Improving Individual Career Counseling through Analysis of Client Reflections

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This study aimed to improve individual career counseling appointments through a deeper understanding of clients’ perceptions of benefits gained from their interactions. A qualitative design examined clients’ immediate reflections in their own words, providing unique insights into client experiences and their perceptions of career intervention outcomes.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

1. ABC Learning Outcomes: Career interventions at The Career Center at Illinois are guided by office-wide learning outcomes which follow the following framework:

   • Affective Outcomes to understand
   • How do clients feel about their career journey?
   • Behavioral Outcomes to understand
   • What are clients doing related to their career journey?
   • What career exploration, decision-making, and management skills can clients effectively demonstrate?
   • Cognitive Outcomes to understand
   • What do clients know about career exploration, decision-making, and management?

2. Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) Theory: CIP Theory provides a strategy for understanding and describing the career choice process. The CIP Pyramid (Figure 1) describes some of the key features of the theory, including:

   • Self-knowledge: e.g., values, interests, skills, passion
   • Option knowledge: e.g., majors, careers, graduate school
   • Decision-making skills: e.g., evaluating options, strategic choice-making
   • Metacognitions: e.g., self-doubt, self-awareness

The CIP Pyramid helps us to:
   • Attend to critical attributes of the career choice process
   • Evaluate client progress
   • Provide knowledge to address immediate career-related concerns

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the connections between clients’ experienced reasons for visit, their reflections on the learning that occurs as a result of their appointments, and their intended next steps as a result of their appointments?

2. How do these connections fit with The Career Center’s office-wide learning outcomes and the career choice process?

METHOD

• A total of 227 clients (69% response rate) completed a brief reflection survey (3 open-ended questions and 5 demographic questions, requiring approximately 8 minutes) prior to computerized ratings immediately following their appointments

• The open-ended questions to guide clients’ reflection process included:

   1. What did you learn or gain in your appointment today?
   2. What do you plan to do next regarding choosing or pursuing your major and/or career?
   3. What additional comments would you like to share about your career counseling appointment?

Data Collection

• Data Analysis

   1. Analyzed descriptive statistics of respondent demographics compared to overall counseling participant demographics.
   2. Noted reasons to visit categories self-selected by clients
      1) Exploring self, 2) Majors, 3) Options, 4) Health, 5) Job search skills, 6) Job search, and 7) Graduate/professional schools.
   3. Developed a coding guide to identify learning outcomes expressed by clients, which combined CIP Theory with Affective, Behavioral, and Cognitive (ABC) outcomes of The Career Center.
   4. Evaluated learning outcomes clients gained and outcome areas for next steps based on coding guide. Responses were coded by two raters who had no knowledge of counselor or client names (‘blind coding’). Discrepancies were discussed. A third rater was brought in for consultation when needed.

SELECTED FINDINGS

1. Coming for Self-Exploration, but Leaving with Options-Knowledge?

   • Clients who came to “explore self” (as indicated by reasons for visit) most often reflected on learning regarding options (61%) than self-knowledge (57%).
   • Additionally, their next steps rarely indicated further self-exploration (17%). It was more common for next steps to be related to exploring options (46%), decision-making (19%), job/interpersonal, or schoolsearches (8%), or using resources (20%).

2. Clients Acknowledge Career Development as a Process with Multiple Steps

   • 32 respondents (14% of the total) expressed that they learned career development is a process, not a one-time event. We found this to be an interesting response to a broad prompt about learning. So, we dug deeper into those responses coming from:
     • The majority of process-oriented responses came from clients seeking help with health professions.

3. Moving Forward: From Knowledge/Exploration to Decision-Making and Implementation

   • 145 clients (64% expressed learning outcomes only in terms of the knowledge domain (exploring self or options). We asked, what happened with their stated next steps?
     • 15 clients (10% of the 145 in this group) expressed only next steps that continued to explore self or options, while 75 clients (52%) expressed some next steps in this knowledge domain
     • 31 clients (21%) expressed next steps continuing career decision making
     • 66 clients (46%) expressed next steps implementing career choices
     • 22 clients (15%) expressed next steps engaging both career decision making and implementation of career choices

   • 17 clients (10%) expressed next steps focusing on career development in a broad way.

   • I learned that I need to...

   • I plan to use my academic adviser as an interview to clarify the information that I learned today.

   • I plan on majoring in Knowledge and eventually pursuing a health career.

TABLE 1. OutcomesExpressed by Clients who Selected “Exploring Self” as a Reason for Visit (Finding 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coded Learning Outcomes and Next Steps</th>
<th>% Learned (n=145)</th>
<th>% Next Step (n=145)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Outcomes</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Exploration &amp; Knowledge</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option Exploration &amp; Knowledge</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Resource</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a Decision</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining Experience</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication of Accomplishments</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search Job/Internship/Graduate School</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Understanding of Career Development as a Process

13% 4%

REFERENCES


The Career Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. (2000). Affective, Behavioral, and Cognitive Outcomes of the Career Center, Urbana, IL. Available at:

The Career Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. (2016). Guidelines for career counseling practicum: Champaign, IL, Author.

TABLE 2. Data for Next Steps Expressed by Clients who Shared their Career-Making Learning Outcomes (Finding 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain of Next Steps Responses (n=245)</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Only</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind/Body Making</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included Implementation</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included Decision &amp; Implementation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of the Abes</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 1. OutcomesExpressed by Clients who Selected “Exploring Self” as a Reason for Visit (Finding 1)

Code: 

- 1) Exploring self, 2) Majors, 3) Options, 4) Health, 5) Job search skills, 6) Job search, and 7) Graduate/professional schools.

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