

# ED289996 1987-00-00 Adult Career Counseling: An Interactive Model. Overview. ERIC Digest No. 65.

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TEXT: As the provision of career development services for adults becomes increasingly important, a systematic approach can be useful in identifying and using all available resources for adult career counseling. A comprehensive career counseling delivery system can help counselors deal with diverse client populations, adults' need for personal involvement in career planning, and the time constraints often present in working with adults. Advantages of systematic delivery include a developmental emphasis, effective use of resources, amenability to change, built-in ongoing evaluation, and focus on process and product (Walz and Benjamin, 1984).

## ADULT CAREER COUNSELING DELIVERY SYSTEM

A comprehensive adult career counseling delivery system includes (1) needs assessment, (2) resource assessment, (3) goal setting, (4) planning, (5) establishment of specific objectives, (6) program development, (7) implementation, (8) evaluation, and (9) modification.

In assessing needs for an adult career counseling program, both the needs of the clients and of the service providers should be addressed. Client problems in career decision making -- getting started; gathering information; generating, evaluating, and selecting alternatives; and formulating plans -- as well as the barriers to participation clients may face should be determined. Service providers should evaluate what programs they are currently offering and what services are being contemplated, which can reveal unmet counseling needs in the community. The assessment of resources can investigate current and potential funding sources, physical facilities and staff, availability of assessment instruments and career information, and community resources to which clients can be referred.

These needs and resource assessments can be used to establish goals for the adult career counseling program. Examples of general goals include assisting adults in making career decisions, assisting in training or education placements, and assisting employers with hiring decisions.

At the planning stage, the particular circumstances of adult clients require attention. Varying stages of adult development, accessibility of the physical location and hours of service, immediacy and concreteness of adult concerns, implications of family circumstances, and the need for supportive services should all be taken into account. Specific objectives that are sequenced and related to the functions of the career counseling program model should be formulated. Specific incremental objectives may be used to provide positive, reinforcing feedback to the client.

In program development and provision, the primary consideration is the relationship between the clients and the service providers. A partnership approach demonstrates awareness that adults should direct their own career planning, that the client has answers and the counselor's role is to help the client realize this, and that the client should come to "own" the career development process.

To evaluate the effectiveness of career interventions, Fretz (1981) recommends that three dimensions be considered: clients (demographic, psychological, and career-related attributes), treatments (content domain, interpersonal context, degree of structure), and outcomes (career knowledge, skills, and behavior; feelings; effective role functioning). Summative evaluation measures the degree of success in terms of achieving satisfying, gainful employment. Other evaluation considerations are indications that the client accepts personal responsibility for career planning,

cost-effectiveness of various treatments, length of time for program completion, client satisfaction, dropout rate, and service to all segments of society.

## AN INTERACTIVE MODEL FOR ADULT CAREER COUNSELING PROGRAMS

The model for an adult career counseling program developed by Vetter and others (1986) involves a great deal of interaction among its six steps: (1) intake, (2) formal assessment, (3) exploration and information gathering, (4) decision making, 5) planning, and (6) transition (to education, training, or employment).

**Intake.** The intake interview is a means of obtaining information about the client and of establishing a foundation for the counseling relationship. For both purposes of intake -- determination of eligibility and orientation to the program -- documentation and recordkeeping should be objective, accurate, and thorough. Components of intake forms include name and address, marital and family status, work-related health factors, educational background, employment history, financial resources, motivation for involvement in counseling, and work values. In addition to determining eligibility, this information can be used to consider possible referrals to other agencies, to increase understanding of the purposes of the program, and to explore problems or barriers that affect success.

**Formal assessment.** Formal assessment provides an accurate and thorough information base with which to develop realistic career goals. It generally includes analyzing client strengths, weaknesses, skills, abilities, attitudes, interests, values, and personality. Flexibility in format allows counselors to deal with the needs of special populations. Test administrators must understand the strengths and limitations of the instrument in judging its appropriateness for program use. The possibility of test anxiety in many adults must be considered. The use of computerized career guidance systems is expanding. Heppner and Johnston (1985) provide 17 criteria for evaluating these systems. Vetter and others (1986) devote half of their publication to a description of 76 formal assessment instruments in terms of name, author, source, purpose, primary user population, materials, technical information, advantages/disadvantages, and sources of additional information.

**Exploration and information gathering.** Exploration activities are designed to identify and clarify work values, investigate occupational interests, acquire information about work skills, and facilitate exploration of specific occupations. Work values clarification helps people determine why they want to work and what characteristics a desirable occupation might have. Examples of values activities include using the LifeCareer Rainbow, which relates short- and long-range work goals to the goals of other life roles; specifying job preferences; and rating work values in terms of their relative importance to the individual.

**Decision making.** The decision-making phase of the model applies the information

gathered in a structured way that can help clients avoid such common problems as too much or not enough information, too many or too few alternatives, and poor evaluation of risks and potential outcomes. The interaction between model steps is intensified when it becomes clear that additional exploration/information gathering or formal assessments are needed before decision making can progress.

Career decision making focuses on identifying, prioritizing, and selecting alternatives; it is a process that occurs continuously throughout an adult's life. Examples of decision-making activities include (1) the Life Line Exercise, a means of examining an individual's history of decision making and determining the degree of personal control that has been used; (2) force field analysis, in which forces that work for and against one's goals are evaluated and rank ordered; and (3) analysis of the degree of difficulty and motivation for the risks one has taken.

Planning. The planning phase completes assessment, exploration, and decision making by translating information into action. Counselors should ensure that career plans are concrete, specific, and realistic. Exercises can help clarify goals and objectives, identify resources for attaining them, and determine barriers and strategies for overcoming them. In planning, the counselor and client assess skills needed and match them with the educational and training opportunities available. Flexibility is added by considering contingency or alternative plans to increase the possibility of success.

Transition. The outcome of the decision-making and planning phases of the model, depending on the individual client, may be entrance into a training program, an educational program, a job-seeking program, or directly into employment.

## NEEDS OF SPECIFIC CLIENT GROUPS

This section describes some special group characteristics that require different counseling approaches to meet the career planning needs of these adults.

Dislocated workers may experience shock, denial, anger, and depression; they may also reach a stage of job search burnout. Most tend to have a negative, limited, and underestimated view of their skills. Special attention to formal and informal assessment instruments can help identify client assets to be communicated to prospective employers.

In addition to career counseling, displaced homemakers often need assistance with job training, search, and placement as well as support services such as child care.

The long-term unemployed include inner-city minorities, high school dropouts, single parents, and recent immigrants, among others. These economically disadvantaged persons are likely to

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