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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of SCIENTIFIC PAPER
AFASES 2015
Brasov, 28-30 May 2015

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR PRACTITIONERS IN CAREER COUNSELING

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Abstract: *Despite the fact that the students express needs and expectations related to the career counseling process, many times, counselors face the situation of lack of appropriate expertise in order to help them to manage the various educational, social, communicational, relational contexts. Real life situations generate a wide range of challenges for the counselors to cope with in terms of emotional and socio-affective reactions and behaviors. In these situations, counselors experience difficulties and need themselves advices and supervision in order to adapt their interventions to the particular aspect of the client/student. From this perspective, the present paper is aimed to present a couple of professional training programs in the specific field of career counseling in order to strengthen the need of training and the alternatives the counselors may benefit to, improving their level of competency and areas of expertise, and consequently, ensuring a higher quality of the counseling process. From my point of view, for development of the career counseling's domain, we need to have its representatives well-trained, involved and engaged in the process of empowering the meaning of counseling.*

Keywords: *career counseling, counselor, training in counseling, supervision in counseling, certified supervision professionals*

1. THE NEED OF TRAINING IN CAREER COUNSELING AREA

Studies of the characteristics of the universities' students suggest a diversity of needs for career guidance training programs. A formal research carried out in 2012 in seven of the most prestigious Romanian universities (from Bucharest, Brasov, Sibiu, Cluj, Iasi) shown that almost one half or more of students investigated recognized the need of help with educational and vocational planning. On the other hand, the reality reveals a different face of the coin, confusing and contradictory, in terms of students' interest and desire to benefit

from specialized services about career choices and development. A small number of students, probably one out of five students visits, at least once during the university studies, in a career counseling center.

Therefore, is a huge discrepancy between the formal answer to a questionnaire exploring what the students would like to have or benefit from, in terms of learning facilities or specialized services, like counseling and guidance for a job or career, and the real situation in universities, in terms of students' determination and motivation to attend a career guidance program/session, for instance. We are all, experts in education or counseling,

teachers in higher education system, employers, used to explain this lack of students' interest for anything else, but academic performance, by saying that career counseling/planning/guidance has no longer tradition in Romanian education system. The truth is that students themselves, and the society at a large, have no culture of supporting professions like psychologist, counselor, etc., they are not customized to go easily to a counselor for specialized help. One of the explanations of this situation is closely related to the understanding of cultural influences on career development in Romania, during the former communist regime.

From other perspective, at the same level of scientific interest, the practitioners in career counseling field, including here all those people delivering specialized services of vocational counseling in public or private institutions, claim the need of specific training, as in-service training or as part of continuous professional development.

Despite the fact that the students express needs and expectations related to the career counseling process, many times, counselors face the situation of lack of appropriate expertise in order to help them to manage the various educational, social, communicational, relational contexts. Real life situations generate a wide range of challenges for the counselors to cope with in terms of emotional and socio-affective reactions and behaviors. In these situations, counselors experience difficulties and need themselves advices and supervision in order to adapt the interventions to the particular aspect of the client.

From this perspective, the present paper is aimed to present a couple of professional training programs in the specific field of career counseling in order to strengthen the need of training and the alternatives the counselors may benefit to, improving their level of competency and areas of expertise, and consequently, ensuring a higher quality of the counseling process. From my point of view, for development of the career counseling's domain, we need to have its representatives well-trained, involved and engaged in the process of empowering the meaning of counseling. We, as career counseling professionals, need commitment, enthusiasm

and time for convince each person working in the educational system to become aware of career counseling benefits and fight against skepticism about the worth of career counseling goals and objectives.

2. SPECIFIC TRAINING PROGRAMS IN COUNSELING – PRACTICAL BENEFITS

On the one hand, it seems to have a tremendous need for training of career counselors at the level of these professionals working in education or in social sector of society. In this process of delivering specific training programs are involved mainly universities, ONGs and local teachers houses, each of them at different extents of professionalism and quality of services. The duration of training programs varies from several days/weeks to several months. Obviously, the depth of contents' approach varies accordingly, as well as, the consistency of the training program, which might be a simple and focused training course or integrated into a specific bachelor or master program, correlated with other subjects, relevant for the general understanding of the domain.

On the other hand, at the same level of awareness the need of training, we notice the need of supervisors' training, in order for them to train as many as possible counselors, trying to normalize the existing situation in the counseling system, where the lack of validation and feedback on the conducted interventions influences directly, not only the quality of the counseling process, but also the confidence/self-confidence of the counselor.

In the next sections of the paper we will describe two professional training programs in the career counseling area, two educational experiences addressing specifically to the practitioners or those who intend to do that in the next future.

2.1 The Global Career Development Facilitator. This first training experience described refers to one of the most consistent career counselors' training programs, in terms of the content and assumed objectives, developed in many countries worldwide, namely the Global Career Facilitator Development (GCDF) program [7,9]. This



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program is developed by the Center for Credentialing and Education (CCE) from United States of America [7] and is aimed to offer country-specific standardization and recognition to career development professionals from 16 countries worldwide, including Romania. The program is customized to respond different nations' characteristics, taking into consideration their specific needs to approach different topics according to the different countries' reality.

In Romania, the authorized GCDF training provider is NBCC-Romania (National Board of Certified Counselors – Romania) [9], which is part of the European network run by EBCC (European Board for Certified Counselor, Lisbon), having a consultative and educational/training role in supporting career counsellors' professional development.

The GCDF program is not only a training program, but also, more important, a certification program. The career consultant is the graduate of the GCDF program. The duration is 120 training hours and the program is based on a manual approved by the CCE – Europe. The career consultant's twelve areas of expertise covers, in terms of knowledge and skills, the following major topics [5]:

- Career Development Models, referring to the general understanding of career development theories, models and techniques, and their application to the specific national background;
- Helping skills – basic skills of communication in order to facilitate career development processes;
- Diversity in Counseling – skills for adapting specialized counseling services to the diversity of human nature, to the special needs of various groups of population;

- Assessment skills – how to use under supervision, informal assessments in order to help clients involved in career development interventions, to make their own decisions, informed and appropriate;
- Technical/digital skills – understanding and use of computer applications, related to the career development field;
- Labor market – how to approach the labor market, globally and nationally, according to the specific resources, opportunities and trends in the occupational domains;
- Employability skills – how to prepare a portfolio for job searching, strategies and specific techniques for different vulnerable groups on the labour market, as women or universities' graduates, for instance;
- Training clients and peers – design and implementation of specific training programs;
- Promotion and Public relations – design and implementation of specific strategies for promoting career counseling services;
- Management skills – program/project management, communication management, time management, stress management;
- Supervision – be aware the situations when supervision is needed and how to proceed it;
- Ethical and Legal issues – be informed about the regulations and act according to the GCDF Code of Ethics.

As one of the master trainers of the GCDF training program I try in practice to keep the balance among these areas of expertise, reinforcing the need of basic knowledge and skills for every counselor. At the same time,

based on these twelve areas of competencies, counselors develop and consolidate a reflexive, systemic way of thinking, well oriented in situations and self-confident in interventions.

2.2 The Basic of supervision in helping professions. The second training experience is related to the supervision process and to the training programs on supervision, specifically. As I already mentioned, in Romanian career counseling system there are very few people working as supervisors, because of the low level of interest about the supervision process and the low level of awareness as far as the need and the practical benefits of supervision are concerned, as well. In this context, the initiative of organizing a training program on supervision process represents a big step forward in order to train supervisors working in career counseling. I was one of these supervisors, contributing in this way to the gradually development of the career counseling domain. The supervision training program, entitled “Basic of supervision in helping professions”, is delivered by the same Romanian private provider as GCDF program, NBCC-Romania, in collaboration with the EBCC [7,9].

Areas of competency covered by the professional training program in *Basic of supervision* refer to the following components [6]:

- Purposes of Supervision
- Theoretical Frameworks and Models of Supervision
- Types of Supervision
- Roles and Relationships in Supervision
- Multicultural Issues in Supervision
- Supervision Interventions
- Professional Development of Supervisees
- Legal and Ethical Issues in Supervision

This is an introductory course, which combines the theoretical framework and practice, a valuable instrument for any counselor, who searches for answers or for clarifying specific contents or for validating experiences in the field. The feedback of the participants after the training has been very positive, appreciating the high standards and

underlying the fact that the certification has filled a gap in the professional development of helping professionals.

Due to its international origin and in order to address needs in various contexts and cultures, this certification program in supervision ensures cultural relevance and adapts to the specifics of helping profession's circumstances. Up to now, the program has been delivered in Romania, Greece, Macedonia, Germany, Cyprus, Portugal and Bulgaria.

The Certified Supervision Professionals (CSP) certification has multiple benefits for all actors involved. For supervisors it increased awareness of beliefs, roles, and factors that can influence the supervision process; develops a set of skills and tools for individual, triadic and group supervision and increases awareness about the role of supervision in continuing professional development. For supervisees it benefits in the understanding the supervision process and developing the ability to organize a system for peer supervision and to conduct such sessions. For the clients it leads to an increased personal/professional satisfaction.

There are no doubts, in the countries where the helping professions are well-regulated, supervision is one of the most frequent activities of the helping professionals. In Romania, these issues are still under debate, and the professional and certification recognized bodies are in their progress of development. Step by step, practice of supervision in career counseling becomes a guarantee of professionalism, motivating the counselors to develop a higher level of expertise.

The both training program mentioned above are, at the same time, certification programs, offering to the attendants the possibility to practice as career counsellor/consultant or career supervisor, immediately after the training graduation.

Members of many professions and fields seek certification as GCDF and CSP: Vocational guidance specialists, career counselors, mental health counselors/specialists, school counselors, pastoral counselors, coaches, psychiatric nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists, social



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workers, human resources specialists and other helping professionals and paraprofessionals.

3. ONLINE PLATFORMS FOR CAREER COUNSELORS PRACTITIONERS

The training programs for ICT skills' development need to address to the following critical points, already identified by the practitioners in the career counseling field:

- to offer models, professional standards and good practices in order to allow objective evaluation of the existing resources referring to ICT use in counseling, and to the development of the ICT's counseling contents, as well;
- to develop new attitudes for practitioners regarding to ICT use in counseling process, as support tools in current counseling activities.

Besides basic ICT skills, available in a large rank of professional situations, it should pay attention to acquire new competencies, not only for the counselors' practice to carry out traditional counseling activities in non-traditional styles, but also for providing complementary counseling services in an innovative and flexible approach.

How is possible to offer specific counseling services using ICT tools? How could we change the relationship between the client and the career counselor? Is still possible to use the same traditional methods and practices, following the same ethical principles? What new counseling activities could we undertake based on online platforms?

In this context, it will be relevant for the argumentation to mention some of those ICT specific tools, web-based, supporting the counseling process. Nowadays, the Web 2.0 applications, including social media, videoconferences, blogs, forums, and

specialized sites are only few ideas about how ICT can contribute to the improved career counseling services. One of these ICT applications, which lately draw the practitioners' attention, is represented by the specific platforms/portals dedicated to offer career counseling services.

The counseling platforms/portals are aimed to support the professional development of the practitioners in career counseling field. Among other benefits, the counseling platforms, being specifically addressed to the counselors' community, provide them available and useful resources, such as [8]:

- theoretical and practical models,
- study-cases,
- good practices,
- books' reviews and
- specific instruments.

All of these resources are usually free of charge, and help professionals in counseling field to manage various situations during the process, to cope with the difficult and emotional issues, giving them the opportunity to share and also learn together.

At the same time, the instruments available on these portals are able to support not only the online counseling concept, but also the face to face counseling process, and the development of specific workshops and career events. The instruments are free of charge and focused on various contents, such as [8]:

- communication skills,
- time management,
- stress management,
- project management,
- decision-making strategies,
- creativity,
- leadership and
- teamwork.

Each of these instruments includes in presentation the guidelines for administration, which turn this experience into a real and helpful learning experience or professional/personal development opportunity. Across the Europe, there are many examples of counseling platforms, using ICT tools and applications. These examples and good practices have inspired several Romanian counselors to take initiative and carry out the first platform dedicated exclusively to practitioners in the career counseling field: forcounselors.ro. [8].

One of the most interesting idea regarding to ICT tools' use in counseling imply the capitalization of the great potential of social media, which contribute to help people, especially the young adults, to promote themselves, to build a personal brand and an online identity, to use networking for social contacts and job opportunities.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As a trainer involved in the both, career counseling and supervision processes, working in the largest technical university in Romania – University POLITEHNICA of Bucharest, and coordinating the university's career counseling center, I have attended or coordinated numerous seminars, workshops and training programs specific to the career counseling domain. Not the last, as practitioner, I have conducted many individual or group counseling sessions. Exercising my professional roles I had to rely on my initial and continuous professional training in this filed, valuing the great potential of each training program attended in order for me to become a better professional. My belief as supervisor and trainer in career counseling training programs

is that these kinds of training programs develop core competences that should be included in the education and training of all the future helping professionals, including the career counsellors.

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