Introduction: An Emerging Evaluation Model for Changing Times

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Abstract

In addition to providing the background and framework for the Special Issue and the Sympo-sium on Issues and Solutions for Evaluating Career Development Programs and Services, the introduction examines factors essential to address in evaluation models for career develop-ment. Specifically, the introduction highlights the need for collaboration, integration and expansion. As well, the introduction outlines the fledgling evaluation model that began to emerge at the Symposium. The model addresses the following dimensions held to be critical in the evaluation of any career development program and / or service: Evaluation Focus—inputs, process and outputs; Outcomes; and, Stakeholders. Further work on the model is advocated.

Résumé

En plus de procurer un arrière-plan et un cadre de référence pour le numéro spécial et le colloque sur les problèmes et les solutions pour l'évaluation des programmes et des services en développement de carrière, cette introduction souligne le besoin d'un collaboration, d'une intégration et d'une expansion. Elle présente aussi l'ébauche d'un modèle d'évaluation qui a commencé à prendre forme au cours du colloque. Le modèle adresse les dimensions suivantes considérées critiques à l'évaluation de tout programme et / ou service en développement de carrière. L'évaluation sur: porte les données, le processus et les rendements; les résultats; et les enjeux. Un travail additionnel sur le modèle est recommandé.

This introduction to the Special Issue of the *Canadian Journal of Coun-selling* on Issues and Solutions for Evaluating Career Development Programs and Services is intended to accomplish two purposes. The first purpose is to provide the reader with a context for the issue. The second purpose is to explore a potential model for evaluating career de-velopment programs and services. The model began to emerge from a Symposium on Issues and Solutions for Evaluating Career Development Programs and Services held in Halifax, at Mount Saint Vincent Univer-sity, in March 1994. This is a challenging task, but one which is necessary and critical to the focus of The Symposium, namely, future direction and plan for action. We wanted to move beyond merely overviewing the papers contained in the special issue to critically examine and provide for the reader an opportunity to reflect with us on the outcomes of The Symposium. This would continue the process of examining the evalua-

tion parameters necessary to build a better understanding of the effectiveness of career development programs and services.

Information on the effectiveness of career development programs and services has been lacking. For example, we know little about the effectiveness, efficiency, and appropriateness of programs designed to help persons in transition from education to employment, unemployment to employment, underemployment to more satisfying roles and responsibilities, or programs and services that contribute to individual, provincial, and national well-being. We also do not know the impact of school-based programs and services on the long term development of children and youth.

Despite this lack of knowledge, a large number of approaches, models, and strategies exist relative to career development. However, the strategies to assist in a comprehensive evaluation of career development programs and services has not kept pace with the burgeoning interest in career development. This lack of evaluative data, and more seriously the lack of clarity on the nature of approaches, techniques, and strategies that might help identify the essential characteristics of effective, caring, and efficient career development programs and services, is damaging in a variety of ways. One concern rests with the possibility that ineffective and inappropriate procedures are being utilized. A second concern is that in times of economic challenge, the absence of evaluative information may lead decision makers to question the need for and support of such programs.

It was to address these types of concerns that a selection of Canadian researchers, practitioners, and senior executives responsible for and/or involved with career development programs and services were invited to share their perspectives and to foster discussion at the Mount Saint Vincent Symposium. In setting the parameters of The Symposium, a broad definition of career and employment counselling was used. This included all activities where there was a focus on planning a career (however tentative), exploring possible occupational alternatives (including the exploration of personal, socio-economic, and labour market factors), making transitions from one job to another (including developing the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to make such transitions successfully), and reducing barriers to the aforementioned activities, regardless of the context in which the activities take place (schools, community agencies, prisons, government agencies, or career libraries), and regardless of the mode for delivering the service (classroom instruction, group and individual counselling, self-help service centres, skill training workshops). The major goals of The Symposium were to examine what we need to know about such programs and services in the future, to work towards a beginning model for evaluating career

development programs and services, and to begin a process for information sharing in Canada.

This special issue on the evaluation of career development programs and services contains selected papers presented at The Symposium. All of the papers received rigorous review by those attending The Symposium, and in addition, the papers included in this special issue passed rigorous peer review by others who were not symposium participants. It is our hope that these papers will begin an ongoing dialogue which will facilitate continuing research into the effectiveness, efficiency, and appropriateness of career development programs and services.

Factors to Address in Evaluation Models

As The Symposium unfolded, it became clear to all participants that career development had expanded far beyond early definitions which focused on matching personal attributes with job characteristics and the teaching of decision-making skills. In the current milieu, we believe that career development involves visioning, planning, self-exploration, and exploration of the factors that influence one's life, including personal values and priorities, the factors in one's environment, and factors in society at large. It also involves being aware of the sources of satisfaction in one's life and the labour market realities in a changing world. Career development at the root involves relating to people's individual frames of reference and helping them create the futures they envision for themselves. It became clear also that programs and services must be broadly considered to include a variety of approaches and strategies, such as curriculum development, career education in schools, individual and group counselling, information services, and out-placement services. Given this backdrop, it became evident to symposium participants that career development takes place in a context of uncertainty. The context might almost be described by chaos theory. This is a context for which simple solutions and simple procedures will have little personal relevance for clients and likely be of little interest to decision makers. Further, it is a context for which traditionally focused attempts at evaluation likely will come up empty handed as far as assessing the real impact on client's lives. Some new considerations will need to be introduced into the evaluation process. These are highlighted below.

Collaboration. In developing a new approach to evaluation, collaboration must be a central guiding component. In the past, evaluation often was "mandated from above" with little thought given to involving those being evaluated. If evaluation is to be meaningful, all of the stakeholders in the programs and services being evaluated must be players in planning, carrying out, and disseminating the results of the evaluation. This includes: the *decision makers* (senior management who make the ultimate recommendations and/or decisions on funding), *senior advisors* (those

responsible for designing policy, developing programs, and consulting on program implementation), *advocacy groups* (equity groups, community groups, other partners in program development or service delivery), and those in the *delivery system* (counsellors, teachers, clients, students, and local agency managers).

The collaborative process entails more than an agreement to cooperate. It involves all partners actively identifying their needs and ensuring those needs are part of the collaboration process, i.e., addressing what each group of people wants the evaluation to do for them. Decision makers typically are more interested in things like client volumes, total cost of programs, number of people employed, client self-sufficiency, and effectiveness rations. Senior advisors often are interested in context and process variables, in addition to the outcomes that are the primary concern of decision makers. This includes things such as delivery mode (group or individual), pay-off for staff training, match between mandated roles and actual practice, cost and quality of service, and ratio of contracting out. Advocacy groups are interested in seeing if the particular needs of the groups they represent are being met in the program. Those involved in the delivery system need to feel that the results of the evaluation will be useful to them in the delivery or receipt of programs and services.

In order to reduce the threat often associated with evaluation and maximize the impact of the evaluation, all stakeholders should be involved in all aspects of the evaluation process, from the initial planning through to disseminating the results. In order for this to happen, it likely will be necessary to develop at least some new methodology that will be perceived by counsellors and clients as providing them with useful information and also be capable of providing senior advisors and decision makers with the information they want.

Integration. In order to be maximally effective, and to reduce the potential for threat, it is important that evaluation be regarded as part of program/service development and implementation. All too often, evaluation concerns are only addressed at the end of the program or at some arbitrary point in service delivery. Beginning the evaluation process at the end of a program, or at an artificial point in service delivery, may result in it being too late to address some of the concerns of the evaluation partners. Worse yet, programs may be evaluated against criteria they were not trying to meet. Just as the goals of a program or service determine the focus of the intervention and the process followed during service delivery, they should also determine the focus of the evaluation and the procedures involved in obtaining evaluation data. Thus, if the funder of a program or service wishes to include "self-management" skills as part of the evaluation, it means that self-management training should have been part of the program/service. Or reciprocally, if it was decided

not to include self-management training as part of a program / service, then it is important NOT to have self-management skills as part of the evaluation package. The important point here is that evaluation needs to be an integral part of the organization's mission, completely articulated with the design and implementation of the program / service. When program / service development, implementation, and evaluation are seen as going hand-in-hand there will be a greater chance of being able to demonstrate a clear link between the practice of career development and the outcomes deriving from it. Such a linkage will contribute in meaningful ways to the design and delivery of career development programs and services.

Expansion. Generally speaking, the empirical research is quite promising regarding the effects of career interventions. Recent meta analyses, referred to in subsequent articles in this special issue, suggest that there is a lot of good news that we should be bold in sharing. However, tapping the good news and applying it to parts of the program / services needing modification, requires that new procedures be developed. Procedures will need to be developed to assess efforts to change or correct the context in which a client operates (vs. changing the individual), so that social action can be seen as a legitimate part of counselling outcome. For example, the increased frequency of wheelchair ramps has enhanced the employability of many physically challenged clients and efforts to achieve social action on other fronts need to be seen as legitimate aspects of career development programs, and evaluated as such.

Many types of information have the potential for contributing to judgments about the effectiveness of programs and services. The past emphasis on quantitative and standardized data has often led to the exclusion of qualitative and informal data in many evaluation endeavours. Recently, a more balanced approach is beginning to be advocated. A continued openness to qualitative evaluation methods and an openness to blending both qualitative and quantitative procedures in an evaluation will be important. This may necessitate efforts to convince decision makers and senior advisors of the usefulness of such procedures. As a further example, it likely will be useful to spend energy on developing and incorporating "performance assessment" methods into our service delivery and evaluation models. Since some people tend to "teach to the test," the "test tasks" should be meaningful as ways of promoting client change, i.e., there should be little difference between what is done in a program and what is done in assessing how successful the program has been. It is optimally appropriate to start with the question "What is the desired performance?" and then build both the intervention and the assessment tasks to address that goal. Finally, it likely will be important to develop ways for using computers to do computer business (not computers doing teacher or counsellor business) that are

relevant to the process and outcomes of career development programs and services. If the career development community does not embrace these types of computer applications, then the business community likely will do it instead.

A Fledgling Evaluation Model

Given the complexity of the domain of career development programs and services, it is not surprising that the evaluation model that began to emerge from The Symposium also was complex. To complicate things even more, the model is not complete. However, in the interest of continuing the spirit of open sharing that permeated The Symposium we felt it would be better to lay open to public scrutiny a developing model and invite dialogue on how the model could be completed or improved. The model is an attempt to identify the factors that should be addressed when evaluating career development programs/services. It does not, for the time being, discuss how each of the factors should be evaluated. The beginning part of this paper identified some of the issues that need to be considered when deciding *how* to evaluate the factors described below. The articles in this special issue elaborate many of those "how to" procedures as well. We thought it would be a good start to identify the "areas in need of addressing" so that further effort could be channeled into developing procedures to address those areas.

The evaluation model that began to emerge from The Symposium had five dimensions and can likely best be illustrated by thinking of two cubes, where the first cube has been flattened out to form one side of the second cube. The first cube can be thought of as representing the *Evaluation Focus*, and consists of three dimensions: inputs, process, and outputs. *Inputs* are the physical constraints and resources operating in the agency delivering the service. They consist of things such as: policy, training opportunities, agency resources for client and counsellor use (e.g., career library, computer résumé writer), involvement of a manager or supervisor, staff professional development budgets for inservice training. Input factors are important to address in program evaluation for programs with meager inputs are likely to have difficulty achieving favourable outcomes. *Processes* are the means used to deliver the service. *Process* variables include things like: individual counselling, group counselling, group workshops, classroom instruction, peer counselling, peer tutoring, distance delivery, and self-help, to name a few. Likely no single process is universally suitable to all types of counsellors, clients, or career development outcomes. Group delivery is optimally suitable for some program goals, while individual, peer, or self-help processes might be better suited for others. The key is to identify which types of processes work best with the type of staff resources available and the type of client

outcomes that are being sought. *Outputs* are the direct results of the processes. They are the learning outcomes deriving directly from the program or intervention. *Output* variables include: problem solving skills, decision making skills, self-management skills, other skill development outcomes like financial planning, interviewing, or assertiveness. *Output* variables also would include changes in the social context, client motivation to change, self-awareness, and all the client learning changes (skill, knowledge, attitudes) that may result from a program/service. Taken all together, the *Evaluation Focus* variables create a strong link between what resources go into a career development program/service, what goes on during the delivery of the program/service and the outcomes that derive directly from the program/service.

Part of the argument in the preceding section of this paper was that the scope of evaluation needed to be expanded to include other aspects not traditionally considered. In order to do that, two additional dimensions were thought to be important: the more global outcomes that concerned decision makers and senior advisers and the stakeholder groups involved in the program/service. To visualize this requires some mental nimbleness, but we suggest the following process. Imagine a cube with three dimensions: outcomes, stakeholders, and evaluation focus. Evaluation focus would consist of the inputs, process, and outputs dimensions described above. The outcome and stakeholder dimensions will be described below.

To avoid confusions with "outputs," a factor in the "Evaluation Focus" dimension, the term "outcomes" was used to refer to the more global, "larger context" variables that often are impacted by career development programs. In this sense, *Outcomes* refers to areas such as: economic, sociometric, individual, social context, and the resulting interactions between all of these factors and the other factors in the model. The outcomes are seen as only relevant when they are addressed in the context of the other factors in the model. Thus, economic outcomes, like number of clients finding a job (and the resulting impact on the local, provincial, or national economy), are only relevant when they are discussed in the context of the nature of the program process (individual, group), the inputs (agency policy, supervisory assistance, agency resources available), the outputs (skills learned, changes in attitude documented), and stakeholder concerns (family support, type of client, expertise of counselling staff).

Stakeholders refers to: client, family, counsellor, teacher, agency manager, and learners. Not only should stakeholder groups be involved in planning the intervention and the evaluation process, but their evaluation of the program components that impact them should be assessed as well. It should be noted that those delivering the programs or ser-

vices have been identified as a stakeholder group, in addition to the client stakeholder groups. This is important, for the counsellor/teacher knowledge, expertise, and needs should be considered in any evaluation attempt. Although addressing counsellor/teacher needs may not be seen as new, it does represent a substantial addition to most evaluations models. As such, this inclusion will require the development of new procedures and some modification in the way evaluations are designed and implemented in order to address the broader spectrum of stakeholders.

We acknowledge that the model is still in its infancy and as such does not answer all the questions one might have. However, we feel that it does go a long way towards articulating the factors that need to be addressed when evaluating career development programs.

Conclusions

Program evaluation is becoming a fact of life. Whether implicit or explicit, evaluation procedures set forward the criteria against which career development programs and services will be adjudicated. Those criteria in turn tend to influence the nature of career development programs. In other words, by mapping out the dimensions that should be addressed when evaluating programs and service, setting forward suggestions for the evaluation process, and articulating evaluation criteria, we are in effect influencing the content and nature of service delivery. Perhaps the ultimate motivation for all involved in the delivery of career development programs and services is to sit down together and make sure respective interests are being covered in the evaluation approach being used. In this way, the respective concerns about program content will be given a voice.

Although there were many contentious points of view expressed during The Symposium, there was complete agreement that accountability is becoming a more important issue and therefore, the time is right for marketing a new approach to evaluation. The new approach should embody both qualitative and quantitative methodology, utilize informal data gathering procedures in addition to traditional standardized methods, link outcomes and process, place client intrapersonal and contextual factors as centrally important, and address a wide variety of stakeholder concerns and evaluation needs. This new approach would need to be marketed to policy makers, managers, and funders in addition to clients and counsellors. Counsellors in particular need to be shown that evaluation can be a support to them and evaluation designs and measures need to be developed that provide useful information to counsellors. We think the model that began to evolve at The Symposium is an initial step in helping to think of evaluation in a different way. We look forward to receiving comments from readers on this topic.

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