A Counseling Model for Career Construction

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Career construction counseling (CCC) concentrates on clients making meaning, forming intentions, and acting purposely as they re-story their careers. CCC combines dialogic procedures based on CCT with narrative processes of client change described in the Innovative Moments Model (IMM) of client change devised by Miquel Michael Goncalves and his colleagues (cf., Gonçalves, Matos, & Santos, 2009; Montesano, Oliveira, & Gonçalves, 2017). Paulo Cardoso has led the research and reflection to articulate the use of the IMM in CCC (cf., Cardoso, Silva, Gonçalves, & Duarte, 2014; Cardosa, Savickas, & Gonçalves, in press).

The CCC discourse explains client change across three phases of counseling. After formulating their career concern, clients first (a) explore micro-narratives or short stories about the *constructs* with which they have formed their careers so far, then (b) *deconstruct* and *reconstruct* the micro-narratives into a macro-narrative, and finally (c) use the new story to *co-construct* and perform career change. During CCC, practitioners attend to innovative moments (IMs) of three types at two levels. IMs at Level I consist of attempts to deal with the problem [Action I], understand the problem [Reflection I], and criticize the problem or people who support it [Protest I]. IMs at Level II refer to Reflections, Protests, and Actions involved in the process of change. When innovative moments occur, counselors prompt client elaboration of the innovation and exploration of the change by asking questions, responding with empathy, or offering feedback. The following sections briefly summarize the three phases of CCC in terms of dialogic tasks and IM markers of client change. A free manual explains the CCC process in detail (Savickas, 2015).

Formulating the Problem and Goals

In formulating a problem narrative, clients explain their understanding of the career concern. Then counselors collaborate with clients to initiate a working alliance, explain the problem, assess adaptability strategies, and craft goals for counseling. At this point the change process is furthered when clients explore the problem (Reflection I), report past attempts to deal with the problem such searching for solutions, seeking information, or skill development (Action I), and realistically criticize the problem or people who support it (Protest I).

Phase I: Constructing the Story

The major task of Phase I is to examine the constructs that clients have used to build their careers. To do so, counselors conduct a Career Construction Interview (CCI) during which they elicit micro-narratives about important incidents, recurrent episodes, and self-defining moments. Counselors may prompt such stories by asking clients about their role models, manifest interests, current favorite story, mottoes about tactics, and early recollections. These dialogues provide the first opportunity for clients to examine their vocational interests, work values, and career goals. If micro-narratives express self-limiting ideas, confining roles, or cultural barriers, then counselors support clients in thinking differently

about the stories so as to access new meanings that open possibilities and restart stalled initiatives.

The self-constructing processes of self-organizing -- especially self-awareness and self-evaluation -- play a key role as individuals selectively become aware of, differentiate, and integrate their knowledge, competencies, beliefs, and experiences to understand how they have constructed their careers. The change process at this point is furthered by new understandings of the career constructs [Reflection 1]. The change process also advances if the client begins to deconstruct, question, or refute problematic assumptions and prescription in the career narrative [Protest 1].

Phase II: Reconstructing the Story

The major tasks of Phase II is revising the career narrative with a perspective that envisions goals and plans actions to resolve the career concern. This occurs by integrating the small stories into a large story or macro-narrative that binds the stories together with a career theme which invests meaning in the occupational plot. The resulting life portrait reorganizes experiences and explains what is at stake in the next episode of the career story. The resulting self-clarity enables clients to make their intentions more apparent to themselves and their counselors. With this newfound clarity, clients may envision the next scenes, choose priorities, and form intentions. Re-understanding themselves at the end of Phase II, clients sketch new career plans and may affirm the assertiveness needed to enact the plans. Client and counselor together craft an action agenda that will move the client from the currently experienced situation to the one currently desired.

The self-constructing processes of self-conceiving -- especially self-representation and self-coherence -- play a key role as clients make sense of themselves, social roles, and the world. During this phase, the change process is furthered when clients reconsider the meaning of past vocational experiences and adopt new ways of thinking [Reflection II]. Recognizing differences between the problematic past and a more adaptive present prompts clients to articulate a new understanding and envision possible futures. This reflection on reflections [Reflexivity] usually enables clients to reposition themselves relative to the career problem, express an assertiveness that enables them to consider actions meant to create change [Protest 2], and feel emotionally grounded as they anticipate performing the new career story [Action II].

Phase III: Stabilizing Story Change

Phase III concentrate on the clients' own agency in shaping their futures. The major task is to stabilize client transformation so the changed story takes hold and becomes permanent. To firmly establish and maintain the new career story, clients must recognize that they are the authors of their own change, not just actors in it. To do this, counselors prompt clients to conceptualize the change process by recognizing the difference between the old story and the anticipated story as well as explain how they themselves have authored and authorized the change.

The self-constructing processes of self-regulating -- especially self-direction in setting goals, self-management in controlling behavior and self-monitoring in evaluating progress -- play a key role as clients solidify the new story and begin to perform it by expressing intentions to enact plans [Action II]. Transformation is consolidated

when clients describe the changes they have achieved, recognize the processes underlying these changes [Reflexivity], and exercise their own authority in telling the new story with intentional self-regulation.

Performing Change

Closing career construction counseling involves confirming that clients have accomplished the goals they brought to counseling. Counselors usually end with a few sentences that summarize the client's conceptualization [Reflexivity] that occurred during Phase III. In the end, counseling concludes with clients substantiating the new career plan by reviewing their intentions to initiate change [Action II] and with the counselor encouraging clients to go further and deeper into the world to answer the questions they brought to counseling. Action in the real world advances self-making, identity shaping, and career constructing.

In sum, counseling for career construction involves having clients narrate their vocational stories, deconstruct demoralizing beliefs by destabilizing their meanings, reconstruct a new career story, co-construct the next episode in the occupational plot, stabilize the change, and perform actions to create a more satisfying life. Thus, the sequence is articulate, destabilize, revise, plan, firm, and act.

The summary chart below was adapted for CCC from ideas in Montesano, A., Oliveira, J. T., & Goncalves, M. M. (2017). How do self-narratives change during psychotherapy? A review of innovative moments research. *Journal of Systemic Therapies, 36*, 81-96.   https://doi.org/10.1521/jsyt.2017.36.3.81

IM Type	Definition
Action 1	Activities addressing the problem
Reflection 1	New understandings of the problem
Protest 1	Criticizing the problem
Reflection 2	New thinking and planning
Action 2	Intending action
Protest 2	Asserting agency
Reflexivity	Owning the process of change
Performing	Enacting new behaviors