

PSYCHOLOGISTS AND THE GUIDANCE PROCESS



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Psychologists and the Guidance Process

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The terms although used in the masculine refer, indistinctly, to the feminine and masculine.

Challenges and Responsibilities

The psychological intervention in career guidance has been inspired by different models: (a) differentialist (what), which refers to the importance of individual characteristics such as interests and skills, (b) developmental (how), which refers to the importance of the processes of change that occur throughout the life cycle, and (c) relational (with whom), which places the practice within the network of significant relationships.

In addition, intervention in this field assumes a multiplicity of modalities, such as educational and vocational information sessions, individual consultation or counselling, guidance and transition programmes for work, and consulting activities - in a process that has sought to articulate with the other agents involved in the education, training and work systems.

Over the last twenty years, the changes in career^{1,2} have created new concerns or needs, which will have to be reflected in practice, in terms of their modalities, techniques, and even moments and contexts of intervention.

In the current setting, the main challenge is the need to look at career intervention as a lifelong support process in different contexts, focusing on the development of career management processes or competencies, convening the person and their system of meaningful relationships³.

A **first challenge** is to adapt the principles of differentiation to the field of career intervention, offering services that respond adequately to the growing heterogeneity of our consultants.

A **second challenge** stems from the impact of new information and communication technologies (ICT) on the provision of guidance services. In fact, ICT and increasingly the Internet, allow synchronous and asynchronous counselling practices at a distance, providing greater access to guidance services to a greater diversity of consultants, namely in school and professional information, and now the intervention is no longer limited to a certain physical space or territory (e.g. school or company), going on to

include all those who have access to the Internet and who consider the help provided by a device, site or digital platform relevant. Psychologists will necessarily have to develop specific skills in this new format, because, contrary to what one might think, providing information and guidance services using new technologies is not an easy task⁴.

A **third challenge** is based on the assumption that the issues of training, professional practice and guidance are deeply intertwined especially because in the multiple configurations of the current work contexts, the alternation between education/training and professional practice is increasingly frequent, and the provision of career services to the whole population, within a network that conveniently articulates the resources of the education/training and employment systems, is highly desirable.

The **fourth challenge** is at the level of the evaluation of interventions. Several documents on education, training and employment policies make a clear reference to the need to observe visible impacts on the competitiveness and productivity of society as a result of the interventions of the guidance services. Demonstrating the effectiveness of career interventions remains a major undertaking for all those with technical and policy responsibilities in the areas of education, employment and training. This importance should be reflected into permanent and more widespread investment in evaluation that ensure that consultants benefit from quality interventions and that psychologists use cost-benefit indicators in their design and implementation. This can undoubtedly be one of the strategies to follow, or one of the challenges to be faced with, if we want to see reflected in the educational and employment policies the guidelines that lead to the reinforcement of psychological intervention in the field of careers development^{6,7}.

It is in a context of intervention that it is increasingly difficult to interpret that it is necessary to answer the question: what do psychologists have to offer to people who, while still being part of the education system, prepare for their entry into the labour market, or for those who are part of the labour market, to deal with multiple and sometimes unexpected changes⁸?

Indeed, the domain of career counselling and guidance, which has always sought to respond effectively to social concerns^{9,10,11} now risks becoming obsolete if it is not able to rethink its priorities and, consequently, of introducing a range of new practices within its scope of action¹², being able

to accept, among other theoretical references, the contributions offered by the constructivist approaches of the career, namely the career building theory¹³. This theory, by giving attention to the interpretive and interpersonal processes through which individuals attribute meaning and direction to their behaviour, emerges as a response to the challenges posed by the phenomena of globalisation and multiculturalism, as well as the continuing changes that occur in work and training. Career building theory¹⁴ addresses both the content (what), the process (how), and, in line with its constructivist inspiration, the 'why' in career decision-making.

The attempt to integrate different contributions of the literature, favouring the emergence of conceptual bridges between them, constitutes in itself one of the main forces of that model¹⁵, and is the reason why, as in the booklets previously published in this collection, the proposed activities are organised in the light of this theoretical reference, and are centred on the construct of adaptability.

With this option, we do not intend in any way to convert psychologists to a certain theoretical approach, although in this domain some convergence is desirable¹⁶. Our aim is only to provide a framework that can, in a sense, frame or substantiate the psychological practice carried out in the context of career intervention, and facilitate dialogue between educational agents, in the awareness that there is great diversity in the way services are provided in this field.

Psychological practice in the field of career counselling and guidance is thus a dynamic and tested field of intervention in the education, training and work systems. In its different modalities, career intervention plays a key role in promoting lifelong learning and training, in adjusting to labour and training contexts, and in promoting the skills needed for career management in different life situations.

Promoting Career Adaptability in an Educational Context

Adaptability is a useful construct as it favours personal career management and lifelong employability¹⁷. The dimensions of curiosity, autonomy, cooperation, planning and trust designate attitudes associated with basic career skills integrated into the notion of adaptability.

Career adaptability has been defined as an important metacompetency because it results in the ability to either maintain a sense of identity and self-direction in situations of change or to solve complex issues and problems (e.g. new problems, building solutions, unforeseen events) inherent in career development.

Adaptability requires openness to change, envisaging the possibility of thinking differently about oneself and about the situations, and being able to act on circumstances that require decisions on career ^{18,19,20}. It involves having the readiness and personal and context resources to handle development tasks, transitions, and career experiences throughout the life cycle²¹.

Career theorists suggest that the more specific dimensions of adaptability - the attitudes of curiosity, autonomy, cooperation, concern, and trust - can be important in all phases of career development, i.e. in periods of growth, exploration, stabilisation, management and disinvestment of professional or working life ^{13,22,23}.

Curiosity is related to the behaviours or competence of self-exploration in relation to possible activities, occupations and lifestyles.

Autonomy is related to responsibility and decision-making competencies and to the perception of personal control over the future and one's career.

Cooperative attitude, which defines a pro social relational style in approaching career issues, is related to interpersonal and social skills and to the use of consultation and involvement of others in decision-making.

Concern for the future relates to planning skills and building a positive view of the future.

Confidence is related to problem-solving skills and self-efficacy in decision making, overcoming obstacles, and advancing in the face of career dilemmas.

Empirical research on career adaptability has demonstrated, above all, the role of curiosity, planning and decision-making competencies^{24,25,26} and it is important to continue with more systematic investigation of all adaptive attitudes and skills. Adaptability positively affects the ability to cope with transitions, make congruent choices and perceive satisfaction with life in adolescence^{27,28,24}. Adaptability is a predictor of subjective career success^{29, 30}, satisfaction with transition processes, career satisfaction, and satisfaction with life as a youth^{31,32}; of self-efficacy in the process of job search and re-employment of young adults ^{33,34}.

Following the line of studies on career adaptability can bring benefits to guidance professionals, since the purpose of their interventions is often to promote the adaptability of their consultants.

How can we assess and intervene in each of the dimensions of career adaptability?

About the measure and assessment of career adaptability, we can highlight:

The North American reviewed version of the Career Maturity Inventory³⁵ - Form C (CMI-C), adapted to Portugal³⁶ allows for the assessment of the career adaptability of young people with schooling up to the 12th grade. The CMI-C allows assessing career readiness, based on four-dimensions, designated as: concern, curiosity, trust and consultation. This is an inventory with two forms, one shorter (10 items with dichotomous response, agree or disagree) for investigation and diagnosis of large-scale adaptability (e.g. population, school, school year), and another

longer one (24 items with dichotomous response, agree or disagree) to be used in an evaluation process in the context of individual or group career counselling. The CMI-C allows for a total adaptability or career readiness result, and a partial result in three dimensions of adaptability - concern, curiosity and planning³⁷.

The Portuguese version of the Career Adaptabilities Scale^{38,39,40} known as "Escala sobre Adaptabilidade" (EA), allows us to evaluate four dimensions of adaptability, designated as concern, control, curiosity and trust, and has a total of 28 items, seven by dimension, with answers within a five-point scale, where one means "very little" and five means "a lot".

Examples of Activities

Using the shorter version of CMI-C ³⁵

Students with higher scores in CMI-C demonstrate greater career readiness or adaptability. These students can be invited to participate in interventions that favour their involvement in deep and specific exploration processes of the labour work, either based on interpretation and reflection on the results of interest inventories, or through a more experiential approach, noting and experimenting activities.

In turn, students with lower CMI-C scores may be invited to engage in broader career exploration processes, from intervention activities designed to the clarification of values and the development of identity.

Using the longer version of CMI-C

In counselling, psychologists can begin by explaining the concepts of readiness and adaptability, demonstrating the importance of guidance and concern for the future, and their relationship with career planning, and focus on the content of the Concern sub-scale items, discussing with students such indicators.

Savickas and Porfeli³⁵ also propose that psychologists develop a three-step process that allows individuals a non-directive exploration, directive modelling, and active learning.

In a first step, psychologists may use a non-directive style (e.g. open questions) and support their client in identifying one or more items responded on the opposite direction to the expected one, and reflect with them, what was the basis for their response, analysing related beliefs, feelings and behaviours, clarifying the meaning of the response, and more actively modelling more adaptive visions and responses by the client (e.g. through instruction, persuasion, verbal modelling, stories and reinforcement). When the client verbally expresses a change of beliefs or attitude, psychologists can help consultants translate their new beliefs and attitudes into vocational goals. This process can be followed for one or more items and for different dimensions of career adaptability.

Psychologists can use this process in a group, without even looking at CMI-C, focusing on the analysis and discussion of each item, with a more focused approach to the career decision making process and less on its contents, considering which could be considered beneficial to all students in the group. Students who demonstrate more favourable beliefs and attitudes can be chosen as role models and support the promotion of change in the other peers.

In addition, psychologists can also work in the classroom by addressing the four dimensions of career adaptability and then applying the CMI-C to assess the impact of their intervention. The CMI-C authors recommend that professionals rely on models that explicitly consider the role of culture and acculturation in career building⁴¹, as well as the role of identity, to support their consultants in interpreting the results in the consultation sub-scale of CDI-C.

Consider the aspects of adaptability measured by the EA scale

Considering the evaluation of the adaptability measured by the EA scale, several suggestions have also been presented, as well as in the literature, regarding intervention:

CONCERN

Concern is the basis of planning and guidance, of building a career. It is an optimistic, forward-looking and hopeful attitude. Concern and planning about the future avoid indifference, pessimism, and immobility in the process of career building.

The use of activities that favour the temporal perspective of the future, through an increase in anticipation, awareness, hope and optimism about the future, and the focus on achieving significant short and medium-term goals can produce positive emotions and proactive career behaviours. This implies helping consultants to better anticipate and understand how people make their career decisions (and not just what decisions they make) and how they make decisions throughout their lives. In turn, favouring the participation and engagement of students in school, in meaningful and successful experiences and activities, provides consultants with a sense of hope and planning for the future. These aspects are an important condition for students' involvement in career decision-making processes and their feelings of control and autonomy over their own lives³⁵.

TRUST

It involves testing problem solving and career dilemmas and the beliefs of self-efficacy in this field. It requires persistence, initiative and confidence, which can avoid problems of inhibition, avoidance and low self-awareness, in the construction of the career^{19,35}.

The use of role-modelling, modelling, and cognitive-behavioural interventions that help consultants relate current behaviours to future goals may contribute to increasing self-efficacy beliefs and positive self-concepts in the career domain.

CURIOSITY

Curiosity about the labour market expresses a positive attitude, forward-looking and is related to observation, questioning and experimentation of activities and roles, interest in wanting to know more about career options, questioning about life situations and lifestyles and about oneself in different roles of life and possible futures.

This competence favours community involvement promotes realism in decision-oriented exploration and prevents the creation of unrealistic expectations and aspirations towards the future¹³.

To foster curiosity, it may be important to choose interventions that will foster the students' interest in exploring the future, promote learning from information-seeking behaviours, using various sources and exploration resources, exploring the world of school, domestic and community work and of attractive professions, activities that favour the test of reality (experimentation) and the use of technology (multimedia and hypermedia)^{35, 19}.

CONTROL

It involves the increase of self-regulation through the practice of decision-making and taking responsibility for the future, and the gain of a sense of self-direction and authorship in the construction of the future. It also implies the will to decide and assertiveness in the decision-making processes.

These skills foster confidence and career autonomy and compete to avoid persistent career indecision and fluctuation. Professionals can facilitate the development of these competences in their consultants, favouring in the interventions, the clarification of self-concepts, the management of debilitating anxiety in decision making, the assertive dialogue and the raising of support from the most significant ones.

Training of psychologists throughout life

According to a recent report on the role of career counselling and guidance in supporting the renewal of the education system (ELGPN, 2013-14), it has been concluded that it should integrate an articulated and systematic set of preventive, intervention and compensation measures that:

- allow the involvement of young people at school prevent early school withdrawal
- allow the integration and reintegration of young people at risk
- promote effective processes of transition to the labour market
- promote the acquisition of career management skills and employability

In fact, high quality career guidance and counselling should empower citizens for lifelong learning, acting as a preventive measure, which encourages the development of skills favourable to the autonomous planning of career paths. In addition, guidance and counselling should encourage and facilitate mobility and increase the quality and effectiveness of the education and training systems.

In this context, the life-long training of psychologists working in the field of career counselling and guidance, particularly in the educational context, is particularly demanding and requires a continuous effort to acquire knowledge and skills in diverse, though complementary, areas of practice.

There has been some discussion and reflection on this theme in the European and in the wider international context, within various instances (e.g. European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training - CEDEFOP) and networks funded for this purpose (e.g. European Lifelong Policy Network - ELGPN, Euroguidance, Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe - NICE).

For example, according to a training manual proposed by NICE⁴¹, the specialists consider that there are five types of professional roles and functions that guarantee a professional identity in the field of career counselling and guidance, and that they should constitute the pillars structuring the potential creation of a European reference of competencies in this domain:

Information and evaluation activities in the context of the career – relevant information about oneself, training opportunities and the labour market, as well as the evaluation of the career needs felt by the consultants and the possible use of additional psychological evaluation resources;

Career education – support for the development of career management skills (e.g. awareness of resources and personal needs, understanding the labour market and the education system operation, development of career plans...) through planned and systematic activities;

Development of career systems – support to individuals and organisations to 'design' and develop/implement adaptive and healthy career trajectories (e.g. placement, fostering links between public services and employers to promote the integration of young people in the labour market...);

Career counselling – helps consultants to reflect on themselves, to make sense of their experiences, to make complex career decisions, and to make changes in behaviour and personal performance, based on a strong working alliance;

Management of career services – the promotion of effective management of career services and the quality of work performed, and the management of all the other functions and roles referred to above presupposes a high degree of professional autonomy and an in-depth understanding of the needs of consultants and services which, in an appropriate way, can respond to these needs.

This proposal of professional roles and functions presupposes the existence of three levels of professional specialisation in the field of career counselling and guidance, organised either according to the level of competences required of psychologists or according to the degree of reflection they provide to consultants:

Work on career information - the most basic level of competencies presupposing, however, the ability to support individuals and groups and the understanding of theories and principles of career development;

Career counselling and education – associated with highly specialised knowledge, in which the professional is able to perform effectively all the professional roles;

Expertise in research (specialist in career research)– at this level the professional must also be able to perform all the professional roles, maintaining a privileged link with high quality research.

It is up to each psychologist, based on his experiences of initial and lifelong learning, to determine his/her present level of knowledge and skills. He should also pursue more specialised professional roles and functions, to undertake training courses at the level of the 2nd and/or 3rd levels of tertiary education, which will allow him/her to exercise, with full responsibility and competence, the activities and career counselling and guidance services required by consultants. The training and hiring institutions of psychologists may play an equally important role, promoting the conditions for their training in this area.

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Links

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The purpose of this brochure is to provide a framework that can, in a sense, frame or substantiate the practice carried out in the context of career intervention, and facilitate dialogue between educational agents, in the awareness that there is great diversity in the way services are provided in this field.

