THE CAREER-PERSONAL DICHOTOMY: PERCEPTUAL REALITY, PRACTICAL ILLUSION, AND WORKPLACE INTEGRATION

The implicit definitions we give to career and personal counseling reflect a dichotomy between the two areas of research and practice. The field's research focus and counseling trainees' early practice experience probably reinforce the idea that career counseling is prototypically concerned with young adult career choice. A case study of targeted coaching in business is presented to illustrate how career and personal issues are intertwined in adult career adjustment.

When counselors are asked about their preferences for conducting "career" or "personal counseling," they do not have any difficulty understanding what is meant by the question (Dorn, 1986; Pinkney & Jacobs, 1985). This observation reveals that a dichotomy between the two does exist, even if only on a perceptual level. But perception is important because the meanings we assign to events have implications for our actions (Maddux, Stoltenberg, & Rosenwein, 1987). A perceptual dichotomy is apparent in our implicit definitions of personal and career counseling, our field's research and in trainees' typical exposure to career counseling clients. This perceptual dichotomy disappears, however, when counseling practice is considered. An illustration of how career and personal issues are closely linked in practice is provided through a case study description of targeted coaching, an intervention strategy used in business settings.

IMPLICIT DEFINITIONS OF THE PERSONAL AND CAREER DOMAINS

Career and personal counseling seem to exist as distinct cognitive categories, or schemes, in our perception. The existence of separate categories is not problematic in itself, but it teems likely that the content of the categories underlies the supposed dichotomy between career and personal counseling. Category content includes "what comes to mind" when we hear the labels "personal" and "career," and reveals our implicit definitions of the two. When we compare "personal versus career" counseling, we assume that the two are similar in scope. On a content level, it becomes clear that "personal" and "career" are not equivalent categories; one is overly broad and the other, unnecessarily narrow. Rather than making an "apples and oranges" comparison, we are making a "fruit and oranges" comparison. The implicit definition of personal counseling seems to encompass anything that is not strictly related to career. The implicit definition of career, on the other hand, often focuses on the career choice of young adults, to the neglect of adult work adjustment (Hackett, Lent, & Greehaus, 1991).

What is problematic about the broad definition of personal, relative to our understanding of career? "Person" is a summary category and subsumes other aspects of the individual. Career, like "marriage," or "aging" or "cognition," is more appropriately described as one facet of the person. As facets, career, marriage, and aging may co-occur, may follow each other in developmental stages, or be integral parts of all experience. Yet each alone does not encompass what we mean by "person," or by

extension, "personal." Rather, the personal infuses consideration of any other facet. As such, we might answer the question of "how personal is career counseling?" by saying that career counseling is personal to the extent that the career issues presented engage other aspects of the whole person.

Our implicit definition of career also adds to the perception that the two are unrelated. If we examine the conceptualization of career counseling that is reflected in the field's research and practice, we find that both have traditionally been dominated by a focus on young adult career choice. For example, Hackett, Lent, and Greenhaus (1991) have charged that counseling research has been characterized by a narrow focus on topics (such as career indecision), studied in college student populations, and that consideration of ongoing career adjustment has not kept pace with attention to career entry. They also noted that issues such as adult workplace adjustment have traditionally been the province of the organizational behavior literature, not of counseling psychology.

It can also be argued that early practitioner training in career counseling reinforces the notion of a dichotomy. If we examine the typical experience of a counseling graduate student, the implicit definition of career that develops is probably similar to that reflected in research, that career counseling is prototypically concerned with young adult career choice. A trainee's first career counseling practicum is likely to occur in a college or university counseling center. In these settings, the trainee will encounter college student clients for whom career choice is a developmentally appropriate task (Erikson, 1968). Although adolescent clients may be experiencing anxiety or confusion in making a choice, many are basically well adjusted in other areas of functioning. They may have little interest in personal exploration beyond consideration of career options. With these clients, a trainee can make a correct assessment that career choice is an appropriate counseling focus, but may not encounter other clients for whom personal and career issues are more closely linked.

As a result of the field's predominant research focus and students' introduction to applied practice, we would contend that career counseling is implicitly defined as targeting a single decision point: What major? What career? Do I change jobs? Seek retraining? Returning to the point that career reflects one facet of the person, as does marriage, we appear to have created a view of career counseling that is comparable to conceptualizing marriage counseling as the single decision point of whether or not to divorce. This is in sharp contrast to the view that career counseling is a means of promoting adjustment to and satisfaction with work, just as marriage counseling promotes growth and change in a relationship. Both imply a dynamic process implemented over time. This latter view of career counseling emerges clearly in counseling adult clients who have workplace experience but has not been addressed in much of our research and applied training.

Adult Career Adjustment

The personal/career dichotomy does not seem to be as sharply drawn in the area of adult career adjustment. Research exists on linkages between work behavior and personal factors in areas such as job and family role conflict (Wiley, 1987), nonwork stress and absenteeism (Smulders, 1983), and life satisfaction and job satisfaction (Rice, 1984). There are questions, however, about how much this literature is known to career counselors. The investigation of adult career behavior has been traditionally considered part of the organizational behavior domain (Hackett, Lent, & Greenhaus, 1991) rather than a core area for counseling psychology. Consequently, articles reporting this research may not appear in counseling journals. Even when the literature is identified, the counselor may discover that adult work behavior has been assessed from the perspective of organizational goals (e.g., productivity), rather than from an individual development or adjustment perspective (e.g., job satisfaction). Such a discovery may again reinforce a limited view of career within a counseling perspective.

Despite the counseling field's roots in development and adjustment across the life span (Sprinthall, 1991), much of our career focus does not reflect this breadth. There are noteworthy exceptions; several counseling psychologists have either worked in both organizational behavior and counseling psychology (e.g., Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) or have recently addressed adult career topics in their research (e.g., Spokane & Fretz, 1993). But despite these efforts, there is a general consensus that counseling psychology has neglected the study of, or practice with, adults at work (Myers & Cairo, 1992; Osipow, 1982). Warnings are also being sounded that interest in work adjustment is fading from the horizon of counseling research (Savickas, 1990), but it appears that this is the one area where the perceived dichotomy between personal and career counseling could most effectively be challenged.

The illusory nature of the career-personal dichotomy is illustrated in the following section, which presents a case study description of counseling intervention in a business setting. The intervention, targeted coaching, integrates career and personal concerns and has evolved in response to changing management practices. As companies have recognized the need for employee involvement in decision making, the personality and adjustment of the manager have received increased attention from human resource professionals. For example, a manager who has adequate, or even outstanding, technical expertise may exhibit poor human relations skills that interfere with effectiveness on the job.

Human resource staff have limited training in approaching employee problems as counseling issues; consequently, a company's choice in such circumstances has often been employee termination, transfer, or remonstrances to change. The counseling field can make a contribution by bringing a work adjustment perspective to such dilemmas. As illustrated in the following case study, the sources of a manager's difficulties, once uncovered, often resemble traditional counseling issues. For example, difficulties in delegating responsibility may be traced to a basic mistrust in others' ability to follow

through on their commitments. Defensiveness in receiving feedback from one's supervisor might be traceable to early parental criticisms. As counselors increase their awareness of how career and personal issues are intertwined for adults, they will enhance their ability to intervene effectively. The perception of a dichotomy between personal and career counseling will also be reduced.

Case Study of an Authoritarian Manager

Cynthia Robbins, a 52-year-old manager at a major insurance company, was told that she had a choice of taking early retirement or taking action to address major problems in her department. An internal investigation revealed that the finances, systems, and productivity of her department were rated highly but that many interpersonal problems existed. These included a high number of grievances, a belief that promotions were unfairly awarded, and descriptions of her management style as "authoritarian, dictatorial, and cold." Because reviews of Cynthia's past performance indicated that her technical skills were very strong, the company employed a counseling psychologist, also trained in industrial/ organizational psychology, to help Cynthia identify and make the necessary changes.

The psychologist recommended a targeted coaching process, which involves a cyclical process of assessment, counseling for action, and reassessment. The psychologist's first task was to help Cynthia assess her abilities, values, interests, and personality characteristics and then consider these relative to the workplace requirements. They learned that her interest profile matched the field she had entered and many of her values were consistent with the corporate culture. Where Cynthia had difficulty, however, was in her ability to adjust to a changing management philosophy. New upper-level management was promoting increased employee involvement in decision making; the resulting changes and staff expectations had created a lack of fit between Cynthia's human relations skills and the requirements of her job. The assessment helped Cynthia identify these links; for example, her communication skills were considered relative to the adjustment task of improving departmental communication.

A "targeting phase" followed the assessment and involved delineation of specific career- or work-related goals, then identification of specific personal goals that corresponded to the work goals. The pairing of personal and work goals highlights the integration of the two areas. In Cynthia's case, one business goal was to "Develop self-empowered work teams in order to share decision-making power in the department." A personal goal that complemented the business goals was, "Explore the anxiety produced by being 'out of control,' and reframe the issue as shared power rather than powerlessness." Cynthia needed to alter her perception that sharing power was somehow dangerous, that it reflected a failing on her part and would interfere with being an effective manager. Through the psychologist's initial assessment, Cynthia had also recognized that her own history included the example of a well-respected father who was a benevolent autocrat in his family, business, and small town. He was her model of management and she had

adopted many of his management beliefs without evaluating their fit with her own situation.

Once goals were identified, the coaching phase began. The term "coaching" reflects the fact that this is an individualized process, similar to individual career counseling. Familiar counseling interventions, supplemented with videotaped practice and participation by other staff, are used to effect change toward achieving the manager's personal and business goals. In Cynthia's case, she had identified her personal goal as a need to maintain a sense of impact yet also share power. Coaching employed cognitive restructuring, focusing on beliefs associated with her difficulty in sharing power. Her management belief about the need for "control and power" was reformulated to mean "impact, results, and influence." Relative to another aspect of her goal, systematic desensitization was used to help her overcome her anxiety in delegating responsibility. She developed a plan and practiced incrementally sharing responsibility with her staff, and continued to explore the cognitive reactions that emerged along with the anxiety. Her difficulty in receiving staff feedback was traced to the automatic thought that criticism challenged her authority and had to be curtailed. She successfully reframed staff feedback as an information source that she could factor into her own managerial decisions; she also learned to respond assertively to staff questions with information about her decisions or the department's direction. Her ability to receive feedback from her staff was further enhanced after she was able to recall her own frustration in trying to communicate a difference of opinion to her father.

SUMMARY

In considering this brief description of targeted coaching, it becomes apparent that the process unfolds in ways that are familiar to most counselors. A relationship is built with the client, an assessment is conducted, a plan of action is formulated and agreed upon by the client and the psychologist, the plan is implemented and then evaluated. The work is collaborative and addresses those facets of the person that can promote his or her adjustment to work.

Both the need for targeted coaching, and its potential for effectiveness as an intervention, are based in the integration of work and personal issues. In the case example, Cynthia's personal issues became problematic because of shifting requirements in her current job, not because her personality caused her difficulty in general. In other settings, issues such as her tendency to assume sole responsibility would not present problems and might even be viewed as desirable. Unlike client problems that disrupt many life roles (e.g., chronic depression), Cynthia's case illustrates how aspects of a normal personality can be problematic in a particular work setting. This situational interaction between personal and career issues contradicts a view of the two areas as separate.

Nevertheless, many counselors do seem to perceive a dichotomy between personal and career counseling. One consequence of this perception may be the paradox noted

by Myers and Cairo (1992) that, while counseling psychologists clearly have the knowledge and skills to intervene in workplace adjustment issues, the field has neglected workplace applications. To address the paradox and alter the perception that career and personal counseling are separate, our field needs to present a broader conceptualization of career.

Osipow (1982) has suggested that gaps in counselor training may be one cause of practitioners' lack of involvement in business settings. Based on the previous discussion, it seems likely that student exposure to a narrow client population is one such gap. Without exposure to adult clients at work, the counselor's prototype of career counseling is likely to remain as the college sophomore with his or her Strong Interest Inventory. While targeted coaching represents only one example of how personal and career issues intersect in the lives of clients, it does show that the dichotomy is more a matter of perception than reality.

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