

Florida State University Libraries

2010

Group 2:: Career Techniques and Assessments from an International Perspective

Debra S. Osborn and Janet G. Lenz



Group 2: Career Techniques and Assessments from an International Perspective

Debra S. Osborn

Assistant Professor College of Education Florida State University

Janet G. Lenz

Program Director for Instruction, Research, and Evaluation Florida State University Career
Center

Co-Director, Center for the Study of Technology in Counseling and Career Development
Florida State University

Abstract

Career assessments are a primary tool of career counselors. This article summarizes three expert presentations and comments from a discussant group from several countries on the theme “Techniques and Assessment,” which were part of the 2010 NCDA/IAEVG/SVP International Symposium in San Francisco, California. Group participants identified two goals related to the topic, including: a) creating a joint statement on the use of assessments and b) to identify the best practices related to career assessments. In addition, group members identified relevant resources and strategies for addressing these two goals.

Career Techniques and Assessments from an International Perspective

Career assessment has had a central place in the practice of career counseling since the earliest history of the field. As an early practitioner in the field Frank Parsons (1909) used a variety of assessment techniques to develop clients' self-knowledge. Today, career practitioners use a variety of quantitative tests and questionnaires, measuring constructs such as interests, competencies, decision-making status, career maturity, personality, and dysfunctional career thinking in an effort to assist clients in the career decision-making process. Other assessments and techniques are qualitative, such as card sorts (Osborn & Bethell, 2009-2010), story telling, or the Career Style Interview (Reh fuss, 2009). Many career inventories and tools are available online, and some inventories such as the Self-Directed Search (SDS), Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ; Gati & Saka, 2001), or the Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI; Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders, 1996) have been translated to different languages and adapted for use with individuals from different cultures and countries. Further, as Herr (2009) has noted, "career assessments are regarded by policy makers, theorists, and counselors as important instruments to achieve social, economic, and political goals, both at national and individual levels" (p. 13).

Culturally competent career counselors promote and advocate for the career development of all individuals regardless of "age, culture, disability, ethnicity, race, religion/spirituality, creed, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, marital/partnership status, language preference, socioeconomic status, or any other personal characteristic not specifically relevant to job performance" (NCDA, 2011). With respect to culturally appropriate career assessment, the following components are recommended:

"the assessment integrates culturally relevant information about the client; attempts to

understand the client in his or her cultural, personal and career contextual realities; and takes into account the limitations of traditional assessment and assessment tools” (Flores, Spanierman, & Obasi, 2003, p. 80).

Are these recommendations for cultural competence with respect to assessments specific to the United States, or do they extend past national boundaries? Are there other recommendations that should be considered? These questions were the topic of discussion at 2010 International Symposium.

The symposium presenters included Itamar Gati of Israel, Mary McMahon of Australia, and Gudbjörg Vilhjámsdóttir of Iceland. Discussants were faculty, counselors, career service providers and directors from Canada, Hong Kong, Romania, Taiwan, and the United States. The general question posed to symposium attendees was “Are we getting more services, of high quality, to more people?” and further, to examine this question within an international context. The next sections will highlight content covered by the expert presenters, and share several concerns voiced during the group discussion related to the use of career assessments, including client welfare, costs, quality, research, and training. The article closes with a focus on possible action steps related to the topic of career assessment and strategies for reaching those steps.

International Considerations with Career Assessments

The 2010 International Symposium was the third shared collaborative among NCDA, SVP and IAVEG, with the purpose of fostering an international discussion on mutual topics of interest and to establish shared goals. An emphasis of the current symposium group was on cross-cultural assessment, and specifically emphasizing nomothetic and idiographic perspectives of career assessment, themes that were similar to the international assessment group in the previous symposium (Diemer & Gore, 2009). The 2010 presenters addressed online career

assessment (Gati, 2010), qualitative career assessment (McMahon, 2010), and translating career assessments for use with another culture (Vilhjalmsdottir, 2010). Across the presentations and subsequent discussions, five key considerations seemed to emerge with respect to the use of career assessments: (1) client welfare, (2) assessment costs, (3) quality, (4) research with assessments, and (5) training practitioners to use assessments.

Client Welfare

Client welfare is of utmost importance when considering any intervention, assessment, or technique. This theme ran across each of the presentations, as a key motivation for each presenter's topic. For example, Gati (2010) noted that the first question he considers is why a person is seeking services, why she or he is having difficulty making the decision without assistance from a professional. One of his aims in creating the Career Decision-Making Profile, a quantitative online instrument, was to help individuals identify and then take steps to remove barriers to career decision making prior to engaging in self-exploration of interests, skills and other traits or conducting research on occupations. McMahon (2010) discussed the value of using qualitative assessments, and specifically storytelling, as a means to get a fuller picture of the client's story, or between the lines of a standardized career assessment. Vilhjalmsdottir (2010) discussed the rationale behind adapting the Career Adaptability Inventory to the Icelandic context. In her explanation of the difficulties encountered and the process for validation, she explained that the goal was to produce an instrument that would be valid, reliable, and ultimately useful to Icelanders in their career decision-making.

The use of online assessments, and the degree to which a career practitioner needs to "protect" clients from misinterpreting their assessment results, was discussed. Concerns with online assessments included the likelihood of there being no preliminary screening by a

professional of a client's readiness to use and properly interpret specific websites, the questionable psychometric properties of many online assessments, the unknown motives of individuals and groups posting career tests online, a possibility of online cultural bias, and the possible improper uses of assessments by individuals who are not trained in administration and interpretation (Barak, 2003). In addition, career practitioners should remember that educational systems, occupational structures and options that are available in one country may be different or non-existent in other countries, and that using these inventories in a culturally inappropriate way may raise false hopes and expectations, or increase career confusion (Osborn & Zunker, 2006). Sampson, Carr, Lumsden, Smisson, and Dozier (2009) provide additional information on the limitations of computer-based career assessments that may impact client welfare.

Costs

With widespread access to the Internet and thousands of "career tests" available online, clients and counselors may be tempted to choose an inventory that is free over one that costs money. In a tight economy, career centers, practitioners and agencies will be considering multiple costs and may choose to use free or less costly inventories. Not all free inventories or tools are invalid or unreliable. The Career Decision -Making Tool (Gati, 2010), the Virtual Card Sort (Osborn & Bethell, 2009), and the Career Resources Page (Osborn & Zalaquett, 2005; Zalaquett & Osborn, 2007) are examples of free career tools that have been supported by research. Glavin and Savickas (2010) describe a resource called Vocopher: The Career Collaboratory, which was designed as an Internet site that provides free access to a variety of career assessment instruments. While some test developers may have the support and motivation to develop free, high quality online resources, this may in turn discourage other potential test developers due to the time and costs associated with the process of instrument development and validation, if there

is little to no financial benefit. Cost may also be a consideration in relation to the quality of career assessments since, in an ideal world, the investment of sufficient resources can insure that a career assessment has been through a rigorous development process, and therefore meets the highest standards with regard to psychometric properties. Issues related to quality are discussed further in the section that follows.

Quality

A great deal of discussion focused on the quality of quantitative and qualitative career assessments. Issues of reliability and validity were noted as the main concern, especially for the thousands of online assessments readily available. A common concern with qualitative instruments is the establishment of validity and concern about the practitioner's inherent bias when making interpretations (Whiston & Rahardja, 2005). When assessments are used by individuals who are members of cultural groups not included in test norms, there are ethical concerns regarding the validity of the tool for selected client populations (Schwiebert, 2009). In addition, career practitioners need to be aware that adapting career assessments in a culturally competent way requires more than a linguistic translation. Specifically, cultural equivalence of items, constructs, interpretations and resulting interventions are primary concerns. If individuals are making career and life decisions based off of an inventory that has not been shown to have validity and reliability, it is possible that they will make career and training decisions off of unreliable information (Herr, 2009). This scenario would cost the individual money and time, and is likely an ethical violation for a career practitioner who is encouraging use of an instrument of questionable quality.

Research

There is a need for cross-cultural research on the topic of career assessment (Marsella &

Leong, 1995), especially with online career assessments (Jencius & Rainy, 2009), qualitative approaches to assessment, and how test interpretation approaches impacts the counseling relationship (Whiston & Rahardia, 2005). Other research could focus on the characteristics of online users seeking career information or assessments, the issue of using anonymous users to determine the reliability and validity of online assessments, and cultural equivalence.

Vilhjalmsdottir (2010) noted the difficulty of maintaining conceptual consistency, or the stability of item meanings on inventories across cultures, which then impacts the interpretability of scales and total scores. Marsella and Leong (1995) noted that many personality constructs created in the US have a different meaning for non-Western cultures.

They suggested that prior to proceeding into cross-cultural studies with assessment tools, the first step should be an ethno-semantic analysis, where key components can be defined, compared, and understood. Herr (2009) noted that despite the research that supports the efficacy of career interventions, there is a lack of data about the role of career assessments related to accountability, empirically supported treatments, and evidenced-based practice.

Training

Another critical need that was identified was for increased training opportunities for cross-cultural assessments and techniques. Multicultural training has been found to predict multicultural competence (Vespia, Fitzpatrick, Fouad, Kantamneni, & Chen, 2010). Specific training topics suggested by the discussants included general assessment concepts; issues related to testing online; qualitative design and analysis; cross-cultural assessment; and practical considerations such as travel costs.

First, with respect to general assessment training, the 2010 Symposium group recommended the foci as including traditional and online career assessments, qualitative

assessments and adapting assessments for use with other cultures than the culture for which the assessment was created. This list is similar to a list in Wood's (2005) article on preparing career practitioners to use assessments, in which he stated that career assessment training should cover basic assessment principles (Wood, 2005), specific inventories and approaches, multicultural competencies as related to using career inventories with diverse populations, and ethical considerations.

Second, career practitioners need to have training related specifically to the online environment (Barak, 2003). Training with respect to online assessments and tools might include how to critically evaluate career development websites (Zalauque & Osborn, 2007), experiential activities that require trainees to locate appropriate online tools for specific clients (McCarthy, Moller & Beard, 2003), and ethical concerns specific to online assessments (Barak, 2003). Third, training in assessments should be extended to qualitative approaches. Training in qualitative approaches requires training in the philosophy of constructivism if a practitioner is to utilize various tools and techniques appropriately (Whiston & Rahardia, 2005), as the goals, outcomes, and interventions of these approaches differ dramatically. An example of teaching a qualitative approach is provided by Rehfuss (2009). To teach the concept of career constructivism and the career style interview, Rehfuss gave an experiential assignment. Students reflected that the application of the model increased their confidence in using the approach, answered concerns they initially had about the approach, and to see what worked and didn't work with the approach. Another qualitative approach is described by Glavin, Smal and Vandermeeren (2009), who combined a qualitative approach and technology, requiring students to locate three YouTube videos that "represented ideas and concepts that held personal meaning for them" (p. 162). Descriptions of qualitative approaches such as these, as well as research on their effectiveness

with clients, is needed.

Fourth, training should integrate cultural considerations. Some topics for training might include: basic assessment training (Wood, 2005), the role of cultural context (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2006) issues of cultural validity and specificity when selecting career assessments (Leong & Hartung, 1997); potential barriers for career development (Rush, 2009); and recommended steps for adapting existing inventories for a specific group. In determining cultural competence, career practitioners should read articles, attend trainings and regularly evaluate their cultural competence. One idea for evaluation would be a checklist, such as provide by Krieshok and Black (2009) for use in evaluating competencies and responsibilities related to the use of a variety of assessment tools.

Finally, discussants noted that there are often limited funds to travel to conferences for training, and a lack of in-depth training on using career assessments (whether general or specific) as a part of the training provided to career practitioners. This may necessitate test developers and professional associations offering trainings in different ways and at reduced costs, such as through webinars, recorded sessions and regularly updated newsletters or websites about their tools. Directors of career services and private practitioners may need to be more proactive and seek out the training opportunities, contacting tool developers to discuss synchronous (real time online) training opportunities, or making their training needs known to their associations.

Goals

During the discussion on the topics above, it became apparent that there were many similarities among nations with respect to these issues. As we focused on our task of answering how career service providers might provide more quality services internationally, two main goals emerged. Specifically, the two goals included (1) creating a joint statement on the use of

assessments and (2) the identification of best practices with respect to career assessments.

Goal 1: Creating a Joint Statement on the Use of Career Assessments

During our discussions, we heard common themes related to beliefs about assessments. Some of these beliefs included: a recognition that career assessment plays an important role in career counseling, that both quantitative and qualitative approaches have value in meeting the diverse needs of clients in various contexts, and that as professionals with advanced training and experience with career assessments, we have a responsibility to clients and career practitioners to share that knowledge. First, we should be providing clients with information about the effective use of assessments as well as the tools for critically evaluating career resources. Second, we have a responsibility to continue supporting career practitioners in their use of career assessments by providing guides, resources, research and training on specific assessments and issues related to online assessments, qualitative and quantitative approaches, interventions based on assessment results, and using cross-cultural career assessments.

In our reflection on these beliefs, we realized that a united statement from professional career associations is currently missing and is now desirable. The benefit of such a goal would be a shared understanding regarding career assessments. We discussed if it was naive to assume a one-size fits all approach to creating such a statement. Despite that reservation, we had confidence from our discussion that a general statement about the ethical use of career assessments could be developed.

A consensus derived from our discussions was that a collective statement, agreed upon by our respective associations, should speak to the aspects of career assessment listed below as a way of shaping not only practice, but what is taught, and to shape policies related to the use of assessments:

- Assessment as one component of the career decision-making process
- Value of qualitative and quantitative assessments
- Evaluating assessments
- Selecting assessments
- Administrating assessments
- Interpreting assessments
- Developing assessments
- Training practitioners to use assessments appropriately all considered within a personal and cultural context.

To achieve this outcome, each professional organization would need to include this goal in their strategic planning for their organization, with discussion among executive committees.

Once the goal of creating a joint statement is included in the strategic plan for individual organizations, an inter-association team could be charged with creating that statement and submitting it for approval. In designing a joint statement, associations should reference relevant resources on career assessments, including ethical guidelines, statements related to use of assessments, outcome research on career assessments, and books on career assessments such as *NCDA Counselor's Guide to Assessments* (Whitfield, Feller, & Wood, 2009). While it is possible that the statement could evolve into something larger, such as a white paper or even a code of ethics for career practitioners using assessments across national and cultural lines, the starting place would be a simple statement acknowledging the value of assessments.

Goal 2: The Identification of Best Practices With Respect to Career Assessments

Our second goal emerged from the realization that (a) career practitioners are using traditional, quantitative, qualitative, online and cross-cultural career assessments in a myriad of

ways, and (b) we do not have a collective resource that showcases best practices with respect to career assessments. Thus, our second goal was to identify best practices related to career assessments. These best practices should address the topics identified within Goal One.

One can argue that best practices are demonstrated regularly through conference presentations and published scholarly works. The issue is that each article and presentation provides one piece of the picture, and the process for obtaining a comprehensive look at best practices with career assessment would be extremely time intensive. Thus, a practical implementation strategy of Goal Two is to create some type of repository for these best practices. Some ideas we discussed included:

- Suggesting a companion piece (or a dedicated chapter) to NCDA's *Counselor's Guide to Career Assessments* (Whitfield, et al., 2009) that highlights less "traditional" assessments
- Creating an annotated bibliography that addresses the topics above
- Creating an "experts list" with contact person(s) for various assessments
- Highlighting research that documents good practice in the use of assessments
- Surveying members of the respective organizations to determine most commonly used career assessments.

Resources that might aid in the accomplishment of this goal would first involve professional associations agreeing to cross-survey members on their assessment choices and rationale for using specific assessments. Other relevant resources would include existing books on career assessments, outcome research on career assessments, guides for evaluating research, and technological recommendations on how to best manage and deliver the information that would be housed in such a repository.

Summary

The topic of cross-cultural career assessment was addressed by this 2010 Symposium discussion group. Specific concerns noted included: the benefits and risks of online career assessments, the intuitive appeal of qualitative approaches along with a need for more research for qualitative career assessments, and issues with adapting instruments internationally. General concerns related to client welfare, costs, quality, research, and training in a cross-cultural world led to specific goals for a general statement across associations about career assessments, and the identification of known best practices. Our end goal is ultimately an improvement in the way career practitioners across the globe select and use assessments to help clients achieve their goals.

References

- Barak, A. (2003). Ethical and professional issues in career assessment on the Internet. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 11, 3-21. doi: 10.1177/106907202237457
- Capuzzi, D., & Stauffer, M. (2006). *Career counseling: Foundations, perspectives, and applications*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Diemer, M. A., & Gore, P. A., Jr. (2009). Culture and assessment: Nomothetic and idiographic considerations. *Career Development Quarterly*, 57, 342-347.
- Flores, L. Y., Spanierman, L. B., & Obasi, E. M. (2003). Ethical and professional issues in career assessment with diverse racial and ethnic groups. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 11, 76-95.
- Gati, I. (2010, June). Challenges in assessing client's career decision making needs: spotlight on career decision-making profiles. In L. Oakes, Schwallie-Giddis, & D. Schultheiss (Co-chairs), *Bridging international perspectives of career development*. Symposium

- conducted at the joint meeting of the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, Society for Vocational Psychology, and National Career Development Association: San Francisco, California, USA.
- Gati, I., & Saka, N. (2001). Internet-based versus paper-and-pencil assessment: Measuring career decision-making difficulties. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 9, 397-416. doi: 10.1177/106907270100900406
- Glavin, K., & Savickas, M. (2010). Vocopher: The Career Collaboratory. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 18, 345-354. doi: 10.1177/1069072710374568
- Glavin, K., Smal, P., & Vandermeeren, N. (2009). Integrating career counseling and technology. *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal*, 25, 160-176.
- Herr, E. L. (2009). Career assessment: Perspectives on trends and issues. In E. A. Whitfield, R. W. Feller, & C. Wood, (Eds.), *A counselor's guide to career assessment instruments* (5th ed., pp. 13-25). Broken Arrow, OK: NCDA.
- Jencius, M., & Rainy, S. (2009). Current online career counseling practices and future trends. *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal*, 25, 17-28.
- Krieshok, T., & Black, M. D. (2009). Assessment and counseling competencies and responsibilities: A checklist for counselors. In E. A. Whitfield, R. W. Feller, & C. Wood, (Eds.), *A counselor's guide to career assessment instruments* (5th ed., pp. 61-68). Broken Arrow, OK: NCDA.
- Leong, F., & Hartung, P. (1997). Career assessment with culturally different clients: Proposing an integrative-sequential conceptual framework for cross-cultural career counseling research and practice. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 5, 183-202.
- Marsella, A. J., & Leong, F. T. L. (1995). Cross-cultural issues in personality and career

assessment. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 3, 202-218. doi:

10.1177/106907279500300207

McCarthy, C. J., Moller, N., & Beard, L. M. (2003). Suggestions for training students in using the Internet for career counseling. *Career Development Quarterly*, 51, 368-382.

McMahon, M. (2010, June). Qualitative career assessment: A bridge between career assessment and career counselling. In L. Oakes, P. Schwallie-Giddis, & D. Schultheiss (Co-chairs), *Bridging international perspectives of career development*. Symposium conducted at the joint meeting of the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, Society for Vocational Psychology, and National Career Development Association: San Francisco, California, USA. .

National Career Development Association. (2009). Minimum competencies for multicultural career counseling and development. Retrieved from http://www.associationdatabase.com/aws/NCDA/asset_manager/get_file/9914/minimum_competencies_for_multi-cultural_career_counseling.pdf

Osborn, D. S., & Bethell, D. B. (2009-2010). Using cards sorts in career assessment. *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal*, 25, 101-114.

Osborn, D. S., & Zalaquett, C. (2005). Seeing career counseling-related websites through the eyes of counselor education students. *Journal of Technology in Counseling*. Retrieved from http://jtc.colstate.edu/Vol4_1/osborn/osborn.htm.

Osborn, D. S., & Zunker, V. G. (2006). *Using assessment results for career development*. (7th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Parsons, F. (1909). *Choosing a vocation*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Rehfuss, M. C. (2009). Teaching career construction and the career style interview. *Career*

- Planning and Adult Development Journal, 25, 58-71.
- Rush, L. C. (2009). Multicultural career counseling strategies: an update for 21st century career professionals. *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal*, 25, 82-96.
- Sampson, J. P., Jr., Carr, D. L., Lumsden, J. A., Smisson, C., & Dozier, C. (2009). Computer-assisted career assessment: State of the art. In E. A. Whitfield, R. W. Feller, & C. Wood, (Eds.), *A counselor's guide to career assessment instruments* (5th ed., pp. 43-60). Broken Arrow, OK: NCDA.
- Sampson, J. P., Jr., Peterson, G. W., Lenz, J. G., Reardon, R. C., & Saunders, D. E. (1996). *Career Thoughts Inventory: Professional manual*. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.
- Schwiebert, V. L. (2009). Selecting a career assessment instrument. In E. A. Whitfield, R. W. Feller, & C. Wood, (Eds.), *A counselor's guide to career assessment instruments* (5th ed., pp. 27-33). Broken Arrow, OK: NCDA.
- Vespia, K. M., Fitzpatrick, M. E., Fouad, N. A., Kantamneni, N., Chen, Y-L. (2010). *Multicultural career counseling: A national survey of competencies and practices*. *Career Development Quarterly*, 59, 54-71.
- Vilhjamsdottir, G. (2010, June). Adapting the Career Adaptability Inventory to the Icelandic context. In L. Oakes, P. Schwallie-Giddis, & D. Schultheiss (Co- chairs), *Bridging international perspectives of career development*. Symposium conducted at the joint meeting of the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, Society for Vocational Psychology, and National Career Development Association: San Francisco, California, USA.
- Whiston, S. C., & Rahardja, D. (2005). *Qualitative career assessment: An overview and analysis*.

Journal of Career Assessment, 13, 371-380. doi: 10.1177/1069072705277910

Whitfield, E. A., Feller, R. W., & C. Wood, (Eds.). (2009). *A counselor's guide to career assessment instruments* (5th ed.). Broken Arrow, OK: NCDA.

Wood, C. (2005). Building dreams and deeds: A pedagogy for preparing practitioners to use career assessments. *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal*, 25, 72-81.

Zalaquett, C., & Osborn, D. S. (2007). Fostering counseling students' career information literacy through a comprehensive career website. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 46, 162-171.