

★ A healthy New Zealand career industry

Richard Vernall takes up the cry for our ideas to be widely promoted and for us all to evidence that career practice matters.



Introduction

This paper presents findings that suggest there is a dearth of evidence based studies that promote the effectiveness of career counselling as a critical vocational intervention to key stakeholders. In order for the careers industry to evolve, rigorous evidence based studies are required that promote the benefits of career counselling to government and industry.

A personal reflection

On the 28th May 2016 I attended the Careers Expo at the ASB showgrounds fronting a stand with colleagues from the Career Development Association of New Zealand.

During the day I talked to stallholders and the public, promoting the benefits of CDANZ membership and career guidance. I also had time to reflect on the current 'health status' of the careers industry.

As I looked around the pavilion I noted how much the expo has reduced in size from the days of the Coco-Cola Expo, held at the same venue (2000 -2010). Other causes of concern include the current downsizing of the career centre and the demise of the Graduate Diploma in Career Development at AUT; the merger of Careers New Zealand with TEC, and dwindling numbers of CDANZ members attending PD events, all of which are worrying signs for the careers industry, and imply that fresh thinking, new ideas and enthusiasm for what we do are under threat.

With these points in mind I started to consider how well the careers industry has marketed itself to society at large.

For example, the fact that key stakeholders such as central government still struggle to realise the importance of career guidance implies that the careers movement has not created an industry but more a functional capability that only a select few people understand and care about.

This last statement is well worth reflecting on as it appears that a 'cobbled community' that does not speak with one voice is detrimental to the advancement of a professional industry that wants to be taken seriously by government.

In an independent report to the Department of Education in the UK, entitled *Towards a Strong Career Profession* (2010), the Task Force summarised one of their findings was as follows:

Careers professionals working with young people are part of a wider community of practice, which includes those working in higher education and with adults in the public and private sectors, in a wide range of contexts and settings. These groups are represented by a number of different professional associations. This is why it can be difficult to identify a 'careers profession', which often means different things to different

people. Indeed, the Task Force is not convinced that this community of practice is yet fully a profession. If it is, it is only weakly professionalised.¹

It appears there are similarities between the UK and NZ regarding the makeup of their respective careers industries.

In 2014, Kaye Avery, CDANZ President, expressed a similar view in an article published in this Ezine:

In the eyes of the public, career development, coaching and counselling has been muddied by the vast array of services – It is easy to understand why organisations have little idea of what equates to expertise, quality or professionalism in such a confused market.²

Is it time for a change in the way the careers industry markets itself?

Sunny Hansen, *Integrative Life Planning Theory*, talks about career practitioners being 'agents of change'. Is this happening in reality? In some areas of practice undoubtedly it is, but I suggest that the jury is still out as to whether career counselling is a cost effective strategy.

It appears that the message that the careers industry is promoting to society at large is either falling on 'deaf ears', is incongruent or is at odds with what people want to hear. Further, are we ignoring the messages of leading thinkers in the careers industry, at our peril?

In February 2013 Mary McMahon outlined to CDANZ members in her seminar, *Looking Out to Look In*, the importance of developing evidence based systems that track people over a period of time in order to clearly show the beneficial impact of career interventions.

„, the 'careers industry' needs to promote ideas and collect and disseminate evidence based data that can be assimilated and understood by policy makers. This will result in more informed choices being made at a central government level in regards to the allocation of spending and the policies that are implemented to improve the efficiency and relevance of education and 'career' services.³

Did we heed the message?

If not it is time we did as the future of the careers industry is dependent on providing this critical data and, I suggest, we all have a responsibility to ensure this happens.

A summary of findings that highlight the importance of evidence based studies:

The following summary presents findings from a research analysis of studies that identified how well career counselling, life coaching and supported employment providers use evidence based studies to promote effective intervention strategies. In order to evolve and grow, the points listed warrant consideration from the New Zealand careers industry.

1. Overseas research highlights that in order to make recommendations to governments, policy analysts need evidence that clearly outlines the cost effectiveness of interventions that most effectively support economic growth. Evidence based studies do this and also provide industries with a vehicle to 'voice their opinion/s' and shape government policy.⁴
2. In reviewing studies of evidence based career counselling researchers Hughes and Karp (2004) found that evidence of effective interventions was weak and that there were few studies relating to the cost effectiveness of career interventions. For example evidence

on the effectiveness of career counselling in traditional career settings such as schools was 'hard to tease out' and appeared to be inconclusive in determining specific benefits.⁵

In a comparative analysis of studies that reviewed vocational interventions, career counselling studies lacked data and evidence of the benefits of life coaching and supported employment, likely to be of interest to key stakeholders.

3. Rigorous qualitative longitudinal studies that track career interventions in secondary school and employment settings are required in order to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of career interventions. Randomised controlled trials should measure not only career and academic outcomes but also behaviour changes such as increases in resilience and wellbeing, decreases in anxiety and depression. Measures tailored to employment outcomes should include differential between unemployment benefit and employment rates, tracked days to first job (following career intervention), annualized weeks worked, and job tenure in longest job held during the follow-up period.

This article has posed a number of questions relating to the current health of the New Zealand careers industry and it is fitting that the final question is posed by the founder of CDANZ.

In 2015, Dr Dale Furbish asked “is CDANZ an association of career professionals, or an organisation for those who work in the ‘careers industry’?”⁸

The answer to Dale Furbish's question will surely be influential in determining the future direction of the NZ Careers industry.



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Notes:

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Additional study of interest:

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