

Quality Outcomes for Career Development: The Perspectives of Policy and Practice

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In preparation for participating in the Second International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy, representatives from fourteen countries responded to the following question.

In your country, what quality outcomes for career development across all ages do policy makers and practitioners jointly endorse now? What outcomes might be/must be added? These outcomes might include sustainable employment, increased academic achievement, school retention, workforce development, supplying the labour market, greater productivity, enhanced work performance, or increased job satisfaction. After identifying the outcomes and why you believe that they are, or could be, endorsed by policy makers and/or practitioners, indicate what research base exists, or is perceived to be needed to support these outcomes as quality indicators. An appropriate research base would include as a minimum how these outcomes should be defined and measured

From my reading of the country papers, I concluded, and I may be wrong, that only one country actually addressed the specific question asked. The question asked about visible or practical results that policy makers and career practitioners JOINTLY valued. Spain wrote:

Quality outcomes that both policy makers and practitioners jointly endorse are facilitating self-awareness, acquiring the ability to make satisfying decisions, promoting sustainable employment, enhancing employability skills, workforce development, supplying the labour market, increased job satisfaction, promoting entrepreneurship ("self-employment").

The other countries, at least in my understanding of the country papers, indicated with remarkable similarity that policy makers and practitioners view quality outcomes from two distinct vantage points. Policy makers view outcomes from an objective perspective that focuses on worker's success, satisfactoriness, and adjustment. In contrast, practitioners view outcomes from a subjective perspective that focuses on worker's job satisfaction, personal development, and maturity. Policy makers look at what worker's contribute to the economy whereas practitioners look at what workers receive from employment. In addition to using a dichotomy of success versus satisfaction to label the two perspectives, we could use extrinsic versus intrinsic, product versus process, employer versus employee, and skills versus interests. In any event, as a group the quality outcomes endorsed by policy makers can be characterized as quantitative whereas the quality outcomes endorsed by practitioners can be characterized as qualitative. The following two pages synthesize the outcomes identified in the country papers, starting with the objective, quantitative outcomes preferred by policy makers followed by the subjective, qualitative outcomes preferred by practitioners..

Outcomes from a Policy Perspective

JOB SATISFACTORINESS OF THE WORKER - including productivity, attendance, tenure

EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

RETENTION - reduce drop-out rate

ACHIEVEMENT - increase grades

PROGRESSION - go to college and graduate school

SCIENCE AND MATH CURRICULA

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

SUPPLY LABOR MARKET NEEDS

REDUCE SHORTAGES

AVOID STRUCTURAL UNEMPLOYMENT - supply/demand imbalance (Greece)

IMPROVE SKILLS

INCREASE FLEXIBILITY OF WORKFORCE (Finland)

DEVELOP COMPETITIVE WORKFORCE AND INNOVATIVE ECONOMY (New Zealand)

SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT - reduce number of day unemployed

EQUITY (Gender, race, and ethnic minorities) (Sweden)

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION (Australia)

REDUCE WELFARE ROLLS (help handicapped, disabled, and disadvantaged)

IMPROVE JOB PLACEMENT (fit between work and worker)

PROVIDE PLACEMENT AND INFORMATION SERVICES (Germany; Hungary)

EASE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Outcomes from a Practice Perspective

JOB SATISFACTION

COUNSELING INTAKE - versatile, visible, accessible, impartial, fair, inclusive

COUNSELING PROCESS -

client-counselor relationship
quality assurance guidelines (UK best practice)

COUNSELING GOALS

IMMEDIATE - decidedness, choice satisfaction, commitment

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES (NEXT STEP) - portfolios, personal action plans

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES (LEARNING OUTCOMES) -

managing a satisfying life (Germany)
coping skills
decision making skills

SOFT SKILLS (Hungary)

MOTIVATION

SELF-AWARENESS

SELF-ESTEEM

SELF-EXPRESSION

MATURITY AND ADAPTABILITY (Ireland, Canada)

FLEXIBILITY

WORK AS A SOURCE OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENT (Finland)

Among several papers that made this point, Canada was particularly explicit in asserting that we need to agree on outcomes that link policy and practice, or satisfactoriness and satisfaction. To link social quantities and individual qualities, we need to move beyond either/or to both/and. Satisfaction and satisfactoriness need to be linked more explicitly in both theory and research. One possibility for linking the objective and subjective perspectives on career development is to focus on the intersubjective or interpersonal. At the nexus between work and the worker we might use psychosocial constructs such as intentions instead of interests and identity rather than person-environment. As the Netherlands paper stated, we might continue to use the concept of “the right person on the right place” as well as continue to implement it by using school results to rationally match people to positions. But this Parsonian paradigm must be informed by “stories from the outside” that deal with the actual world of work, vocational practice, and demands of industry. Bill Law once suggested that we replace the construct of fit with “enablement.” As the Finland country paper stated, we could replace fit with “affordances to reposition self in working life.” Another suggestion is to focus, not on the employer or the employee, but on the community, being explicit that humans need to work and group needs work done. An outcome of career development then becomes knowing how one can and will cooperate with and contribute to the community. An immediate challenge is to agree on language and constructs that serve this discussion.

To identify and discuss possible outcomes that link the psychological and the social, policy makers and practitioners may want to begin by using the language in which overriding policy issues have been stated, such as:

- Lifelong learning or learning for life
- Ongoing skill development
- Sustainable employment
- Transition management
- Prosperity and fairness
- Assist disabled and disadvantaged

The language of these policy catchwords is usually at the nexus between worker and work. For example, Sweden emphasized that education is the actual link between the individual and the employer. Finland goes further in stating that the link is not merely education but in particular it is counseling that concentrates on educational planning (requiring counselors to focus on intentions rather than abilities and interests). Australia agrees, and emphasizes that we must do more to help individuals understand the link between education to work. New Zealand elaborated this idea in suggesting that a joint outcome could be knowledge of how society works, including a “good understanding of the post-compulsory education system, the labor market, the connection between education training, and career options as well as awareness of the increased rate of change in occupations why this requires life-long learning. Australia suggests that the linkage be “transitioning” because it connects lifelong learning to employability. The Netherlands country paper emphasized that policy makers and practitioner could collaborate by becoming “investors in people;” both education and employers need to focus on employability by developing the skills of their students and workers, and recognizing acquired skills through some type of national system. Such a local, regional, or national skills data bank would increase the transparency of the labor supply, improve deployment of workers with a company, and boost

the career opportunities of workers.

Of course, once JOINT outcomes are identified, we must (as noted by Canada, Ireland, and New Zealand) find and agree on criteria for evaluating outcomes, not just for the individual but also for societies. There are problems in constructing adequate measures. Furthermore, as New Zealand described, there are trade-offs between competing objectives such as those focused on long-term sustainable employment and those focused on minimizing unemployment by moving people into new jobs as quickly as possible. Finland suggested that the criteria should be more contingent, local, short-term, and stated in a language that is transparent and accessible to all stakeholders. For example, some countries suggested using exploration and information use as an outcome rather than information availability or using willingness to begin occupational training rather than self-esteem.

Many country papers stated that agreement on outcomes and criteria requires that policy makers and practitioners first develop a common language and shared definitions for career development, including its objectives, activities, and typical outcomes. Currently career development includes a group of distinct services provided to distinct populations. For examples, Sweden clearly differentiated school counseling from adult counseling and Finland differentiated guidance, counseling, and placement. Prior work has established at least six distinct career services: education, guidance, counseling, placement, coaching, and rehabilitation. Clearly these different career services aim for different outcomes. We might want to use an existing framework of career services as a starting point to identify how the distinct career development services relate to the quality outcomes listed herein. For example, career education in the schools might relate best to the quality outcome of reducing drop-out rates and be almost unrelated to productivity at work.

More difficult, but still worth discussing, is the possibility that government units which make career policies somehow coordinate their language and policy goals. As the Dutch paper emphasized, career development is an important instrument of policy across many governmental units. The Dutch urged that we work to erode boundaries between policies in the education, labor market, and economic sectors. Hungary emphasized that these services need to be integrated into a national strategy so they complement each other and operate, across the life-span, as inter-related modules.

The one thing I missed in all the papers was any discussion of the quality outcomes sought by the public. Maybe practitioners, before trying to influence policy makers directly, should first consider the needs and desires of the public. We could go to the public and ask them what they want. The public can influence policy better than the counseling profession can. What quality outcomes will make the public's heart beat faster? Maybe the answer to this question could guide policy makers and practitioners as they jointly formulate quality outcomes for career development.