

Developing Career Time Perspective

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Abstract

Temporal experience interventions alter time perspective, differentiate time into meaningful units, and connect events along a time continuum. Counselors who use temporal interventions with their clients aim to make the future important, cause the future to seem real, and create hope that goals can be achieved. Clients who experience time in this way display greater career awareness, more optimism about their futures, and increased motivation for life planning. The planful attitudes and planning skills that result from temporal interventions may also generalize to empower individuals as they plan for other life roles.

Developing Career Time Perspective

Counselors can foster career development by changing how their clients organize and experience time. Temporal experience interventions create a cognitive schema with which individuals can recognize and develop their own careers. These interventions make the future important, cause the future to seem real, and construct pathways that lead from the present to goal attainment. When individuals experience time in this way, they cultivate the planful attitudes and planning skills that are critical to career decision making and work adjustment.

It is easy to overlook the fact that career planning requires individuals to know that they have careers. Everyone has a career but not everyone knows that they do. An individual's objective career is externally observable because it consists of the series of positions occupied during her or his life cycle. In contrast, an individual's subjective career is not externally observable because it consists of self-conscious thoughts about the vocational past, present, and future. Those people who do not think about their vocational past, present, and future lack a subjective career. A subjective career emerges from a certain temporal experience, that is, beliefs about and attitudes toward time. For the purpose of career intervention, counselors may want to deal with the constructs of time perspective, differentiation, and integration. The following three sections describe how these temporal constructs relate to career development and how counselors may assess and alter them.

Time Perspective

Time perspective refers to how individuals view and orient themselves to time. To assess view of time, career educators and counselors may ask students and clients to complete the following sentence: "Time is like _____." Individuals may respond with metaphors such as time is like money, a race, a frozen rope, or an old African tree. The counselor may then consider whether the metaphor has movement and direction. In the career culture, metaphors that express directional movement facilitate occupational success and satisfaction.

Counselors may assess temporal orientation with a lines test (Cottle & Pleck, 1969) which presents a horizontal line to individuals and asks them to view it as their lifeline. The left end of the line is labeled "B" for birth and the right end is labeled "D" for death. Individuals are instructed to draw two vertical lines that divide the line into three segments: the first segment represents their conception of the amount of time in their past, the second their present, and the third their future. The largest segment is interpreted as the time zone which they are oriented toward. The assessment may then be turned into an intervention using procedures described by Olesky-Ojikutu (1986). Cottle's (1976) circles test may be used in a similar way. In the circles test, individuals draw circles to represent their past, present, and future. The size of the circles is thought to reflect the individual's degree of orientation to the three time zones. Career interventions typically work to create or reinforce a future orientation by making the future seem important and by creating anxiety about what one will do in the future. Counselors who wish to design interventions

that condition clients to view time as directional movement and to orient themselves to the future will find many effective interventions in futures curricula (Toffler, 1974). Tips about counselling techniques relative to present versus future time orientation are provided by Langer and Zwerling (1980).

Time Differentiation

A time perspective that moves forward and orients one to tomorrow makes the future important. Temporal differentiation makes the future feel real. Temporal differentiation refers to the density and extension of events within time zones. The more events that populate a time zone, the more that time zone seems real to an individual. An individual who densely populates the future with anticipated events which extend far into the horizon has a schema ready for career planning. A differentiated future provides a meaningful context for setting personal goals. While a future orientation may create anxiety, future differentiation alleviates anxiety by envisioning the future and one's place in it.

Just naming anticipated events helps people to adapt. Labels for experience reduce anxiety. Anxiety is greatest when we know something is going to happen but we have no idea what will happen. "Naming the animals" (as was required to adapt in the Garden of Eden) turns free floating anxiety into a circumscribed fear that can be thought about, discussed, anticipated, and prepared for. For example Kubler-Ross' stages of dying give structure and meaning to a traumatic experience. With her metaphorical stages as a tool, people can cope better. Some individuals even learn to "live with" rather than "die from." The same

is true for career development. Anticipating events and then modeling the future using these events enables an individual to envision possible selves embedded in that future.

Assessing an individual's time differentiation can be informal. For example, counselors may ask students to write down the important events they expect will occur during the school year. Students who write more events and who anticipate events farther into the future will probably earn higher grades and like school more. To more formally assess density, counselors may count the number of responses that an individual gives to two questions: "Who will you be?" and "What will you do?" (Kastenbaum 1961). To assess extension, counselors may determine the difference between actual age and the most distant event written in response to the Open Events Test (Wallace, 1956). The Open Events Test has individuals list ten events that may happen to them in the future. After listing the ten events, they must then indicate the age when each might occur. Counselors may also ask clients to place a checkmark next to the events over which they have some control.

Anticipatory guidance may be the preferred mode of intervention to increase temporal differentiation. In pediatric medicine, telling new parents what to expect of their child during the next three months is called anticipatory guidance. Anticipatory guidance about their own lives is an excellent career development intervention for adolescents and adults because it enhances their adaptability. People who can predict the general form their lives will take can adapt better or they can work to defeat the predictions they dislike.

Anticipatory guidance for career development may take the form of discussing life stages. Helping people learn the course of a typical life enables them to think about the progress of their own lives. Media presentations make good discussion stimuli for this type of career intervention. Many popular movies deal with life stages. Counselors may use excerpts from movies such as "Saturday Night Fever," "Down to the Sea in Ships," and "Peggy Sue Got Married." A film that presents Marcel Marceau's (1975) mime of Shakespeare's seven ages of people, "Youth, Maturity, Old Age, and Death," similarly focuses discussion on life stages. An animated movie called "Everybody Rides the Carousel" (Hubley & Hubley, 1975) teaches Erikson's model of the life cycle.

Teaching about career stages, as opposed to life stages, is also effective. The Adult Career Concerns Inventory (Super, Thompson, & Lindeman, 1988) operationally defines four major career stages with 60 developmental tasks that most people will encounter as they develop their careers. The tasks are listed in chronological order so individuals can determine how far they have come, where they are at, and what comes next. Thus, the inventory provides a superb lesson plan for teaching individuals or groups about careers and the developmental tasks which they may face in the near and far future.

Career counselling involves helping people create, articulate, and enact their dreams. Once an individual envisions the future in general, she or he can dream of the personal future. Thus, a powerful intervention is to help people daydream about their futures. As noted by a perfume commercial, "dreams are where we design our lives." Techniques like guided imagery (Skovholt & Hoenninger, 1974; Skovholt,

Morgan, & Negron-Cunningham, 1989) and future autobiographies (Maw, 1982) in which people imagine themselves in the future systematically use the power of dreams. Given these initial dreams as scripts, counselor can work to help clients further differentiate their dreams by making them denser and extending them further. Counselors may also examine the goals in these daydreams and then help clients shape their aspirations into more achievable, believable, and concrete goals.

Time Integration

Perspective makes the future important, differentiation enhances goal setting, and integration enables planning. Temporal integration refers to the sense of connectedness among events across time zones. Integration of time zones includes continuity among the past, present, and future as well as optimism about the achievability of goals. Continuity denotes the cognitive structure that sustains planning skills and optimism denotes the conative disposition that sustains planful attitudes.

Continuity among then, now, and when provides the cognitive schema for realistic planning. As long as life is viewed as discontinuous, each experience is new and unique. Discontinuity reduces predictability and makes planning illusive. When life is viewed as an unbroken thread, individuals can become aware of enduring themes and patterns in their lives, strengthen their sense of identity, and choose activities that require perseverance. They can learn that prior planning prevents poor performance.

Optimism that present behavior can be organized to achieve future goals moves enactment of plans. Temporal integration provides hope that

goals can be achieved. It enables an individual to use the interconnectedness of life as a basis for constructing pathways for goal attainment and to experience and shape the future by acting in the present to implement the plans. Hope implies goals accompanied by specific plans.

Sense of continuity may be measured with the 20-item Long-Term Personal Direction Scale (Wessman, 1973). Optimism can be measured with the 8-item Achievability of Future Goals Scale (Heimberg, 1961) or the 12-item Hope Scale (Snyder, Harris, Anderson, Gibb, Yoshinobu, Langelle, Harney, Holleran, & Irving, 1989).

Interventions to increase integration address planning attitudes and competencies. These interventions, as a group, help clients map their future, plan routes to get there, and commit themselves to the journey. We make plans to reach some inner image of what we imagine the future to be like. Hopkins (1979) described a brief exercise that shows clients how to overlap the present and the future time zones.

I list five things that I need to do by Monday (these tend to be urgent) and then five things that I want to do during my lifetime (these tend to be important). My next task is to combine the lists into one imperative list of things both important and urgent. I can opt at a big important thing by making a small part of it urgent (p. 2).

Counselors have found that games designed to increase temporal integration work well with high school students. "When I Grow Up I'm Going to be Married" (Staff, 1972) is a game which illustrates how time and circumstances affect women. Ten girls can play at a time. Each girl is given a profile with four facts about her marriage,

childbearing, education, and death. Participants are each asked to design an "ideal life" around her four facts and to indicate at which periods in her life she will be doing what. After each girl has designed "her" life, she is given a list of problems that occurred in her life. She must then cope with each problem and analyze how better planning might have prevented the problem. "The Life Career Game" (Boocock, 1967) also provides experience in planning for the future. Field tests of this game indicated that it can "give young people a realistic, if vicarious, experience of certain aspects of adult life" (p. 328).

An assessment method used to examine the quality of occupational plans in achievement motivation research may be modified into a career intervention. First, have clients write a description of a career goal. Second, help them make a plan to attain that career goal by writing 15 steps (one per page) that move them from today to goal attainment. Then modify and develop the plan by making the steps contingent, revising the details so they are specific and comprehensive, and building in alternatives.

Summary

Temporal experience interventions alter time perspective, differentiate time into meaningful units, and connect events along a time continuum. Counselors who use temporal interventions with their clients aim to make the future important, cause the future to seem real, and create hope that goals can be achieved. Clients who experience time in this way display greater career awareness, more optimism about their futures, and increased motivation for life planning.

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