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APPLICATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN THE PRACTICE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Alhaji Thomas (PhD)
(alhajithomas1969@gmail.com)
+2348055836728, 09082446384
Medium Security and Custodian Centre, Makurdi

ABSTRACT

The increasing use of technology will require reconsideration not only of the services provided, but also of the means by which those services are delivered. A consensus has emerged that both the counsellor and ICT have an important role to play in the delivery of enhanced career guidance services via the internet (Vuorinen, 2006). But a broader understanding in the perceptions of guidance practitioners regarding their role and the role of the internet in meeting guidance goals and delivering career guidance services is needed because that understanding will determine effectiveness in the use of the internet in their practice. In fact, practitioner perceptions of the role of technology will have an impact on how their practice will evolve. Thus, the aim of this paper is to examine what changes have occurred over time, if any, in the perceived role of technology in career guidance among practitioners who are experienced internet users.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing use of technology is placing new demands on career guidance practitioners. This article examines what changes, if any, have occurred in the perceptions of guidance practitioners regarding their role and the role of the internet in meeting guidance goals and delivering career guidance services. The data were collected in focus groups in 2001-2002 and a follow-up study in 2010. A total of seven focus groups were held. The data were analysed using combined methods. The results indicated that practitioners now observe that the need for differentiated service delivery modes is more explicit due to varied levels of readiness in decision-making and ICT literacy.

The current wider paradigm of guidance is recognised as a crucial dimension of lifelong learning, promoting both social and economic goals: in particular, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of education, training and the labour market through its contribution to reducing drop-outs, preventing skill mismatches and boosting economic productivity (for example, ELGPN, 2010; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004). Lifelong guidance enables citizens of all ages and in any phase of life to analyse their own interests and skills, make educational and vocational decisions and manage their individual span of development in learning and at work (Council of the European Union, 2008). A key rationale for this recent policy interest is the notion that lifelong guidance represents both a private and a public good (Watts, 2008). A second major change relates to the concept of 'lifelong guidance' and its linkages to lifelong learning. The move from 'education and training' to learning changes the focus from structures and institutions to development of individual lifelong career management skills (Watts, Sultana & McCarthy, 2010).

There has been a consistency in various policy documents (Council of the European Union, 2008; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004) emphasising quality assurance and more diverse service delivery in guidance services. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) has the potential to expand access to career guidance. New forms of virtual tutoring and support, distribution of working life information and career planning and development resources are being developed. Overall use of new technology in guidance settings is expanding. Generic counselling processes have been developed to help clients make effective use of ICT in career guidance (Sampson, 2008). The study will focus on whether or not there were differences in the perceptions among practitioners in 2001-2002 and in 2010.

Several innovations have emerged to supplement traditional career guidance practice. One such innovation is the use of ICT. The past decade has seen an incredible expansion in access to ICT and today technology permeates almost every aspect of our lives. Individuals are now able to access the internet not only through their personal computers but also through mobile phones and other mobile devices. A 'read web' has changed towards a more social, collaborative, interactive and responsive web.

DEFINITION OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING: Guidance and counseling, or guidance counseling, refers to the services and programs that promote personal, social, educational and career development. The program should align with an organization or institution's mission. It is equally described as fundamental information service offered to students during their scholastic career. We treat it as an integral part of the philosophy and a working methodology of our School.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT): Is an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application, encompassing: radio, television, cellular phones,

computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning.

TECHNOLOGICAL TRENDS

We have explored a range of technological trends that are likely to have impact on the way this career exploration environment develops. The eight trends we have identified are:

1. Community: The internet is an important site for community interaction: technology has increasingly become a tool to facilitate a wide range of communication. This myriad of new ways in which people can communicate is driving social and political change (Shirky, 2008) but is also increasingly challenging the way in which people use the web and discover information. To a growing extent, individuals are discovering internet resources via peer recommendation. The technologies associated with the social web challenge this by increasingly utilizing many-to-many forms of communication. This requires a new kind of guidance pedagogy that recognises and utilises the socially situatedness of communications, perhaps by seeking ways of engaging peers, mentors and employers more strongly in the guidance and career decision-making process.

2. Collectivising knowledge: A feature of many Web 2.0 technologies is their ability to collectivise and aggregate the opinions of many. Current technologies allow us to harness collective intelligence in ways that radically alter the way we understand the role of expertise and the production of information. Web 2.0 Good practices in the use of ICT in providing guidance and counseling technologies enable the conventional expert designed taxonomies to be replaced with folksonomies. A folksonomy is an organisational structure defined by users rather than by experts or designers. It allows multiple personal structures to be created, as well as offering the capacity to aggregate these subjective individual structures together into a collective metadata structure. These new ways of aggregating knowledge support the

development of a public sphere within which ideas can be shared, debated and synthesised, and reinforce the trend towards community.

3. Individualisation: Users are increasingly able to individualise and tailor their relationships with online content. Individualisation provides a powerful way for individuals to manage information overload, but its potential goes beyond merely filtering out information. The ability to create a personalized interaction with online information paves the way for the creation of what has been described as a personal learning environment (PLE) (Attwell, 2007). The PLE is not a piece of technology but rather a type of interaction that can utilise a range of technologies. Johnson & Liber (2008) argue that the development of user-driven PLEs necessitates a new pedagogy that recognises this changed dynamic between individuals, professionals and institutions.

4. Recognising time and place: Technologies are now enabling us to interact with the web in ways that recognise and identify time and place. This is particularly important to career exploration. Asking a computer to identify what is recent is difficult, but asking it to identify what is current is more difficult still.

Similarly, identifying where something originated, where it relates to, and how broad a geographical area it will still be relevant to, are complex issues. This is highly problematic for career exploration processes where time (now) and place (near here) are generally important. Many social media services facilitate real-time or near-real-time communication.

Information is generally served to users in ways that emphasise recent activity. Furthermore, people's use of social media is based on the development of networks of people who share a characteristic or interest. Geographical location remains a powerful characteristic that commonly drives the creation of links in social networks. The value of time- and place-specific web content has been identified by recruiters, who have been engaging job-searchers

through using services that make use of new technologies' capacity to recognise time and space.

5. Located in the cloud: The way in which both applications and data are stored and delivered to the end-user is changing and is increasingly located off-site and with third-party providers. For organisations, cloud computing has big implications for the management of technical infrastructure. The locus of infrastructure moves away from a single organisation towards the internet. For individuals, cloud computing opens up some possibilities that are likely to have implications for career. The ability to create online spaces that can serve as repositories for data, to move data easily new technologies for career guidance and mobility between learning and work environments, and to be able to share these resources with others, has the potential to mainstream the idea of the e-portfolio.

6. Free or almost free: The cost of publication and development has dropped, enabling a wide variety of resources to be delivered at a much lower cost than in the past. The cost of publication falls dramatically once there is no longer a need to produce a physical object. It also falls when you remove editorial and selection processes and just allow everyone to publish everything. This movement to free or nearly free services has a number of implications. Perhaps most importantly, it creates a culture of "publish and then filter" rather than "filter and then publish". When publication costs money, a lot of energy needs to go into sorting out what is worth publishing. But when publication is free or nearly free, there is no need to do this. The ability to publish freely also provides an opportunity for individuals to market themselves, their ideas and their skills more easily to employers and investors. The profile of the private sector careers consultant/expert/blogger has been increased by the possibility of low-cost publication.

7. Diverse and integrated: The internet is increasingly integrated into a range of technologies across our lives. In particular, the convergence between telephone and web technologies

opens up new opportunities for career learning. The internet is no longer constrained by conventional desktop computing. The growth in internet-focused peripatetic devices has been enormous and looks set to continue (ITU-D, 2010). The ways that people are accessing online services are becoming both more diverse and more integrated. Users can pull content off the web to their telephone or TV, just as they can integrate their Sat Nav or fridge into their computer (O'Hara and Shadbolt, 2008, p.15). Particularly relevant to career learning is the way in which mobile technologies can facilitate situated learning in a variety of authentic contexts. This raises a range of possibilities, such as using mobile learning approaches to support and facilitate learning during work experience for example.

8. Games: Computer gaming is gaining increasing penetration across society. It is important that the potential of both commercially produced games and bespoke educational games are explored for the purpose of career learning. Gaming has enormous penetration with young people, but has also increasingly moved into mainstream (adult) culture. Purpose-built games have been utilised in education for a number of years. However, there is a growing discussion about the learning that takes place through mainstream computer games (Royle, 2009). Games-based learning can take place within the context of a formal curriculum, but is more likely to take place outside it. Careers educators have certainly been using face-to-face games and simulations for years to enable people to experiment safely and to explore decisions and transitions (Jamieson, Miller & Watts, 1988). The possibilities offered by game -and simulation- based learning are already being used to support career exploration Good practices in the use of ICT in providing guidance and counseling.

THE GOALS AND POTENIAL USE OF ICT IN DELIVERING CAREER GUIDANCE SERVICES

The goal of using ICT-based career guidance resources and services is to help young people and adults to make informed and careful occupational, educational, training and

employment decisions (Sampson, 2008). Information delivered via ICT facilitates the clarification of self-knowledge or the knowledge of options for the person seeking assistance in solving problems and making decisions. Completing practitioner-assisted or self-help career assessment via ICT provides a resource for clarifying self-knowledge about values, interests, skills, aptitudes and employment preferences. Using occupational educational, training and employment information provides a resource for enhancing knowledge of options. Communication among and between career guidance practitioners and the individuals served provides opportunities to facilitate use of the overwhelming amount of information that is now available (Sampson, Shy, Offer & Dozier, 2010).

Similarly, the potential of using ICT to deliver career guidance services has long been recognised by the broad community of careers guidance professionals and researchers. Beginning with access to traditional occupational and career information, ICT in career guidance has evolved to include a wide variety of information sources as well as facilitating interaction among clients and guidance professionals (Bimrose & Barnes, 2010; Harris-Bowlsbey & Sampson, 2005; Offer & Chiru, 2006; Sampson, 2008; Vuorinen, 2006; Watts, 2002). Material development (Barnes, La Gro & Watts, 2010; Vuorinen, 2006), automated interaction, games and simulations present a wide range of opportunities (Hooley, Hutchinson & Watts, 2010) and purposes for using ICT in guidance. In the last few years, the potential of ICT in the development of more integrated lifelong guidance systems is also being realised. ICT is acting not just as a tool but also as a powerful agent of change that illustrates the transversal elements of education, employment and social policies (ELGPN, 2010).

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE INTERNET IN MEETING GUIDANCE GOALS

Results from both 2001 and 2002, and 2010 revealed that the practitioners were motivated in their use of the internet in guidance. Rather than developing coherent strategies for the use of ICT, the practitioners were using technical applications in order to solve fragmented problems. In both studies, the emphasis in ICT use was in delivering career information rather than promoting career management skills from a lifelong guidance perspective. The internet had added value, especially in obtaining educational and labour market information.

In 2001 and 2002, in many cases within the educational settings, the practitioners were not able to use the internet in a flexible way in meeting student needs. They were able to use the internet only when a computer class was available. In 2010, students have better access to the internet and better ICT literacy. Nationally, there are also more online resources available in Finland. Instead of using the internet in the same scheme as printed materials, the practitioners helped their students in obtaining and selecting the information from the internet. The practitioners noted that the internet had in large part replaced the use of printed material in their daily practice.

In 2010 the practitioners describe an external pressure to increase the use of the internet in their practice. They are expected to get involved in developing online career courses, to produce career information on institutional websites or to get engaged within social media. A clear need for peer support and ongoing in-service training in the use of ICT in guidance was identified both in 2001 and 2002 and again in 2010.

APPLICATIONS OF ICT TECHNOLOGIES AND POLICY ISSUES IN THE PRACTICE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Given the wide range of technological developments that have the potential to impact on career exploration processes, it is important to examine how these have been being

incorporated into the practices of a range of organisations. This paper demonstrates that technology has generally been used to help meet client demand in one of three ways:

1. to deliver information;
2. to provide an automated interaction; or
3. to provide a channel for communication.

Where technology is used to deliver information, it serves a range of functions. It can, for instance, recreate the careers library by supplying information about jobs and courses. This can increase clients' access and remove the space limitations that plagued the conventional careers library. However, this kind of technology also provides an opportunity to improve the quality of information, to harness the linked nature of the web to draw in external resources (such as employers' sites) and to provide a more media-rich experience through the use of pictures, audio and video.

Where technology is used to develop an automated interaction, there are a range of opportunities. The use of technology can automate the initial exploration and diagnostic elements of the usual advice and guidance service: for example, it can facilitate psychometric, matching and reflective tools, and perform some initial diagnostic tests. Technology can also be used to support people to develop their career learning skills: for instance, through games and simulations that can be used to provide an interactive way of exploring the worlds of learning and work. These technologies therefore both promote user-control and self-reliance, but also can automate some of the more routine aspects of the guidance process, so allowing professionals to focus on offering higher level support to clients.

Finally, there is a range of tools that facilitate communication and interaction between people, usually but not always at a distance. These technologies include the telephone and email as well as a range of technologies that enable telephone and email communications to

be more effectively managed. Such technologies can make professional support to individuals more accessible, and are also being used to build communities of learning. These technologies can be further classified as those that facilitate the following types of communication:

1. one-to-one;
2. one-to-many and many-to-one; and
3. many-to-many.

Each of these different forms of communication offers new potential for both career exploration and the delivery of career IAG.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

The goal of using ICT-based career guidance resources and services is to help young people and adults to make informed and careful occupational, educational, training and employment decisions (Sampson, 2008). Information delivered via ICT facilitates the clarification of self-knowledge or the knowledge of options for the person seeking assistance in solving problems and making decisions. Completing practitioner-assisted or self-help career assessment via ICT provides a resource for clarifying self-knowledge about values, interests, skills, aptitudes and employment preferences.

Careers professionals do not have sole responsibility for all career Good practices in the use of ICT in providing guidance and counseling learning or for the development of all online career exploration. They do however have an important role in supporting the development of career-related digital literacy, in quality-assuring career learning materials and in developing a strong understanding about the inter-relationship between technological development and the pursuit of career.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government should create more awareness to the public and encourage students interest in ICT.
2. Government should ensure adequate funding of ICT.
3. Integrating ICT in all subject areas in guidance and counseling.
4. Monitoring and implementation of ICT application at all levels of Guidance and counseling should be of a priority to the management.
5. In services training of ICT for both the lecturers and guidance and counseling students should be on regular basis.
6. The management should invest more on ICT facilities in the area of procurement of equipment in all ICT centers.
7. Government should motivate and create more incentives for ICT trainees and the professional.

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