

Developing a Multicultural Career Mindset

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DEVELOPING A MULTICULTURAL CAREER MINDSET

Leong and Hartung (2000) suggest that the global economy and rising immigration rates will influence the idea of career in this millennium, and by implication, the competencies needs for those who deal with clients from other cultures at home or abroad. Immigration rates are expected to rise in the next five decades, which means that the demographics of the Canadian population will change noticeably during that time. Additionally, the advent of the global economy will affect how Canadians do business in other parts of the world. Entrepreneurs, business people, and consultants will need to understand how cultural learning affects the expression of interpersonal communication, learn skills to promote effective communication across cultures, and learn ways to resolve cultural misunderstandings. Career counsellors and others will need to develop a multicultural career mindset.

The term *career*, as conceptualized in this paper, is used to encompass three components: life space, lifespan, and self-concept (Super, Savickas and Super 1996). Lifespan and life space are used to understand a person's current status in society and a person's perspective on his or her career development. Given that all learning takes place in a cultural setting (Pedersen 1994), the writer thinks this perspective on career is an appropriate one for the multicultural context. Regardless of country of origin, and hence cultural learning, the worker role with all the interpersonal expectations around it is learned within a cultural perspective. The interpersonal expectations about how the worker role is performed influence how the individual behaves in the work environment. These interpersonal expectations, which are mediated by cultural values, form part of the self-concept, and hence the importance of considering self concept in this definition of career. For example, individuals who learn to respect those in authority by not directly asserting themselves in their presence will behave differently in the work environment from those who learn that being assertive is not a sign of disrespect.

Mindset is defined as a level of understanding having three key components: the availability of a specific knowledge domain, i.e., culturally specific knowledge; the ability to process information against this knowledge domain; and the ability to monitor one's thoughts and thought processes, i.e., engage in metacognition (Peterson et al. 1996). Career counsellors need to be able to interpret information about the behaviour of clients whose cultural origin is different from their own, as well as monitor the information they have or need to obtain. For example, Asian workers tend not to take individual initiative in their work environments due to their collectivist world view (Zunker 2002). Awareness this culturally specific knowledge helps career counsellors understand why Asian workers in Canada may not be assertive in their work environments. Further, career counsellors

may need to consider the issue of acculturation and ask Asian clients how long they have lived in the dominant society. With different levels of acculturation, Asian workers may have adopted the value of assertion but not have learned the skills of being assertive. Being aware of culturally specific information and engaging in metacognitive monitoring of information and information gaps allows career counsellors to exercise a multicultural career mindset. Thus, mindset involves the culturally specific knowledge of issues like world view, cultural values, the role of the family, perceptions of the work role, time orientation, as well as an awareness of the cognitive schemes and thinking strategies used in understanding and interpreting information.

In this paper, the author will outline a number of reasons why career counsellors need to consider developing competencies to enhance their level of service to all client groups, the knowledge domains needed for culturally specific knowledge, and a number of cognitive strategies about which counsellors need self-awareness to avoid some of the pitfalls in interpretation and assessment in counselling.

DEVELOPING CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Need to improve counsellor competencies

Arthur and Januszkowski (2001) highlight the need for counsellors who deal with multicultural clients to improve their competencies. They suggest that Canadian counsellors must go beyond resolving cultural conflict through trial and error because the use of such lower-level competencies leaves clients at risk if harmful assessments and interventions. They suggest that counsellor education programs provide more information from a multicultural perspective and encourage counsellors in training to engage in more self-reflection, that is to be more metacognitive in their professional practice.

Currently, Canada's population is experiencing a slow growth rate, which is expected to be offset by higher rates of immigration. Population projections suggest that by 2016 the visible minorities in Canada will number over 6 million (Kelly 2001). Currently most of the visible minorities live in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal, and the majority of these visible minorities are made up of individuals of Chinese, South Asian, and black descent. Counsellors have an ethical mandate to provide high standards of professional competence to the clients they serve. In addition, they are expected to proceed with caution when judging and interpreting the behaviours of minority group members. They should take into account issues of age, ethnicity, culture, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status (CCA Code of Ethics, Schulz 2000). If counsellors do not increase their multicultural competencies, they run the risk of committing unintentional discrimination.

Avoid unintentional discrimination

Counsellors commit unintentional discrimination when they view all clients from an ethnocentric perspective. Ethnocentrism is the tendency to view and interpret the behaviour of others through a personal cultural lens (Matsumoto 1996). Discrimination, in this context, is the tendency to provide competent services to one group while providing less than competent services to another group due to a lack of knowledge and skill. Counsellors who do not develop their knowledge around multicultural understanding of interpersonal behaviour and who do not develop high levels of metacognitive awareness tend to unintentionally discriminate against the clients they serve.

There are a number of ways counsellors may unintentionally discriminate against minority clients (Ridley 1995). Counsellors may maintain negative attitudes towards minority clients, they may misdiagnose, or may cause minority groups to leave the helping system prematurely. Ridley (1995) suggests that the reason why counsellors perpetuate discriminatory practice is that they tend to cling to oversimplified explanations about behaviour, and they lack awareness that they are committing unintentional discrimination. Further, traditional counsellor education programs promoted the view that all interventions and understandings applied equally to all clients, a perspective that contributes to unintentional discrimination. Such a perspective does not take into account such factors as gender, culture, and ethnicity, for example.

Ridley (1995) suggested that counsellors need to take an emic perspective in their provision of helping services. This perspective suggests that there are divergent attitudes, values, and behaviours all of which arise out of a cultural context. It suggests that the interpretation of the normalcy of behaviour rests upon an understanding of the culture within which the behaviour was learned and not in the culture where one is living.

DEVELOPING MINDSET

Domains of cultural competence

Arthur and Stewart (2001) argue that counsellors need to develop their cultural competencies in four areas: personal self-awareness, the culturally different client's world view, intervention skills and techniques, and organizational development. In terms of self-awareness, counsellors must demonstrate respect for minority groups, become aware of their personal cultural background and development, and understand how their personal development has shaped their understanding about what motivates human behaviour. To help understand the world view of minority clients, counsellors should develop an understanding of the history of minority clients, issues of acculturation, and how discrimination influences the psychological health of minority clients. Counsellors should use culturally sensitive

and appropriate intervention skills and techniques when working with minority clients, and they need to examine their institutional practices to ensure that these practices do not get in the way of offering culturally appropriate services. Counsellors who develop their knowledge and skill competencies in these four areas enhance their abilities to provide competent and effective service to minority clients.

Metacognitive awareness

Leong and Hartung (2000) suggest that research in social cognition helps us to understand the ways that mindset influences behaviour. This research suggests that how counsellors respond to clients depends on the experiences and memory they have available to them at the moment. The extent to which these memories and experiences are monocultural influences the counsellor's ability to deliver competent services to clients whose cultural background is different from their own. If counsellors respond from a monocultural perspective, they are subject to what is known as the availability bias. As our society becomes increasingly culturally diverse through immigration, pressure is brought to bear on counsellors to increase the range and type of information they use to interpret the behaviour of others. Counsellors need to become aware of their tendency to make judgment errors in their assessments of clients. It is important to study such errors because in most instances counsellors are unaware of their influence and further, such errors reveal how counsellors think about themselves and others (Myers and Spencer 2001).

Models of social knowing

Social cognitive psychologists suggest two models of social knowing that influence the way people respond (Barone, Maddux, and Snyder 1997; Myers and Spencer 2001). One model is known as the naive scientist and suggests that people are systematic in the manner in which they consider events and behaviours, and how they arrive at conclusions. This model suggests that people behave much the same way that a scientist does; that is, carefully weighing all the information from a variety of perspectives and arriving at conclusions that are balanced and fair. The other model is known as the cognitive miser. This model suggests that people use rough and ready rules that serve as shortcuts to decision making for rapid and easy judgment at the cost of biases, errors, and illusions. Individuals who function from this model tend to have more interpersonal conflicts. Research tends to support the notion that counsellors make use of the cognitive miser as much as lay people do (Barone, Maddux, and Snyder 1997; Myers and Spencer 2001).

Errors and biases in assessment

Since most lay people expect professionals to be accurate in their professional judgments, professionals should monitor their metacognitive thoughts to avoid making errors and biases in their

clinical judgments. Evidence appears to indicate that professionals make these judgments at the same rate as lay people (Barone, Maddux, and Snyder 1997; Myers and Spencer 2001).

There are four types of errors that appear to influence counsellors in their professional judgments (Barone, Maddux, and Snyder 1997; Myers and Spencer 2001; Ridley 1995). The first of these is known as the dispositional attributional error. One of the frequently used heuristics by cognitive misers is the tendency to over-attribute causes of behaviour to personality factors. This tendency should be of concern to counsellors because how they interpret behaviour will have a large impact on decisions about the type of interventions to use in counselling. There are several reasons for making such an attribution. One reason is that counsellors may be unaware of the client's social learning around the role they are expected to perform in counselling. For example, Asian clients have a tendency not to establish eye contact with counsellors (Zunker 2002). Consequently, a counsellor using a monocultural North American perspective may interpret such behaviour as an indication of low self-esteem. However, the Asian client's behaviour may be motivated by social learning that suggests that the counsellor is the authority figure who will give clear direction to solving the issue at hand, and that to establish eye contact would be a sign of disrespect. When counsellors do not understand such cultural learning, they may commit the dispositional attribution error and conclude that the cause of the client's behaviour is due to a personality variable, i.e., low self-esteem. Another reason concerns counsellor education programs. Counsellor education programs tend to present clinical assessment and the use of diagnostic schemata with a bias toward a personality explanation of a client's problem. For example, courses in assessment tend to cover instruments whose construct validity explains behaviour from a personality perspective. Using diagnostic instruments tends to negate the influence of context on the client's behaviour, and hence the tendency to view the origin of difficulty as residing with the person. Further, using the DSM-IV as a diagnostic scheme suggests a similar assumption.

Another bias used by counsellors is the confirmatory bias. This bias is influenced by first impressions. After counsellors form impressions, they tend to look more closely to information that confirms their first impressions. Research suggests that when counsellors are under busy working conditions, they tend to base their decisions on first impressions even when they have information that would lead them to make different conclusions. This bias suggests that counsellors need to examine their stereotypic attitudes and information about ethnic groups so that they do not interpret information in a manner that confirms their biases and stereotypes.

A third type of bias is known as behavioural confirmation of expectations. Research suggests that counsellors tend to use their

initial beliefs about other people to plan their interactions with them. A common example is the belief that physically attractive people are outgoing. Consequently, counsellors are likely to act more warm and outgoing towards them and they respond accordingly to the counsellor's expectations. In a multicultural context, some clients may tend to view job security as more important than aspiring to personal recognition (Zunker 2002). If career counsellors believe that clients whose origin is South America tend to value job security, they are more likely to focus on ways to provide security and overlook ways to help such clients achieve personal recognition for promotion purposes.

The last bias is known as the overconfidence effect. This effect arises when a counsellor has confidence in the accuracy of his or her judgments. This overconfidence illusion overlooks the human tendency to be unaware that mental processes are subject to the errors and biases of the cognitive miser. Career counsellors ought always to be circumspect in their conclusions and to take a second look at all the information they interpret as supporting their conclusions.

OVERCOMING BIAS AND ERROR IN ASSESSMENT

Fortunately for counsellors, research demonstrates that people are capable of becoming aware of their biases and errors in decision-making (Barone, Maddux, and Snyder 2001). With sufficient cognitive monitoring and motivation, counsellors are able to engage systematically in processing information with the goal of understanding their clients. Counsellors must maintain a balance between a nomothetic and an idiographic perspective in their practice with multicultural clients. They need to view their clients as unique and to seek to understand the uniqueness so that they can compare this understanding against a background of information that has been gained through personal experiences and textbooks. They need to understand that each client is a dynamic blend of roles and identities.

Counsellors need to examine their counselling theories for bias. Most counselling theories were developed using populations within North America and hence there is a bias toward individualism, a common measure of what is meant by normal behaviour, a dependency on linear thinking, and cultural encapsulation. Counsellors should avoid the tendency to blame the client. They need to look to context as well as personality to understand the motivation for behaviour. Counsellors should avoid stereotyping and imposing their values or the values of the dominant group on a minority client. Further, they should not protect their minority clients from emotional pain. Such situations where emotional pain are experienced may be good learning experiences.

Counsellors ought always to provide support and attempt to prepare their clients for certain contexts. They should develop their levels of cultural awareness (knowledge of ethnic cultural practices and socialization experiences and values), and they ought to develop a high level of personal understanding (their socialization experiences, their world view, their thinking strategies), and use metacognitive awareness. Counsellors should accept their cultural naïveté and not be afraid to ask their multicultural clients to help them in the counselling. Clients will be able to explain the meaning of different behaviours. They should develop their cultural empathy, that is, demonstrate their understanding and communicate this understanding from the client's cultural perspective. They should consider the client's primary cultural role in their counselling assessments. Counsellors should select interventions that emphasize a multimodal perspective and ones that have demonstrated their efficacy with multicultural clients. By adopting these practices, counsellors minimize the biases and errors in the clinical judgments.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, counsellors should seek to understand the strengths of their multicultural clients and build on these strengths. This identification can be accomplished by looking for past accomplishments and then building interventions in accordance with these strengths. Further, when counsellors become aware of ethnic and cultural knowledge of the clients they serve, and understand their personal cultural experiences together with monitoring their metacognitive thinking strategies, they will develop a multicultural mindset, and consequently provide competent services to their multicultural clients.

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