

EMPOWERING CAREER COUNSELLING SERVICES VIA THE MASTERING OF 21ST CENTURY SKILLS AND CODE OF ETHICS AMONG MALAYSIAN COUNSELLORS

FORTALECIMENTO DOS SERVIÇOS DE ORIENTAÇÃO PROFISSIONAL ATRAVÉS DO DOMÍNIO DAS COMPETÊNCIAS DO SÉCULO XXI E DO CÓDIGO DE ÉTICA ENTRE OS ORIENTADORES DA MALÁSIA

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Abstract

The prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, spanning almost three years, has posed significant challenges across various employment sectors, leading to either considerable contractions or complete transformations in specific career fields. Consequently, the demand for career counselling services has surged due to the pandemic's widespread impact on multiple economic sectors worldwide that directly or indirectly affected many career or work forces all over the world. Therefore, the delivery of career counselling services must be strengthened to align with the current global scenario sparked by this pandemic. This conceptual paper proposes two strategies to enhance the provision of career counselling services: the mastery of 21st-century specific skills and a deeper understanding of the Malaysian Board of Counsellor's Code of Ethics, particularly as they relate to career counselling. In other words, these recommendations should be adopted by local counsellors as part of a comprehensive strategy to empower current and future service delivery. Additionally, these recommendations can be considered by key stakeholders in the profession, such as the Malaysian Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development (KPWKM), the Malaysian Board of Counsellor (LKM), and various local counselling associations, in order to improve aspects of continuous professional development, especially in training programmes aimed at enhancing career counselling skills.

Keywords: Career Counselling. 21st Century Skills. Code of Ethics. Malaysia.

Resumo

A prolongada pandemia da COVID-19, que se estende por quase três anos, tem representado desafios significativos em diversos setores de emprego, levando a contrações consideráveis ou a transformações completas em áreas profissionais específicas. Consequentemente, a demanda por serviços de orientação profissional aumentou devido ao impacto generalizado da pandemia em múltiplos setores econômicos em todo o mundo, o que afetou direta ou indiretamente muitas carreiras e forças de trabalho globalmente. Portanto, a prestação de serviços de orientação profissional deve ser reforçada para se alinhar ao atual cenário global desencadeado por esta pandemia. Este artigo conceitual propõe duas estratégias para aprimorar a prestação de serviços de orientação profissional: o domínio de habilidades específicas do século XXI e uma compreensão mais profunda do Código de Ética do Conselho de Conselheiros da Malásia, particularmente no que se refere à orientação profissional. Em outras palavras, essas recomendações devem ser adotadas pelos conselheiros locais como parte de uma estratégia abrangente para fortalecer a prestação de serviços atual e futura. Além disso, essas recomendações podem ser consideradas pelas principais partes interessadas da profissão, como o Ministério da Mulher, da Família e do Desenvolvimento Comunitário da Malásia (KPWKM), o Conselho de Conselheiros da Malásia (LKM) e várias associações locais de aconselhamento, a fim de melhorar aspectos do desenvolvimento profissional contínuo, especialmente em programas de treinamento voltados para o aprimoramento das habilidades de aconselhamento profissional.



Palavras-chave: Aconselhamento Profissional. Competências do Século 21. Código de Ética. Malásia.

1 INTRODUCTION

Career counselling represents one of the earliest dimensions of the modern guidance and counselling profession. Since as early as the 1890s, the career counselling movement in the West has undergone six distinct developmental phases (Zunker, 2012). In the United States, notable figures such as Jesse B. Davis and Frank Parsons often referred to as the Father of Career Counselling—were pivotal in promoting vocational guidance activities within the education system, ultimately leading to the national recognition of counselling as a professional support service in various settings.

In Malaysia, the provision of guidance and counselling services also began within the educational sphere, initially focusing on vocational guidance and career guidance programmes in schools. Othman, Che Din, and Sipon (2000) observed that schools have been the primary setting for the widespread practice of counselling services in Malaysia, with these services being implemented at both primary and secondary school levels since the early 1960s (Khan & Okwun, 2011; Mey & Kok-Mun, 2010; Sipon, 2007; Ibrahim, 2003). Specifically, the inception of counselling services can be traced back to the Malaysian Ministry of Education's circular in 1960, emphasising the importance of vocational guidance and the need for career teachers. This initiative was further reinforced by the appointment of R.K. McKenzie (under the Colombo Plan) to introduce career guidance services in schools in 1962, during which a select group of teachers was trained. Following this, in 1964, all secondary schools were instructed to appoint at least one career guidance teacher, culminating in the establishment of the Ministry's Guidance and Career Unit in 1967 (Glamcevski, 2008; Mey, 2004; Salim, 1994; Othman & Aboo Bakar, 1993; Scorzelli, 1987). The scope of these services was subsequently broadened to encompass more systematic guidance and counselling activities as per directives issued in 1979 (Glamcevski, 2008; Othman, 1996; Salim, 1992). Following these developments, the Guidance and Career Unit was renamed the Guidance and Counselling Unit in 1980. Career counselling services later expanded into public higher education institutions from

the early 1970s onwards, where they have been consistently available to all public university students (Ninggal, 2008; Mohamed, 2000; Kamaruddin, 1994; Abdul Kadir, 1994).

Beyond the educational context, career counselling services should also be extended to workplace organisations. According to Carroll (1996), these services serve as a supportive system through psychological counselling interventions to facilitate employee empowerment, promote mental health, and implement psycho-educational counselling programmes, among other related services. Commonly conducted programmes include stress management, effective communication in organisations, motivational reinforcement training, career development, and individual or group counselling sessions to assist employees with specific issues. Presently, career counselling services in organisations are crucial in ensuring the mental, emotional, and performance quality of every employee (Ahmad & Mustaffa, 2002).

Therefore, career counsellors who wish to provide effective services whether in educational or organisational settings must possess specific skills relevant to their practice context. Additionally, as professional counsellors in Malaysia, it is essential for those offering career-related services to thoroughly understand the provisions outlined in the Professional Code of Ethics established by the Malaysian Board of Counsellor (MBC). In Malaysia's multicultural context, this knowledge and these skills should be integrated to deliver effective and tolerant career counselling services through a multicultural approach that considers diversity factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, and religion.

2 THE MASTERY OF 21ST CENTURY SKILLS REQUIRED FOR CAREER COUNSELLORS

In general, a counsellor must be proficient in applying relevant theories during sessions, whether with individuals or groups. The application of theory helps counsellors navigate session dynamics, choose strategies or approaches, and assist clients in selecting alternatives to resolve their issues. Specifically in career counselling, counsellors must master career development theories to apply the appropriate theory based on the client's specific issues. However, mastery of theory alone does not guarantee the effectiveness of a career counsellor, particularly in the 21st century. In other words, counsellors need to

acquire specific skills aligned with contemporary developments and changing times to ensure their practice remains effective and impactful for clients' personal development.

In line with the advancements in information technology in the era of globalisation, the primary specific skill that career counsellors must acquire to remain effective is the ability to integrate technology into potential activities (Zunker, 2012). For instance, service promotion can be conducted through online applications, social media, and other digital platforms. Moreover, career information searches for client sharing can be expedited using online browsing of institutional or agency portals. Furthermore, psychological assessments and testing activities can also be enhanced through information technology applications; many career-related psychological tests have now been adapted to online versions, replacing traditional pen-and-paper formats. Therefore, career counsellors must become proficient in information technology to ensure that their services and information are disseminated and updated more efficiently than before. The rationale is that IT proficiency enables career counsellors to adapt their professional practices to current trends, making them more efficient and effective.

The second specific skill that career counsellors must develop in the 21st century is the ability to evaluate current trends in employment and organisational dimensions. Unlike the scenarios emphasised by traditional career development theories (particularly the modernist approach), the passage of time has led to significant changes in some contexts (Zunker, 2012). For example, economic shifts in the modern era have rendered some past occupations obsolete, while new job categories have emerged. Additionally, contemporary organisational structures tend to be flatter rather than tall hierarchies, altering the career landscape and the impact of specific occupations on individuals. Thus, career counsellors must be adept at navigating these current developments, as these changes need to be integrated into any approach or strategy used to assist clients. In other words, career development theories must be combined with current career world trends to provide effective, impactful, and relevant client services.

The final specific skill that career counsellors should master is the ability to integrate a multicultural approach into their practice. For instance, the increasing number of women in careers traditionally dominated by men requires counsellors to understand the implications, issues, and appropriate interventions for such scenarios (Zunker, 2012). Additionally, the growing number of foreign workers and the entry of new generations

(Y and Z) into the local workforce has led to more complex and cross-cultural career issues. The rationale is that the diversity of personalities and issues among the new generation of clients requires career counsellors to apply multicultural approaches and understand the unique needs and backgrounds of each client.

2.1 The professional code of ethics related to career counselling

The Code of Ethics for counsellors is an official document that serves as a reference for all registered counsellors in Malaysia, established by the Malaysian Board of Counsellor (MBC) in 2011 with five primary objectives in order to:

- a. provide guidelines to assist counsellors in acting professionally, enabling them to offer the best counselling services and foster the values of the counselling profession most effectively.
- b. establish principles that define ethical behaviour and best practices.
- c. enable MBC to clarify the ethical responsibilities of all counsellors registered with the board
- d. support the mission of MBC.
- e. serve as a basis for addressing complaints and inquiries regarding ethical issues directed at counsellors.

This Code of Ethics for Malaysian counsellors comprise eight main sections addressing the following areas:

- a. Section A – Helping Relationships
- b. Section B – Confidentiality, Communication, Privilege, and Privacy
- c. Section C – Professional Responsibility
- d. Section D – Relationships with Other Professionals
- e. Section E – Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation
- f. Section F – Supervision, Training, and Teaching
- g. Section G – Research and Publication
- h. Section H – Resolving Ethical Issues

Overall, all sections in these eight main areas can be directly or indirectly referenced in the application of all dimensions of counselling services, including career

counselling. However, some sections are specifically outlined and can be considered particularly relevant to career counselling services.

In Section A.1.e (Employment Needs) in Section A (Helping Relationships) is the first section that is highly relevant to career counselling services. This section recommends that counsellors, together with their clients, consider occupations consistent with their overall abilities, vocational limitations, general personality traits, interest patterns, social skills, education, general capabilities, and needs. Additionally, it suggests that counsellors with appropriate training in career development should assist in placing clients in positions aligned with their interests, culture, and welfare, as well as those of employers and the public. In other words, this section specifically emphasises the need for career counsellors to help their clients make informed decisions about their career paths based on a comprehensive understanding of their personality and career interests. In addition, Section A.2.c (Cultural and Developmental Sensitivity) is also highly relevant to career counselling practice, given the diversity of issues, client populations, and changing times. This section asserts that counsellors should convey information appropriately based on the developmental level and culture of the client. Accordingly, counsellors should present career information and related content in sessions, considering elements such as the client's gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion, ensuring that career decisions align with the client's personal characteristics.

In Section B (Confidentiality, Communication, Privilege, and Privacy), all clauses under Sections B.1 (Respecting Clients' Rights), B.3 (Information Shared with Others), B.6 (Records), and B.8 (Consultation) are highly relevant to individual or group career counselling sessions. In summary, all these sections emphasise the ethics of client confidentiality, where counsellors are strictly prohibited from disclosing any information shared by clients during sessions to any party without the client's consent.

In Section C (Professional Responsibility), career counsellors must always be mindful of the requirements under Sections C1 (Knowledge of Standards), C2 (Professional Competence), C3 (Advertising and Soliciting Clients), and C4 (Professional Qualifications). These sections collectively outline how the services offered can maintain the professional integrity of the field at all times. Additionally, Section C5 (Discrimination) should be referenced to ensure that career counselling services do not discriminate against any individual client based on age, culture, disability, ethnicity, race,

religion/beliefs, gender, marital status, language preference, socioeconomic status, or any legally prescribed grounds.

Consequently, both sections in Section D (Relationships with Other Professionals), namely D1 (Relationships with Colleagues, Employers, and Employees) and D2 (Consultation), are relevant to career counselling practice due to its educational and organisational focus. Therefore, all career counsellors should refer to these sections before, during, and after sessions.

Since career counselling is often underpinned by evaluation and psychological testing activities to obtain additional information in the process of assisting clients, all sections in Section E (Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation) of the LKM Counsellor Code of Ethics are highly relevant and must be thoroughly understood by counsellors offering services in any setting. In other words, all ethical details concerning evaluation and psychological testing must be adhered to in career sessions by all LKM-registered counsellors.

To finish, section H (Resolving Ethical Issues) is the final section that also has direct implications for career counselling practice. Ultimately, to avoid practices that may conflict with legal implications, all clauses under Sections H.1 (Standards and Laws) and H.2 (Suspected Violations) must be understood and adhered to by all career counsellors offering professional services.

3 CONCLUSION

Career counselling, which has spearheaded the development of the counselling profession as a whole, has experienced rapid growth since its inception in the early 20th century. Today, in the 21st century, various changes in the era of globalisation necessitate a holistic transformation in the implementation of professional career counselling practices. Consequently, all career counsellors must update and enhance their knowledge and skills relevant to the times while adhering to all ethical codes to avoid any misconduct or actions that could tarnish the profession's reputation. Additionally, the increasing diversity of client characteristics today enhances the potential for implementing career counselling practices based on multicultural approaches. For example, in addressing career-related issues, counsellors must possess in-depth knowledge of specific

occupational patterns and other career-related information beyond racial or ethnic factors; for instance, the Malay community predominantly holds public service careers, while the Chinese or Indian communities may not favour careers in defence or law enforcement sectors. Moreover, counsellors should study the cultural background, language, and spiritual ideology of individuals from each racial and ethnic group to understand any issues presented from the client's perspective.

In a nutshell, counsellors should be prepared to acquire new skills to handle sessions with clients they have not previously encountered. For instance, counsellors without the skills to manage clients with diverse sexual orientations (LGBT) must be willing to learn relevant skills due to the growing number of such individuals in society, increasing the likelihood of acquiring clients from this group. Therefore, counsellors who wish to adopt a multicultural approach must be willing to 'unlearn' and 'relearn' appropriate knowledge and skills for application in sessions as needed. Ultimately, all counsellors offering services in the career dimension must be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to be recognised as 'multicultural counsellors' in the future.

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