

Chapter 1

Using Information in Delivering Career Services

Introduction

- Do you know any companies that provide on-the-job training?
- Where can I learn about careers in the military?
- What health careers can I pursue that don't require science?
- Do you have a list of schools that provide training in automotive body repair?
- How do I get a teaching position with Department of Defense schools overseas?
- Where can I get certification as a child development specialist?
- Do you have a list of pharmaceutical firms that are hiring sales reps?
- What major is best for being an event planner?
- What fields will be in demand in the next 10 years?
- I am re-entering the workforce after being at home....where do I start?
- Can I get tuition reimbursement to retrain for a new job within the company?

The questions above illustrate the kinds of queries that persons working in career resource centers encounter daily from individuals seeking career assistance. While it is essential that career services practitioners have basic counseling skills, it is equally essential that they know how to locate and use career information resources effectively, regardless of the format or delivery system associated with a particular resource.

The career counseling and development profession has a long history relating to the use of career information resources. Frank Parsons, a pioneer in the career guidance field, acknowledged the importance of career information in discussing his view of the guidance process, which according to Parsons involved:

1. a clear understanding of yourself, your aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations, and their causes;

2. a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities and prospects in different lines of work;
3. true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts (1909, p. 5)

Since Parsons' day, the process of career decision making has undoubtedly become more complex. Some scholars would argue that we need completely different approaches and ways to think about careers and career development. We believe that the need for individuals to locate and make use of high-quality career information resources has not abated in this Information Age. Indeed, it is probably more important than ever.

National and International Perspectives

In the recently revised U.S. National Career Development Guidelines (NCDG), (<http://www.acrnetwork.org/ncdg.htm>), one of the primary goals stated under the Career Management section is that persons of all ages will "use accurate, current, and unbiased career information during career planning and management" (NTSC, 2006), followed by specific indicators that describe how the goal is measured through

- (1) knowledge acquisition
- (2) knowledge application
- (3) reflection on what has been learned

The guidelines are intended to be a framework for use in building and evaluating comprehensive career development programs for youth and adults. These guidelines recognize such things as the importance of information in career planning, the various types of information needed for career decision making, and the role of information in helping individuals find career options suited to their personal characteristics.

Table 1

Career Management		
Indicators		
Knowledge	Application	Reflection
Describe the importance of career information to your career planning. [CM3.K1]	Show how career information has been important in your plans and how it can be used in future plans. [CM3.A1]	Assess the impact of career information on your plans and refine plans so that they reflect accurate, current, and unbiased career information [CM3.R1]
Recognize that career information includes occupational, education and training, employment, and economic information and that there is a range of career information resources available. [CM3.K2]	Demonstrate the ability to use different types of career information resources (i.e., occupational, educational, economic, and employment) to support career planning. [CM3.A2]	Evaluate how well you integrate occupational, educational, economic, and employment information into the management of your career. [CM3.R2]
Recognize that the quality of career information resource content varies (e.g., accuracy, bias, and how up-to-date and complete it is). [CM3.K3]	Show how selected examples of career information are biased, out-of-date, incomplete, or inaccurate. [CM3.A3]	Judge the quality of the career information resources you plan to use in terms of accuracy, bias, and how up-to-date and complete it is. [CM3.R3]
Identify several ways to classify occupations. [CM3.K4]	Give examples of how occupational classifications systems can be used in career planning. [CM3.A4]	Assess which occupational classification system is most helpful to your career planning. [CM3.R4]
Identify occupations that you might consider without regard to your gender, race, culture, or ability. [CM3.K5]	Demonstrate openness to considering occupations that you might view as nontraditional (i.e., relative to your gender, race, culture, or ability). [CM3.A5]	Assess your openness to considering non-traditional occupations in your career management. [CM3.R5]
Identify the advantages and disadvantages of being employed in a non-traditional occupation. [CM3.K6]	Make decisions for yourself about being employed in a non-traditional occupation. [CM3.A6]	Assess the impact of your decisions about being employed in a non-traditional occupation. [CM3.R6]

Source: National Training Support Center. (2006). *National Career Development Guidelines*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved June 1, 2007, from <http://www.acrnetwork.org/ncdg/cm3.htm>.

Table 1 highlights the details under each of the three areas listed above. In addition, the American School Counseling Association (2005) has highlighted the importance of career information in its publication focused on a framework for school counseling programs. As part of the Career Domain, the model outlines desired competencies for students, including acquiring skills that will enable them to investigate the world of work in relation to knowledge of self and to use this information in making sound career decisions.

Beyond the United States, countries throughout the world have recognized the importance of providing

career guidance and information as an essential resource, not only serving the needs of young people and adults, but also in ensuring the growth and development of their economies and helping advance related key public policy objectives. One example is the work of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, <http://www.oecd.org>). OECD (2002) recently conducted an extensive survey of its member countries to gather data on the organization, management, and delivery of guidance and information services in those countries and to understand how this activity plays a role in larger challenges faced by

the OECD members. The focus of this survey was to learn more about the role of these services in promoting the career decision making and management of individuals throughout their lives. One section of the questionnaire was devoted to career information and included such questions as:

1. What is the public sector's role in producing career information?
2. What forms does career information typically take?
3. At which client groups is career information aimed?
4. What methods are used to gather career information?
5. What role does the private (both for-profit and not-for-profit) sector play in providing career information?

In a handbook for policy makers focused on career guidance, OECD (2004) identifies a number of challenges associated with improving career information, especially in countries with few resources. The report notes that in countries where career information is not comprehensive and lacking in quality, this fact greatly hinders the possibility that individuals will make well-informed and satisfying career decisions.

An example of efforts to improve access to and the quality of career information on the country level can be seen in the work of the Career Industry Council of Australia (<http://www.cica.org.au/>) on behalf of Australia's Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The council's work has led to a set of guidelines for career development services and career information which can be found at <http://www.cica.org.au/system/files/f16/o106/Final%20scoping%20paper.pdf>.

The examples in this section illustrate that considerations about the use and management of career information take place not only on a microlevel (e.g., how one school or community might tackle this issue), but also on a macrolevel as nations grapple with the well being of their citizens as well as the development of their economies. Beyond these national and global and international perspectives, it is useful to consider at a practical level who the providers of career information and their target audiences are.

Who Provides Career Information?

Who Benefits From It?

Who actually provides career information and

resources? How do we define staff roles with respect to developing and managing career information resources? The previously mentioned term "career services practitioners" includes a number of staff roles that relate to this topic, one of which has been called "librarian." Although this role has undergone changes as new information technologies have emerged, many of the standard skill sets used in managing information resources, such as collection development, cataloging, and reference services, are relevant to how career resource centers are staffed and managed today. The emergence of paraprofessionals, such as career development facilitators (Splete & Hoppin, 2000), both in the U.S. and around the world, has expanded the number of individuals who can play a role in the delivery of career information. We will use the term career practitioner throughout the monograph to cover a wide range of persons who are involved in delivering information, guidance, and counseling services. We devote space in later chapters to a more in-depth discussion of issues related to staff roles associated with developing and managing career resources.

Defining the population or populations to be served is another key area to consider in relation to any organization's, program's, or center's desire to develop and manage career resources. Students of all ages and levels, distance learners, employees, community adults, ex-offenders, immigrants, and downsized workers are just a few of the populations that may be seeking career information resources. Don Schutt (2008) in his book, *How to Plan and Develop a Career Center*, includes several chapters that deal with this topic. Obviously the target "client" population has enormous implications for which resources are acquired and made accessible, whether in an actual physical setting or through Web-based delivery systems. We work in a university-based center that is open to the public. This had led to decisions about resource acquisition that might differ from a more traditional university setting serving only currently enrolled students. Another setting might serve a very narrowly defined population, for example, high-level government employees who are leaving their public sector jobs, and that may lead to a resource collection more uniquely focused on transition issues faced by these individuals. An example of this would be the Career Transition Center maintained by the U.S. Department of State, which provides training, counseling, job leads, and other assistance to U.S. citizen employees of the Department of State and other federal foreign affairs agencies, (<http://www.state.gov/m/fsi/tc/c6958.htm>). Another

example is the network of career counseling services and resources targeted at union employees, such as members of the steelworkers union, which have been established through a private trust fund (<http://benhudnallmemorialtrust.org>). These centers provide access to and information about educational and other support resources, as well as individual career counseling and workshops (R. Elsdon, personal communication, December 6, 2007). Other centers, based in corporate settings, target employee development (Elsdon & Iyer, 1999) and are a key aspect of an organization's strategic plan for retaining employees, as well as ensuring that the organization maintains a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Some communities have developed counseling and resource centers focused around the career development needs of women. The Montgomery County government in Maryland includes a unit called the Commission for Women Counseling & Career Center (<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cfwtmpl.asp?url=/Content/CFW/CFWCCC.asp>). Part of their services includes a collection of library resources (E. Rambo, personal communication, October 10, 2007). Other career resource centers have been developed to serve the needs of ex-offenders, and the National Institute of Corrections has provided useful guidelines for persons working with this population, (<http://www.nicic.org/OWD>). We provide examples throughout the monograph of how considerations of user needs impact various aspects of resource collection, organization, and management. Although the terms "client" or "clients" may have specialized meanings in certain work settings, we shall use them throughout this monograph to refer to all types of individuals who may be seeking career information resources, including adolescents, adults-in-transition, patrons, customers, students, users, and advisees.

Learner Outcomes

The goal of this monograph is to provide practitioners with an informative and practical guide on developing and managing career resources. Specific learner outcomes for readers of this monograph include the following:

- increased understanding of how a theoretical framework can guide the use of career information in various levels of career services delivery
- knowledge of how a systems approach can improve the development and management of

career resources

- greater awareness of important administrative issues, including accommodating diverse clientele, budgeting, staffing, and policy development
- enhanced knowledge of technical issues faced by career resource center managers, such as cataloging, classifying, and weeding
- greater understanding of factors associated with the organization of career resources, including physical and virtual collections
- increased awareness of future developments impacting career information

Additionally, we provide a variety of useful tools, forms, and worksheets to guide readers of this book who may be starting a career resource center from the ground up, improving one that is already established, or exploring options for a virtual resource center. At this point, it is helpful to address some key definitions, terms, and theoretical concepts in the career development field and how these tie into the use of information in the career services delivery process.

Definitions

In the career development field, numerous authors and theorists have provided definitions that guide our work. These definitions and concepts may help define what a particular organization or institution is seeking to do with respect to the design of its services, which in turn has implications for the career information resources that may be needed. We outline some of these below.

Career development — Peterson, Sampson, Lenz, and Reardon (2002) viewed career development as involving the implementation of a series of career decisions over an individual's lifetime. An earlier definition by Sears (1982) focused on career development as the "total constellation of economic, sociological, psychological, educational, physical, and chance factors that combine to shape one's career" (p. 139). Both of these definitions touch on key areas related to the use of career information. Making conscious career decisions involves actively accessing one or more types of information through a variety of career resources. Additionally, as part of their life experiences in various roles, individuals also subconsciously amass career information about themselves and the world, shaping how they view future options.

Career information — Peterson et al. (2002) noted that career information describes the characteristics of occupations, education, training, and employment that individuals use to clarify their knowledge of career options in problem solving and decision making. We view career information in the broadest sense of the term, not limited to occupational or employment information, but rather including such things as resources related to choices about leisure, ways to balance work and family, and lifelong career management. The career education movement (Hoyt, 2005) viewed career information as an essential component of the various programs designed to impact the career development of young people and adults. Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2005) made a distinction between “career information” and “career data.” They noted that clients and students collect data as part of their career exploration and decision making process. According to these authors, data can be thought of as information only when the data is understood by clients and used to inform career decision making, that is, to assist them to choose one alternative over another. The “data to information” process presents a special challenge for persons using online information resources. Those who seek to design virtual career resource centers must create ways to communicate effectively with clients to assure that they make good use of the data they access in solving their career problems. We say more about the design of virtual resource centers in Chapter 5.

Career problem — A career problem involves a gap between an individual’s present career situation and a desired future career situation that the person seeks (Sampson, Reardon, Peterson, & Lenz, 2004). As Sampson (2008) has noted, it is important to stress that a problem is not necessarily bad. Career “problems” can present both opportunities and difficulties. A highly gifted high school student may have difficulty selecting options because she excels in so many different areas. An adult in a city where the major employer closes down may face a difficult career problem because the options related to his skill set are severely restricted.

In any case, solving career problems almost always involves accessing varying types of career information, but individuals often need help making good use of this information so they can avoid becoming overwhelmed. The challenge for clients and counselors is to know when clients need more information, when they have enough information, and how to avoid

“hyper vigilance” with information. Hyper-vigilant clients often get in an endless cycle of exploring, researching, and continually revisiting career information resources because they feel like they might be overlooking an option (e.g., “I’ll never find the perfect job”), and this “career problem” prevents them from making a choice and committing to it. Effective career problem solving involves not only what clients know about options, but also their ability to effectively integrate that knowledge into the career decision-making process.

Career resources — Sampson (2008) defines career resources as encompassing career assessments and information that are used to help individuals clarify their self and option knowledge and their approach to decision making. These resources may be delivered via career center and school resource rooms, Internet Web sites, and information handouts. In this monograph, we define career resources in a more limited way and will discuss this topic in greater detail in a later section of this chapter.

The Role of Theory

Essential to good career services practice is a theory or theories that help guide the work of practitioners, and serve as a road map for clients and students seeking assistance. Career theories vary in the degree to which they place an emphasis on the role of career information and provide concrete examples of how information is integrated into career counseling. Space limitations in this monograph prevent us from providing a thorough review of theories and the role of career information. For a more detailed discussion of career theories, readers are referred to the publications by Brown (2002), Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2005), and Sharf (2005). In his text, Sharf provides helpful examples of how career information connects to various theoretical perspectives. Readers may also find it helpful to review the book by Niles, Goodman, and Pope (2002), *Career Counseling Casebook*, which includes examples of how practitioners not only use theory to guide the career counseling process, but also how they make good use of career information resources in addressing client needs. We’ll use Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) theory to illustrate the integration of career information into the career counseling process.

Cognitive Information Processing Theory

One career theory that speaks directly to the topic of developing and managing career resources is Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) (Peterson et al., 2002; Sampson, 2008; Sampson, Reardon, Peterson, & Lenz, 2004). A key assumption of CIP theory is, "Effective career problem solving and decision making involves (sic) both knowledge and a process for thinking about the knowledge we have gained" (Sampson et al., 2004, p. 3). Sampson et al. further noted that "we can use career resources and career services to help us think about and organize what we have learned, allowing us to sort through the vast amount of information available and use the most relevant information in making choices" (p. 3). Effective career problem solvers and decision makers are characterized by their ability to locate information, integrate it into their previous life experiences and schema, and apply information to solving the career question at hand. This CIP perspective has implications for how career information resources are accessed and used in the Internet age, which has resulted in an explosion of information delivered via the Web.

Some might ask why career resource centers, staffed by career practitioners and related personnel, are even needed in the Internet age. Isn't it "all on the Internet?" While the Internet has become an indispensable tool for career practitioners and clients alike, not only has it failed to eliminate the role of career practitioners in helping clients make good use of information, in some ways it has made their role even more critical. The data and resources available on the Internet can be overwhelming and intimidating to many clients, who vary greatly in their capacity and readiness (Sampson, 2008; Sampson, et al., 2000) to effectively gather and process information relevant to their career choices. In addition, it is often difficult to judge the validity of many Web-based resources or the extent to which these resources meet the standards for "evidence-based practice." As Sampson et al. (2004) have noted, the helping professionals who use information with undocumented validity, without disclosing the limits of the information, are considered in violation of ethical codes. Clients may focus on the practitioner as the expert ("can **you** tell me...") or believe they are always dependent on someone else to find the answer. A goal of CIP theory is to help individuals improve their ability to locate, use, and integrate career information resources, thus ultimately helping

them become more effective problem solvers and decision makers over their lifetime.

Setting Some Limits

As noted earlier, the career development field includes a wide variety of publications that address career assessment, career theory, ethics, multicultural issues, impact of technology, program design and evaluation, strategic planning, and other topics besides career information resources. Space limitations in this monograph, however, prevent us from connecting career resources to each of these topics. Our emphasis will be on obtaining, organizing, and managing resources that enable clients to learn about key knowledge areas associated with the career decision-making process, such as:

- initial career choice, career transitions, workforce trends
- available options, e.g., education/training, occupations, leisure, employment, and
- strategies for implementing those decisions (job search, gaining admission into training programs, etc.)

We know that most readers who are designing or managing career resource centers include career assessment tools as an essential component of a center's resources. Providing access to a variety of career assessments allows clients to explore their self-knowledge (Sampson, et al., 2004), including values interests, skills, and related personal characteristics. Readers seeking information related specifically to career assessment resources may find it helpful to review *A Counselor's Guide to Career Assessment Instruments* (Whitfield, Feller, & Wood, in press) published by the National Career Development Association, (<http://www.ncda.org>). Osborn and Zunker (2006) provide comprehensive information on the use of assessments in the career counseling process. Schutt and Finkle (2008) in their chapter on "Critical Center Resources" include an example of important issues to consider when selecting assessments. In addition, various computer-assisted career guidance (CACG) systems (such as e-Discover, Choices Planner, Focus, and SIGI³) that play a valuable role in providing career information also include self-assessment activities. Information on these systems can be obtained directly from the system publisher or vendor. The Florida State University

Center for the Study of Technology in Counseling and Career Development maintains a Web site (<http://www.career.fsu.edu/techcenter/>) that provides information on selected CACG systems. In addition, Sampson (2008) provides extensive details regarding the role of resources in implementing career programs across a variety of settings.

Summary

Despite advances in technology and virtual resources, there is still a clear need for career practitioners to improve the development and management of career resources in both physical and virtual environments to better meet the needs of clients, students, and others seeking career assistance. Career practitioners, regardless of their work setting, need to consider a variety of issues related to developing and managing career resources, including such things as:

- who they are trying to serve
- what theory or concepts guide their practice and service delivery
- organizational philosophy and goals
- access to physical and virtual resources
- sources of quality career information resources

This monograph addresses many of the key factors to consider in developing and managing career information resources, gives in-depth guidance to persons who wish to increase their understanding of this topic, and provides practical guides, samples, and tools that allow readers to easily implement the concepts outlined in the chapters that follow. Readers new to the topic of developing and managing career resources may find it helpful to read the chapters in sequence, while more experienced practitioners may choose to focus on selected chapters that speak to a particular area in which they seek more in-depth information. Our goal for all readers of this monograph is to improve the career information resources for the clientele they serve.

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