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Employment Counseling for the Workforce Development The Role of the Public Employment Services (PES)

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Abstract

One answer to the question of what should be the role of the employment counselor is to be found in an interpretation of the kinds of roles counselors have developed out of their experience in making adjustments and adaptations to the realities of their work and to the problems that they have encountered. There are five interconnected functions in counseling roles which provide one with a useful framework for thinking about counseling. These functions are: (1) teaching, (2) behavior change, (3) socio-emotional support, (4) decision-making, problem solving, planning, and (5) advocacy. Each of these functions is discussed in relation to public employment counseling, particularly experimental and demonstration experiences or projects dealing with the disadvantaged. The analysis of the above functions has described three functions (behavior change, decision-making, and advocacy) which fall within the purview of the professional counselor, one (teaching) within the purview of the non-professional, and one (social-emotional support) within the role of the worker.

Key words: vocational counselors, career counselors, counseling services

Foreword

In the past, people usually needed assistance with their career only at major decision points, such as leaving school, graduating from post-secondary institution or changing jobs. Now, in a fundamentally different age, massive changes in the labor market (the structure of opportunity, globalization and the very nature of employment) are leaving our working lives in a state of permanent flux. Career change is constant and the demand for services has changed. This is why career guidance and counseling services are to be given stronger recognition by policy makers, and also career guidance and counseling sector needs to give more attention to ways of influencing the policy-making process.

A quality assurance system in providing career services should be the target for each society being aware of the key contribution this type of services can make to achieve essential public policy goals, such as: lifelong learning, social inclusion, labor market efficiency and economic development.

The present context

Labor market and the need for counseling

In the countries in transition, it is considered that the guidance and career counseling services are not important for the social and economical development. The governments don't have enough justification to invest in this kind of services aiming just to inform people and lead them to the existing training opportunities, without having a direct effect on creating new additional jobs.

Indeed, the career information and counseling services cannot create employment opportunities, but they represent a very important tool in order to diminish the qualification deficit, an excessive personnel flow, attitude and motivational deficiencies, thus representing a measure against the low working productivity and it is useful for the efficient administration of the human resources.

Thus, any career information, guidance and counseling approach should start from the current and future requirements of the labor market. Proceeding this way, the career guidance and counseling services contribute directly to the development of a favorable economical framework to create new jobs.

These services represent a necessary condition, but it is not enough to create new jobs. Out of all services supplied on the labor market, the career counseling activity has an essential role. It is previous to all the other services that are offered, whose success depends on the informational management efficiency about the labor market (supply and demand), on which this activity is based on.

Meeting the client's expectations

In the EU countries the general public is becoming more informed about what to expect from career counseling service providers and, as a consequence, more critical. Funders also are becoming more insistent about quality assurance.

These actors are increasing the pressure on counseling agencies to have *policies, standards, and benchmarks* for service which "customers" can understand so that they can make comparisons and judgments as to which services to select.

The situation in Romania is appreciably different. The general public is not yet aware about the crucial role that information, guidance and counseling play both in facilitating access to learning and developing a successful career. There are not very many career guidance and counseling providers and very few organizations have specific guidelines for the delivery of career counseling and very few practical tools exist to help organizations who want to pay attention to creating better standards in career counseling.

Developing a framework to ensure quality in career guidance and counseling within public employment sector

The role of well organized career information, guidance and counseling services

Well-organized career information, guidance and counseling services are important both to education systems and to the labor market, as well as to their interface.

Within the labor market, well-organized career information, guidance and counseling can:

- Improve the accuracy and accessibility of the information available to individuals about short - and long-term job opportunities. In turn this can improve individual decision making about jobs and about job training opportunities, and improve the allocation of human talents within the labor market. In particular, well-organized career information, guidance and counseling can help to:
 - Achieve a better match between skills, interests and qualifications on the one hand and available job opportunities on the other; and
 - Unearth the talents of those who are not favored by life's circumstances, thus improving the social and intergenerational mobility of talent.
- Help to improve the allocation of labor across regions, industries and occupations in the face of labor supply and demand fluctuations resulting from technological and structural change;
- Make a key difference between the successful and unsuccessful implementation of active labor market programmes and active welfare-to-work programmes (together with other support services).

These roles for career information, guidance and counseling services become increasingly relevant as human knowledge and skill come to play an increased role, compared to capital and labor, in national economic performance. They become still more important in the context of discussions about new concepts of careers that emphasize individual responsibility for career management, and individual and corporate responsibility for developing employability skills, often as a substitute for long-term commitment or loyalty.

The role of employment counselor

Vocational counselors, also called *employment* or *career counselors*, provide mainly career counseling outside the school setting. Their chief focus is helping individuals with career decisions. Vocational counselors explore and evaluate the client's education, training, work history, interests, skills, and personality traits. They may arrange for aptitude and achievement tests to help the client make career decisions. They also work with individuals to develop their job-search skills and assist clients in locating and applying for jobs. In addition, career counselors provide support to people experiencing job loss, job stress, or other career transition issues.

Within the public employment services vocational counseling is commonly used to assist unemployed people to find better jobs, or employed clients to overcome various personal and professional challenges that are confronted related with the actual workplace.

How might we know if key public policy objectives are carried out in order to assure a certain quality level in providing career services?

There are a number of questions that governments might ask to assess the extent to which career information, guidance and counseling services are meeting the key public policy objectives. For example:

- What is the extent of access to career information and guidance provision?
- What mechanisms are used for assuring the quality of such provision?
- To what extent is ICT used to widen access and increase cost-effectiveness?
- What range of individuals and organizations are involved in service delivery, and how adequate are arrangements for the training of guidance practitioners?
- How and to what extent the diverse provision of services is effectively co-coordinated?
- How adequate are arrangements for developing an evidence base to support service delivery?

Conclusions

The need for lifelong career development is becoming increasingly evident as more and more people switch jobs because of new forms of work organization, economic downturns, or technological changes. Many workers will become “portfolio people”, frequently moving from one individual contract to another.

Career guidance and counseling services have often in the past been viewed as marginal services in terms of public policy. Reviews by three influential international bodies¹ have affirmed that this view is no longer adequate. Such services need now to be brought into the mainstream of policy formation. A key challenge for each of us is to determine how this can be accomplished.

With respect to counseling, the public employment service requires well-trained staff. According to Brayfield, Arthur H., there are some criteria to have in mind when aiming the quality of this kind of services: a) 1st is that salary scales for counselors must be competitive; b) 2nd, the shortages of trained counselors are such that adequate training stipends must be made available to qualified individuals who will undertake full-time programs of professional preparation; c) 3rd, research funds should be made available to qualified investigators who will undertake the kinds of occupational research that will help to answer the many questions about vocational effectiveness and career development which are still unresolved.

¹ Three co-ordinated reviews of national career guidance policies have recently been carried out by OECD, the European Commission and the World Bank, covering 36 countries in total.

The key solution remains **the wise use of the human resources** as a basic test of the effective functioning of this kind of services. Vocational counseling under the auspices of a public employment service can contribute materially to the achievement of this goal.

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Consilierea vocațională pentru dezvoltarea forței de muncă Rolul Serviciului Public al Forței de Muncă

Rezumat

O problemă importantă este aceea a consonanței dintre competențele unui consilier vocațional și situațiile cu care se întâlnește în exercitarea profesiei. Există cinci funcții interconexate care configurează un cadru util în abordarea consilierii. Aceste funcții sunt: (1) predarea, (2) schimbarea comportamentului, (3) sprijinul socio – emoțional, (4) capacitățile de a planifica, a rezolva probleme și a lua decizii, (5) susținerea. Fiecare dintre aceste funcții este analizată cu referire la implicațiile sale practice, mai ales în planul interacțiunii cu persoanele dezavantajate.