
Chapter 4

MENTAL HEALTH or CAREER COUNSELING: A Forced Choice? No Need!

by **Kevin B. Stoltz and Karen J. Haas**

In 2011, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) ended the US shuttle program and approximately 3500 workers found their jobs gone (Chow, 2011). These workers used their personal and career adaptability to find new employment, move households, and re-establish support systems. Once considered the most stable jobs, even the federal government is relying on worker's career and personal adaptabilities to aid them and their families in economic, social, and psychological recovery when large-scale government projects end. Super and Knasel (1981) observed that adults continue to develop skills and new career interests over the life span. Based on this observation, they proposed career adaptability as the construct that aided adults' in continued career development. Savickas (1997) posited that the term career adaptability actually represents the acquisition of career skills and attitudes across the life span, and proposed that this term represents an integrative construct for the Life-Span, Life-Space (Super, 1990) theory.

Other terms represent concepts and dimensions of career adaptability. Hall (1996) coined the term Protean career, indicating, like the Greek god Proteus, workers need to be able to reshape skills, attitudes, and behaviors constantly to avoid the capture of unemployment. Arthur & Rousseau (1996) called the new career, Boundaryless, inferring that workers must go beyond the bounds of hierarchical organizational structures and seek opportunities outside the confines of these structures. Additionally, the construct of career adaptability is demonstrating significant relationships with positive psychology measures, building evidence that mental health and career adaptability are related.

The relationship between mental health and career counseling is not new. Betz and Corning (1993) argued that the division between career and personal counseling is in conflict with the overall philosophical position of the counseling profession. These authors contend that counseling is steeped in holistic underpinnings that emphasize development of the entire person. They supported this argument by underscoring the common aspects of career and personal counseling processes (e.g., therapeutic alliance development, exploration of incongruent situations and aspirations). Krumboltz (1993) emphasized the need for counselors to attend to all aspects of human development. He noted that many client problems include aspects of career and personal counseling. Blustein & Spengler (1995) highlighted the many parallels between career and personal counseling and stated that treatment of one dimension has effects across the other. Attempting to reduce the conceptual division, these authors presented the term career or personal domain as the focus of counseling in general.

More recently, Zunker (2008) highlighted relationships between personal and career counseling by presenting the biopsychosocial model within the framework of human behavior. Zunker explained that these three dimensions coalesce to create influences on human behavior including career behavior. He cited multiple life roles (cultural and social), the pervasive nature of psychological disorders and early learning (schemas), career barriers (cultural and cognitive), and the ubiquitous aspects of work stress (biological, psychological, and social) as experiences that are important to consider when providing counseling services.

Together, these authors provide strong arguments supporting the claim that career counseling is mental health counseling and that clear divisions are not possible in practice. One domain has significant influence on the other and thus, career and personal counseling have mutual influences. With this understanding, being able to identify and grow the clients' strengths and adaptabilities becomes a central focus in career counseling.

The purpose of this article is to emphasize the importance of conceptualizing career counseling as a process for mental health and optimal human functioning. A definition of optimal human functioning is offered as a framework for supporting individual human strengths. Then, by reviewing emerging literature that highlights relationships between career adaptability and markers of positive mental health, we advance the perspective that career counseling affects the whole person. Finally, we describe ways of incorporating the various dimensions and aspects of optimal human functioning and career adaptability into the practice of career counseling.

Optimal Human Functioning: Well-Being Across Life Roles

Interpersonal relationships and work highlight the human experience (Erikson, 1963; Savickas, 1991). According to Blustein and Spengler (1995) and Zunker (2008), there is mounting evidence that career concerns are integral to human functioning. Contextual and environmental changes in the social and work worlds imply that career issues will become increasingly more widespread in the lives of people. These structural changes in the workforce may create feelings of anxiety, stress, and indecision that affect a number of areas of psychosocial functioning. However, the constructs of psychological hardiness and well-being, main tenets of positive psychology, can be harnessed to assist workers in overcoming challenges as they face diverse work and personal transitions.

Scarce attention has been focused on creating rationales and interventions linking positive psychology to career counseling, with the exceptions of Harris, Thoresen, and Lopez (2007), Savickas (2003), Stebleton and Peterson (2007), and Zikic and Franklin (2010). The work of these researchers indicates favorable results gained by the application of positive psychology concepts to career counseling. Specific findings demonstrate the use of narrative counseling techniques as particularly well-suited in facilitating the skills and behaviors of optimal human functioning and career adaptability (Savickas, 1993; Stebleton & Peterson, 2007; Zikic & Franklin, 2010). Positive psychology is defined as the study of optimal human functioning (Stebleton & Peterson, 2007). The meaning of optimal human functioning centers on experiencing positive emotion, engaging in meaningful activities and relationships, taking responsibility, pursuing personal growth, and adopting productive roles in society (Robertson, 2013; Walsh, 2008). Optimal human functioning, or well-being, is exemplified by high involvement and focus, intrinsic mo-

tivation, and the capability of overcoming difficult challenges by the application of personal strengths and characteristics (Donaldson, Dollwet & Rao, 2015; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Keyes, 2002). Self-esteem, life satisfaction, and optimism are among the most important constructs that reflect optimal human functioning (Seligman, 2011).

Seligman (2011) defines well-being theory as a construct that includes five measureable elements or pillars (PERMA): positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. Positive emotion concerns what individuals feel (e.g., pleasure, satisfaction). These emotions involve intellectual and physical stimulation, creativity, and challenge. Supporting the inclusion of emotion, Hartung (2011) posited that emotion and affect are important variables in the study of career development. Engagement centers on the process of flow, or the loss of self-consciousness during an absorbing activity. The engagement of workers is also an emerging topic in career literature (Alessandri, Borgogni, Schaufeli, Caprara, & Consiglio, 2015). The act of building and maintaining positive relationships and social networks is a key element that centers on the importance of relationships to human functioning. The social and relational aspects of career development are well documented (Blustein, 2006; Hall, 2002). Additionally, people value meaning and purpose in life. According to Seligman, a meaningful life consists of belonging to and serving something larger than the self. Meaning is often created by reflecting on personal struggle and tension (Singer & Bonalume, 2010; Thorne & McLean, 2001) and thriving after an event. Career development includes many events that create struggle and tension. Adams (2012) makes a strong case for including meaningfulness as an integral part of career counseling. Finally, accomplishment is symbolized as personal agency to pursue excellence. The achieving life (Seligman, 2011) is viewed as an individual who is often absorbed in career work (sense of flow), experiences positive emotions, and believes work is contributing to something larger than the self. To flourish in career and life, individuals must cultivate positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and achievement. Qualities such as self-esteem, optimism, resilience, vitality, and self-determination help people to flourish in overcoming challenging events and circumstances, thereby creating a sense of continuity and meaning of life. These tenets of positive psychology apply equally well to career development.

This total view is represented in the work of Brott (2005), Peavy, (1994), and Savickas (2011). Although many times these lines of research (positive psychology and career counseling) develop with little cross over, there are meaningful conceptualizations that link career and optimal human functioning.

Career Adaptability: Markers of Mental Health Functioning

Career adaptability is a construct that highlights individuals' skills and strengths to cope with work demands, changes, and transition. In research, career adaptability shows significant relationships with many positive mental health indicators. Extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness personality traits show positive correlations with career adaptability (Rossier, Zecca, Stauffer, Maggiori, & Dauwalder, 2012; Teixeira, Bargagi, Lassance, Magalhães, & Duarte, 2012; van Vianen, Klehe, Koen, & Dries, 2012). Rottinghaus, Day, and Borgen (2005) and Rottinghaus, Buelow, Matyja, and Schneider (2012), found positive correlations between extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness with career optimism, confidence, and seeking career knowledge. Additionally, Rottinghaus et al.

(2012) noted positive correlations of career adaptability with positive life orientation, work-life balance, career decision-making, and career self-agency. The correlations between the personality trait of neuroticism and career adaptability were negative in these studies (Rossier et al., 2012; Rottinghaus et al., 2005; Rottinghaus et al., 2012; Teixeira et al., 2012; van Vianen, Klehe et al., 2012), indicating that those people with high scores on neuroticism reported lower adaptabilities. These studies indicate that many aspects of personality correlate with constructs from positive psychology.

Briscoe, Henagan, Burton, and Murphy (2012) found positive attitudes toward career self-management correlated with active coping strategies. They noted seeking social support correlated with an unbounded attitude concerning organizational hierarchies. These studies show that individuals who go beyond the organizationally defined boundaries for support and information tend to experience more positive career opportunities and embrace responsibilities for self-managing their careers.

In addition, career adaptability was shown to correlate with self-regulation skills (Creed, Fallon, & Hood, 2009), increased work pleasure and engagement (Johnston, Luciano, Maggiori, Ruch, & Rossier, 2013), positive emotions and self-efficacy, (Hirschi, 2009), and fewer perceived career barriers and overall life satisfaction (Soresi, Nota, & Ferrari, 2012). These studies highlight the positive linkages between career adaptability and well-being in life.

Collectively, these correlational studies indicate that positive personality traits relate to positive work experiences. Additionally, career adaptability and the related constructs, defined as skills that can be increased through narrative counseling (Savickas, 2011), help people make positive career transitions and adjustments.

Optimal Human Functioning and Career Adaptability: A Whole-Life Perspective

Workers in the 20th century relied on the hierarchy, stability, and security of their work environments to provide a place of safety for their careers. Inherent in the 21st century is the notion of protean and boundaryless careers that require individuals to engage in managing their own careers. These changes require workers to develop a strong sense of identity to guide career decisions and transitions. Researchers (Blustein, 2006; 2013; Hall, 2002; Savickas, 2011) point to the acquisition of career meta-competencies that denote psycho-social capabilities, such as career adaptability, resiliency, optimism, identity awareness, sense of purpose, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence. Career meta-competencies help people to be self-directive learners and proactive agents in designing their evolving career trajectories. These career meta-competencies are analogous to the concept of optimal human functioning in that both constructs center on personal agency, strength-building, personal identity, emotional engagement, social relationships, and meaning making.

Exploring rationales and interventions that help individuals to utilize career meta-competencies is critical in view of the changing nature of careers. To aid clients with adjusting to career changes, transitions, or identity development tasks, we propose that the therapeutic alliance is more important in career counseling than ever before. The creation of a holding environment (Maree, 2010) becomes the space for helping the client explore, inventory, and construct an ability to

self-hold that will serve as a reserve for the person in future transitions. Career counseling should help the person develop a fund of self-knowledge and self-encouragement that assists the client in future career and life transitions.

The Therapeutic Alliance as Holding Environment: Crucial Role of the Career Counselor

Researchers highlight the working alliance as paramount to successful counseling outcomes (Horvath 2006; Maree, 2013; Meissner, 2007). Others, (Brott, 2001; Maree, 2010, 2013; Meara & Patton, 1994) posit that the working alliance is a necessary component of career counseling. In this section, we emphasize the critical role of the career counselor in establishing the therapeutic alliance as a holding environment (Maree, 2010). The term “holding”, devised by British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, refers to not only the psychosocial environment in which infants are nurtured, but also the therapeutic conditions necessary for effective counseling practices. The holding environment creates a safe, caring, and trusting space where individuals can explore and growth is actualized (Winnicott, 1961).

In the mid-20th century, the western world, with heavy industry and bureaucratic organizations, created a social contract with workers (Shein, 1964). This contract dictated worker loyalty and in exchange, workers were given secure employment with opportunities for advancement. The organization acted in the role of supportive parent, effectively providing aspects of the holding environment (Maree, 2010). However, with the advent of the global economy, the contract was broken (Uchetille, 2006) and workers were vested with self-managing their careers. To achieve this in today’s protean and boundaryless career environment, workers must learn to hold themselves (Maree, 2010, 2013) and garner their strengths and career meta-competencies in order to flourish.

The therapeutic alliance: Care in career counseling.

The therapeutic alliance established by the counselor and client, presents the client with a collaborative space that provides care or conditions for support. Within this environment, the client can begin to draw a sense of safety and support while exploring career and life stories (Maree, 2013). As the alliance strengthens, the counselor helps the individual develop a sense of personal agency, accessing the person’s individual adaptabilities and personal strengths. These resources are put to work examining the present and forging possible future career and life stories. The counselor provides support and encourages the individual, enabling the client to stand freely and to hold the self. This therapeutic alliance helps individuals to recognize and cultivate those positive aspects of well-being and adaptability such as optimism, resilience, confidence, and self-direction (Robertson, 2013). The development of the inner holding environment enables individuals to engage in optimal human functioning, allowing clients to recreate and reimagine their career and life paths. A specific aspect of developing this holding environment is helping the client develop a future life story that includes meaningful elements of personal experience for examination and restoring (authoring new and more fulfilling career/life stories).

Career Narratives: The Building Blocks of Optimal Human Functioning

The guiding principal of the narrative approach to career as mental health counseling is that people make sense of their lives through stories (Brott, 2001; McAdams, 2008; Savickas, 2011). In his narrative model of identity, McAdams (2008) contends that identity itself takes the form

of an inner story, including settings, scenes, character, plot, and themes. The use of narratives promotes individuals' power of agency by evaluating resources and building on those positive aspects of well-being that help the person work through career and life transitions (Savickas, 2011). The aim of narrative career counseling is to aid individuals in scripting their own life story by helping them explore personal tensions, construct meaning, and a personal holding environment (Maree, 2010, 2013).

The use of narratives in career counseling is linked to optimal human functioning and career adaptability by its emphasis on a holistic approach, the power of human agency, a focus on personal strengths, identity understanding, the search for meaning, and a future orientation of hope and optimism.

Narrative Counseling Strategies: Integration of Career and Mental Health

Counselors can employ narrative interventions to help clients reauthor career/life stories. While engaged in the therapeutic alliance, counselor and client collaborate to review life events, construct maps that link experiences (Brott, 2005), identify strengths, abilities, and interests, and pinpoint overarching life themes that recur within the client's personal schemas (Savickas, 2011). Counselors build the holding environment by affirming the client's story and reflecting the emotional content that accompanies the story. By focusing on basic counseling skills, the counselor begins constructing a holding environment. Recognizing the deep emotions that come with negative events and helping the client develop meaning from the events is a key aspect to building optimal human functioning. Finally, helping the client to understand life themes and discover how those themes influence work behavior and adjustment is important.

This type of in-depth work is not often associated with career counseling (Blustein & Spengler, 2005; Peavy, 1994, Savickas, 2011). However, this work represents a fertile ground for helping clients cultivate the skills, strengths, attitudes, meaning, and adaptabilities that represent many aspects of optimal human functioning.

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Chapter 5

BREAKING THROUGH CAREER INDECISION in CLIENTS with ADHD

by Katharine S. Brooks

Abstract

Career decision-making is a key element to successful career development, and can be particularly challenging for individuals with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Many career practitioners are not specifically trained to work with ADHD clients, and may find their typical career decision-making methods ineffective. This article provides six general techniques the author has found particularly helpful with individuals with ADHD, and presents instructions to complete a “**Possible Lives Map,**” a creative visual-thinking exercise that can help break through the cycle of career indecision.

Introduction

Deciding what career to pursue is one of the most important tasks in the career development process (Gati & Asher, 2001). Traditional methods of assisting individuals with the decision-making process generally involve helping them build knowledge of their skills and values, and matching those traits in a logical fashion to opportunities in the workforce (Parsons, 1909; Holland, 1973).

Career decision-making can be enhanced through career assessments and experiential activities (such as shadowing professionals in the field of interest, completing internships, summer jobs, or volunteer activities), which help clients acquire *real world* knowledge and experience. These approaches all rely on a belief that increasing knowledge of one’s self and the marketplace, logically assessing those factors, and weighing the options and consequences of different choices will result in a clear career direction.

Career decision-making skills are regarded as crucial to an individual’s career success, and career indecision is often associated with low self-efficacy and emotional instability (DiFabio, Palazzeschi, Asulin-Peretz & Gati, 2013). Individuals with ADHD often experience difficulty with career decision-making. Norwalk, Norvilitus, & MacLean (2009) found a significant negative relationship between the presence of ADHD and career decision-making self-efficacy, and cited studies (Wasserstein, 2005; Weyandt & DuPaul, 2006) demonstrating that this could be due to deficits in planning skills (executive functioning) and attention. Individuals with ADHD often also experience symptoms of depression, anxiety, and/or other mental health issues (Heiligenstein & Keeling, 1995) which could further impair their career decision-making ability.

In a comprehensive article outlining career development issues for college students with ADHD, Dipeolu (2011) noted that most ADHD college students find career planning “*to be boring, time-*