

## *Interview with Professor Itamar Gati*

*By Laura Nota*

### 1. As a researcher, which are the most important research studies that you are currently conducting in the field of vocational guidance and career counseling?

There are three major focuses of our research at present. One is focusing on attrition from post-secondary education (namely, college or university) of many students and on the phenomenon of changing majors. We regard changing majors also as attrition. We believe that part of the problem is related to unsatisfying career decisions of those students. Those who feel that they are not in the right place, often ask 'why should I continue?' The important question is *why* those students drop out. We believe that part of the reason is that they make wrong career decisions. We examine in this project the decisions leading to the choice of a major *before* actually beginning study at a university or college. In particular, using variables related to the career decision-making process we aim to predict which person has higher chances of dropping out or changing his or her major. So this is one focus.

Another focus is developing procedures to help young adults who have already passed two thirds of the career decision-making process, namely the prescreening and the in-depth exploration stage. So they are considering a few career options that were found not only promising, but also indeed suitable. So they are wondering: 'Should I choose A or B or C?' We are trying to develop procedures to help young adults who are at the Choice stage summarize their knowledge and process it in the best way.

The third focus of our current research relates to the study of *career decision-making profiles*, which we suggest as a concept that should replace the traditional career decision-making style. Traditional approaches to career decision-making styles characterize individuals by a single dominant characteristic, for example, rational, intuitive, or dependent. We suggest using a multidimensional profile characterizing the individual's career decision-making process. For example, whether the processing of information is analytic-holistic, readiness to compromise low-large, desire to please others low-high, and so on.

These are the three focuses of our current research.

### 2. How do you appraise the quality and extent of interaction between researchers and counselors in your Country?

Unfortunately, the interaction and cooperation is less than the desirable. I know that this is the case in many places around the world, not only in Israel.

Practitioners tend to focus on practice; they are involved in helping their client.

They do not have enough time, typically, to collaborate with researchers, perhaps because they do not see it as important.. Moreover, I dare to say they do not read

enough career-related research for various reasons. Therefore I think a yearly

Convention like the one we will have in Sperlonga this year is a wonderful

opportunity to update practitioners about new developments in theories, in

interventions, in research, which they can consequently incorporate into their daily work.

### 3. Do you think career counseling contribute (how important and to what extent) to downsize the problems caused by the International socio-economic crisis?

Well, the economy goes up and down. No one can really predict it; it is unrealistic to expect from a career counselor to provide accurate predictions regarding future trends: what occupations will be in demand five years from now, ten years from now, fifteen years from now, and so on. Unfortunately, counselors cannot solve the world's economic problems, nor the problems or difficulties related to the uncertainty involved in career decisions related to unpredictable future events.

Nevertheless counselors help clients, I believe, in two ways. First, by helping clients develop various kinds of flexibility and readiness to adjust to future changes, which no one can predict at present. So, career decision is not a one-time decision; We will have to make even more decisions in the future. Another way that counselors help clients is by guiding them how to cope better with the compromises involved in their career decisions. Because almost all career decisions involve some kind of compromises, the question is how should we deal with such a reality. In this respect, framing compromises not in terms of alternatives, but in terms of what factors are important to me, to what degree am I ready to compromise on, for example, the place where I work, the length of training involved, and so on. Thus, clients would be prepared to make more decisions as well as deal with more compromises in the future.

### 4. Which kind of training and what professional competencies should vocational guidance/career counselors possess?

Well, those of a Superman! Why? Counselors should assess the needs of their clients, help by providing information, guide them to process information, and help them in compromising. Counselors are expected to do all these, while dealing with unique individuals. So they have to assess the needs of each client, develop an intervention plan, and do so under constraints of time and additional resources. Still, I believe that career counselors can benefit from new tools developed by researchers. It is important to provide career counselors with needs-assessment tools that were validated, suggest interventions which are evidence-based, namely, which have been proved that they are working. To sum up, career counselors should be trained to be knowledgeable of theories, methods, procedures, and evaluation.

#### 5. What should future research in this sector focus on? In your opinion ...

I think that there are two central challenges. The first is to design evidence-based interventions, which can be adopted and *adapted* when needed, to the needs of particular clients. The second challenge is better tailoring the intervention to each client's unique needs. This is a non-trivial challenge. And, of course, evaluating one's own work can help updating and improving the service career counselors provide; this goal can be achieved by adopting the best available methods, theories, tools, and questionnaires.

Further suggested reading:

Itamar Gati (2010). Facilitare il career decision making. In L. Nota e S. Soresi (a cura di). *Sfide e nuovi orizzonti per l'orientamento* (pp. 195-206). Firenze, Italy: GIUNTIO.S.