

## **LIFE-DESIGNING AND CAREER COUNSELING NICE : COMPETENCIES**

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### **1. Objectives :**

1. Why should we change our practices in career counseling ?
  - Briefly evoke the co-evolution between economy and vocational counseling during the last 50 years.
  - Show some myths and paradoxes to overcome, now.
2. What is going on at the international level ?
  - Remember the work done by professional associations (IAEVG), EU administration (CEDEFOP) and academics (NICE network)
  - Briefly describe the 'bottom-up' approach used to develop the 'Swiss Survival Kit' for counsellors
3. What did we learn so far ?
  - Show the need for integrated views about 'individual counseling' and 'social engineering' as whole sets of competencies
  - Discuss the difficulties to 'build' counselor competencie
4. Finally : outlook to three important challenges...

### **2. Co-Evolution :**

Ideas about vocational counseling drastically changed during the last 50 years. So did methods and tools counsellors used (and continue to use...).

- after World War II unlimited growth (e.g. laundry machines, TV etc) asked for placing 'the right man at the right place' ; counsellors used psychological tests and informed about 'professions'
- in the seventies, programming computers created new ideas ; counsellors tried to educate and train clients for problem solving and choice
- in the eighties, improved efficiency through production 'just in time' led to downsizing and structural unemployment ; counsellors focused on necessary and sufficient profiles of 'employability' and skills
- in the nineties, change became permanent and globalization/delocalization created new unemployment ; counsellors became aware of the need for 'life-long' and 'life-wide' learning
- at the beginning of the XXI century, we assist at the emergence of a new generation ('Y' : immediate satisfaction, no authority, zapping jobs...) ; counsellors need new tools and methods

### **3. Myths and paradoxes :**

However some ideas, shared by many counsellors, need now to be seriously re-analyzed. Instead of being helpful, they may create harmful paradoxes ...

- instead of believing in client's free choice as an ideology, we have to fully understand our client's eco-system (e.g. available jobs in his region)
- instead of believing in stable 'professions', we have to admit that people continually change jobs and thereby (their) professional identities
- instead of looking for linear and planified careers, we should accept that unplanned events (see 'happenstance' by John Krumboltz) exist and people continuously re-invent / re-write their personal 'stories' (or past careers...)

- instead of standardized tests, we therefore better should listen to the 'narrative' (subjective, lived) multiple realities, which people have
- finally, instead of using statistical references (group, normative), we should test new approaches, such as modelling complex dynamics for research in vocational counseling

#### **4. International Standards :**

Many organizations actually are preoccupied by the question what the actual 'state of the art' for vocational counselling really is, and where we should go.

We might assist in the next years at the 'emergence' of international standards, which might then be imposed by political authorities, if counsellors do not develop their own criteria.

- IAEVG, as the most important professional association of counsellors, conducted a large survey in 1999, adopted a list of 11 competencies and 10 specialized practices in 2003 (by consensus) and offers now a web-based 'Kit for Self-Assessment' for counsellors
- CEDEFOP, as a specialized EU office in Greece, published a report on current evolution of counsellor practices all over Europe
- NICE, as an academic network (Erasmus LLP) currently executes three work-packages on 1) assessing the existing training practices ; 2) innovation ; and 3) collecting and sharing documentation for counsellor training

#### **5. Swiss Survival Kit :**

In Switzerland, we tried to avoid the shortcomings by sharing the ideas on the profile of necessary and sufficient competencies for vocational counselors in a joint project.

Political authorities, employers, professional associations and academics worked out together a minimal set of measurable/operationalized/documented competencies.

Specialized studies at universities (MSc level) are the norm. Exceptions by 'validation des acquis' are possible.

We distinguish :

- 5 basic competencies (=core identity)
- 5 complementary competencies (= special tasks)
- 2 'technical' competencies (quality assurance, networking)
- related social & personal skills

#### **6.Contextualized competencies :**

Within the NICE academic network the just mentioned Swiss Survival Kit actually serves as a reference for the development of experimental tools and methods for innovation (life-designing, needs for generation Y).

Counsellor's competencies will develop in the direction of 'meta-competencies'.

Therefore integrative conceptual frameworks are needed.

We currently discuss :

- individual counseling and network activities are complementary
- individual counseling might be structured by Jean Guichard's concept of 'subjective identity forms'
- individual counseling might further be adapted to client's needs (autonomy) by counsellor's polyvalent use of intervention techniques (guidance)
- network activities might be structured by Jean Piaget's concept of 'equilibration majorante'
- again, network activities of counsellors might be adapted to group needs by polyvalent training

### **7. 'Building' competencies :**

Self-evaluations of students during their MSc-studies (4th and 5th year) were compared to self-evaluations of general practitioners and specialists in vocational counseling.

- > in general, practitioners were more severe (more realistic ?) in their self-evaluation of competencies
- > students progressed in their basic and some specialized competencies (exception : group management) during their studies
- > specialists revealed specific resources (groups, coaching, modules) as compared to general practitioners

### **8. Discussion :**

Three (six) major points need to be discussed :

- What are the limits of self-evaluation ? Our observations revealed, that counsellors are not necessarily realistic in their self-evaluations. In analogy to quality assurance procedures, shouldn't we check by hetero-evaluations ?
- A particular challenge is the 'validation des acquis'-issue : Who does it ? What are the necessary controls to avoid pitfalls ?
- Do we need monitoring or research on the evolution of core competencies over time ? What are the respective roles of professional associations and academics ?
- What about the need for development of 'meta-competencies' ?
- Should we facilitate interdisciplinary teamwork in vocational counseling ? Who should be part of it ? How the 'specialists' might qualify ?
- International 'standards' will emerge anyhow... How anticipate and influence these developments ? What are the chances (discovery of cultures) and limits (language) of more exchanges and mobility ?