

Career Counselling Multicultural Immigrant Groups

John B. Stewart
University of New Brunswick
Fredericton, NB Canada

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The ethnic composition of Canada's populations is changing (Statistics Canada, 1996). Currently one Canadian in nine is a visible minority. By 2016, this ratio is expected to change to one in five for adults and one in four for children. As a result of rising immigration rates, Canadian society will soon be termed a global society composed of Asians, Africans, Hispanic, Native as well as euro-ethnic groups (Zunker, 2002, p. 279). In 2001, the total number of immigrants admitted to Canada was 250,346 of which 152,972 were economic immigrants and 97,374 were refugees (Harding, 2003). As more individuals from diverse ethnic groups gain access to higher education and jobs, career counsellors will need additional competence to help them (Arthur and Stewart, 2001).

Immigrants must resolve a number of issues upon re-settlement in North America (Roysircar, 2003). They must resolve their relationship with the dominant White society, the continuance of their cultural heritage, and the resultant stress and mental health concerns which arise from the first two issues. While helping recent immigrants resolve these issues, career counsellors should view their clients as individuals and not stereotype them (Zunker, 2002). Additionally, career counsellors should view the transmission of culture as significant social learning, and they need to be aware of any their learned biases toward cultural pluralism (Trimble and LaFromboise, 1985).

The purpose of this paper is to present issues of culture which may influence the work behaviour of recent immigrants. The author will discuss a number of issues including world view, work values, identity and acculturation issues, language and prior learning assessment. This discussion will be contextualized within a counselling model which assesses issues of ethnicity and culture.

Phases of the Multicultural Career Counselling Model

There are few career counselling models which account for issues of ethnicity. Bingham and Ward (1996) outlined a six phase model for females. Their model can be used effectively with both genders provided that the counsellor is sensitive to cultural issues. Additionally, McFadden (2003) developed a model for counselling ethnic clients which assesses clients from cultural-historical, psychosocial, and scientific-ideological perspectives (McFadden, 2003, 213). In this paper, these two models combined to develop a more comprehensive model described in the remainder of this paper.

Establish rapport and culturally appropriate relationships

This first phase is important as it develops the basis for the rest of the counselling process. When clients feel free to express themselves, they can provide ethnic and cultural information. Counsellors can promote this freedom of expression by fostering creative uncertainty, an attitude characterized by openness which permits clients to inform counsellors of how culture has influenced their life (Fouad, 1995). It is impossible for career counsellors to be aware of all cultural variables (Bowman, 1995). Most recent immigrants come from cultures where it is normative to receive advice and may not be familiar with client-centered approaches. Therefore, counsellors may need to adopt a structured approach in their counselling (Zunker, 2002).

To establish culturally sensitive rapport, career counsellors should not necessarily expect immigrant clients to establish eye contact. Career counsellors should allow as much time as is necessary to establish the counselling relationship and may need to teach recent immigrants their role in the counselling process. Additionally counsellors should be sensitive to clients' use of personal space and privacy (Ivey and Ivey, 1996). For example, Chinese immigrants might consider direct eye contact to be insulting, while Arab immigrants require very little personal space.

Counsellors need to monitor the types of questions and responses they use. Some ethnic groups consider directness as intrusive (Ivey and Ivey, 1996), while others may see an open person as weak and incapable of appropriate restraint (Ivey and Ivey, 1996). Further, counsellors need to be aware of the different ways immigrants might conceptualize their problems and express their feelings (Ivey and Ivey, 1996). Some ethnic clients may appear to be unwilling to share their emotions outside the family because such expressions are considered a sign of weakness.

Assessment - Assess impact of cultural variables

The first level of assessment seeks to understand the impact of the culture of origin on the client. Counsellors should seek to understand the client's world view to determine the barriers that could impede career decision-making in a Canadian context. World view is a multi-component construct (Okun, Fried, and Okun, 1999). One component of world view is locus of control which influences a client's decision-making process. For example, in individualistic focused cultures, value is placed on individual autonomy and independence in decision-making. However, in collectivist cultures value is placed on the welfare of the group in decision-making. Consequently, Asian immigrants may want to involve their family in vocational decision-making. A second component is time orientation, which may present a barrier (Zunker, 2002). Individuals from some cultures may view time as "whenever we get together, that is convenient." In Canada, being late for an appointment may be misunderstood as a symptom of indifference or a lack of a basic employability skill. A third component of world view deals with perceptions of human nature (Zunker, 2002). Some cultural groups view human nature as a composite of good and bad while others see human nature as basically good. Individuals who believe that humans are basically good may be perceived by Canadian workers as gullible and naive. A fourth component pertains to family roles and relationships with others (Okun et al., 1999). Some ethnic groups maintain differences in their expectations of what and how males and females may contribute to family and occupations which are suitable for both. A fifth component of world view centers on work values. The work values held by ethnic groups differ significantly (Hofstede, 1984). Some ethnic groups tend to maintain status differences between supervisor and employee, while others tend to minimize them. Further, some cultural groups tend to focus on self-reliance whereas others tend to focus on group decision-making and avoid making individual decisions.

Counsellors need to assess recent immigrants' world view to determine the extent to which their beliefs, values, and behaviours are similar to and suitable for Canadian work sites.

Assessment - Career Issues (Personal)

The second level of assessment deals with the immigrant's personal adjustment. Counsellors are reminded that the migration experience can be very stressful (Zunker, 2002). Adjustment to Canadian culture involves a number of transitions including developing new social networks, learning a new sociol-economic system and adapting to a different cultural system (Rogler, 1994). Thus, career counsellors need to assess the immigrant's pre-migration experience (Wilson, Kohn and Lee, 2000). Immigrants and refugees have a number of important differences in their pre-migration experiences (Hauora, 1998). Immigrants choose to leave their birth country, have time to prepare for their departure, take their important documents, emigrate with their families, and have high levels of health, education and self-sufficiency. However, refugees have fled their homeland, had little time to prepare for departure, and often have no documentation of their credentials. They tend to leave their families behind and often arrive in Canada traumatized. They tend to have lower levels of education and depend on the Canadian social system. Once settled, immigrants are likely to experience differing levels of adjustment. Typically they experience initial feeling of euphoria. However, this euphoria may be followed by emotional and psychological difficulties due to the loss of their culture, relationships, and identity. They may experience culture shock (Zunker, 2002) stemming from isolation, loneliness, and loss of support from extended families. Further, refugees may experience survivor's guilt of having escaped their birth country, but have left family behind (Zunker, 2002).

Immigrants must deal with two issues: maintaining and developing their ethnicity by retaining their cultural identity and the desire to interact in a positive manner with the dominant society (Roysircar, 2003). These issues represent the processes of acculturation and identity formation. Identity change is a complex psychosocial process which involves attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours (Gysbers, Heppner and Johnston, 2003). There are a number of phases of identity change which are influenced by the immigrant's attitude toward self and others of the same group, others of different ethnicity, and the dominant society. These phases include conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection and integrative awareness.

Immigrants may experience acculturation pressure, i.e., to adopt the ways of the new culture by synthesizing what has been learned in their birth country with what is experienced in the new country. Career counsellors should assess the acculturation level of recent immigrants to determine the extent to which they have adopted the beliefs, values, and lifestyle of Canadian society. The level of acculturation can be assessed by determining socioeconomic status,

language preference, place of birth, generation level, preferred ethnic identity, and ethnic group social contacts (Zunker, 2002). Immigrants may experience acculturation with minimal stress, or as one with severe distress (Roisircar, 2003). Since immigrants made a decision to re-locate in Canada, their work expectations typically tend to be high and their motivation to acculturate strong. However, refugees may not experience such motivation and are likely to take longer to acculturate (Lee and Westwood, 1996). Each immigrant will respond to acculturation issues uniquely. Generally, younger immigrants will integrate faster than older ones (Lee and Westwood, 1996).

Assessment - Career Issues (Employability)

Immigrants need to find work to provide support and often are forced to accept low-level and low paying service jobs. Approximately 55% of all new immigrants are classified as skilled workers, have university degrees, and speak English or French or both (Harding, 2003). Yet despite these employability skills, most immigrants are underemployed. Career counsellors should inform recent immigrants about the potential barriers to their employment and plan ways to overcome them (Gysbers et al., 2003). The major goal of this phase of assessment is to help clients identify and understand issues that limit their career choices.

Language proficiency

An immigrant's competency in English may be a potential barrier to successful employment. Without language proficiency it is difficult for immigrants to obtain work, use community resources, and a number of other services including banking, telephone, and transportation. Career counsellors should have an immigrant's English proficiency assessed by educational institutions which specialize in language assessment (Martin, 1995).

Self-Sufficiency

The need for economic self-sufficiency often necessitates immigrants finding a job, which prevents them from taking language training and education to up-grading. Consequently, the immigrant often lacks the preparation to enter the job market at a level comparable to their aptitudes.

Recognition of Prior Learning

With some immigrants, previous educational achievement may not be recognized in Canada. Often immigrants find it difficult to gain recognition in licensing or certification. Consequently, recent immigrants often take jobs in non-regulated parts of the labour market and are underemployed. Fortunately, some provincial governments are working with some regulatory bodies to develop "bridging programs" which help newcomers upgrade skills and/or get Canadian work experience (Harding, 2003).

Discrimination

Recent immigrants may face a number of discriminatory attitudes in the Canadian labour market. These attitudes including competition for jobs, resentment among White Canadians for immigrants taking jobs, an attitude of territoriality by employers suggesting that immigrants should not be placed in a position of power, and interaction fatigue, the tendency of white Canadians to avoid interaction with immigrants (Lee and Westwood, 1996).

Knowledge of Labour Markets

Recent immigrants often do not understand the Canadian labour market and its rules. They do not understand the concept of career ladders, often lack knowledge of how and where to obtain employment information, and are not aware of the importance of resume preparation and interviewing skills.

Labour Market Expectations

Most immigrants have strong levels of motivation to work, but do not understand the expectations of the Canadian labour market. For example, immigrants expect to find work in their area of competence, but often experience

unnecessary delays or need further education. Some immigrants expect gender equity in the work place but do not receive it (Lee and Westwood, 1996).

Career counsellors need to assess recent immigrants in these three domains (impact of culture, personal and employability career issues) to determine the presence of barriers to employment. The results of this assessment permit the counsellor and immigrant client to move to the next phase of the counselling model.

Set counselling goals

During the goal setting phase, career counsellors need to develop goals which are pragmatic and collaboratively stated. Pragmatic goals recognize immigrants' need to be placed in a job as soon as possible. Collaboration requires the immigrant to be actively involved in the goal-setting process (Leong, 1993).

Career counsellors should consider goals what focus on activities which immigrants can complete. These activities include language training, resume writing, interviewing skills, getting Canadian work related experience, improving personal appearance, learning about the Canadian labour market and work expectations. Further, career counsellors should consider counselling goals which help immigrants to respond situations of racism and discrimination (Gysbers et al., 2003).

Develop Culturally Appropriate Interventions

The career counsellor's decision to employ an intervention should be based on the immigrants' goals and level of acculturation and ethnic identity (Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey, 2002). Generally more "traditional" career interventions are more appropriate for clients who are acculturated, whereas more culture sensitive interventions are appropriate for clients who are less acculturated (Gysbers et al., 2003).

Group interventions are very appropriate for immigrants who have a collectivist world view (Gysbers et al., 2003). Job clubs provide immigrants with support, a place to express their concerns and learn about the Canadian labour market and how it operates. Immigrants who are struggling with English would benefit from group interventions. In some cases, interpreters might be used. Further, for clients with a collectivist world view, group interventions should involve family members in the career decision making process (Gysbers et al.). Within group interventions, career counsellors should consider using a structured reading-discussion technique, using current written and occupational video resources. This intervention helps to promote both the reading and speaking of English.

Career counsellors should consider interventions which focus on client-produced rather than counsellor-produced knowledge (Gysbers et al., 2003), i.e., interventions which require the immigrant to assemble self-knowledge, to locate appropriate role models, and develop networks. Further, career counsellors should plan interventions which involve job shadowing, interviewing possible employers, and enrolling in on-the-job training programs (Betz and Fitzgerald, 1995,263). Such approaches help to promote stronger levels of client self-efficacy and personal involvement.

Career counsellors should choose interventions which focus on the immigrant in relation to their family and ethnicity. This focus will make the intervention credible for immigrants and will enhance their motivation to participate. Doing this, career counsellors recognize family honor and loyalty as a motivating factors in career decision-making (Zunker, 2002).

With some immigrant clients, career counsellors need to use supportive empathic confrontation (Ivey and Ivey, 1999). When using confrontation, career counsellors may need to be selective and exercise great sensitivity. For example, Asian groups may view direct confrontation as ill-mannered. Depending on the client, career counsellors may need to address sensitive issues as body odor, interpersonal interactions, mannerisms, and personal hygiene.

Implement and Follow-up

Career counsellors working collaboratively with immigrants must make decisions about the order in which to implement interventions. They should allow sufficient time for immigrants to complete each intervention and invite them to recycle, using this model without a sense of embarrassment. Once implemented, career counsellors must continually monitor each intervention to ensure that the immigrant is free from unanticipated barriers to completing it. They should assess the intervention both for what was done, and for how it was done (Gysbers et al., 2003). Career counsellors should emphasize the immigrant's demonstrated strengths, an emphasis which helps to strengthen their self-efficacy. Career counsellors should encourage immigrant clients to return for further counselling if needed (Gysbers et al.,). With immigrants, career counsellors should reinforce the idea that returning to an already strong relationship is more appropriate than developing a new one with another counsellor.

Summary and Conclusion

In this paper a number of assessment issues were discussed which career counsellors need to consider in their counselling with immigrants. These issues concern the learning of culture in their birth country, the migration experience, and the need to deal with acculturation and personal identity. In addition, these issues were discussed within a counselling model which assesses issues of ethnicity in the professional relationship.

Canadian career counsellors must learn new ways to deal with the growing number of new immigrant Canadians. The role of these immigrants is a crucial to the Canadian labour market. New Canadians will need assistance integrating into the labour market and career counsellors are in a prime position to offer assistance. Consequently career counsellors need to be knowledgeable and sensitive to issues of ethnicity. Further, Canadian career counsellors need to be aware of the potential barriers that may face recent immigrants as they seek to integrate into the labour market. Counsellors need to both advocate against such barriers and help their clients overcome them. By becoming culturally competent, career counsellors will provide quality service to these new Canadians.

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