career counseling. Research on each model advantages and disadvantages can offer a more comprehensive view of assessment instruments and activities in career counseling

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