Action – What It Is and Why It Matters in Career Counselling

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Action - What it is ...

Action refers to intentional goal-directed (but not necessarily rational) behavior.

It reflects how people understand their own and others’ behavior.

• Doing ➔ Acting ➔ Action ➔ Action Theory

Why it is matters in career counselling

• Career is composed of actions.

• Counselling is an action.

• Developments in psychology

• Integrates theory and practice

• We construct career by acting

Contextual Action Theory: Temporal Structure.

Action Systems.

Long-term CAREER e.g., Work as a lawyer for many years
Mid-term PROJECT e.g., Completing an degree in law
Short-term JOINT ACTION e.g., Giving a friend a ride to study for an exam
Levels of action

- Goals, meaning
- Functional steps
- Conscious and unconscious behavior, resources, regulation processes

This presentation

- Career counselling practice
- Action - A way of understanding career and counselling
- Career research

Career Counselling Practice

Counsellor’s five tasks

- Creating and maintaining the working alliance
- Identifying projects and action
- Addressing problematic actions and projects
- Dealing with emotion and emotional memory
- Connecting with daily life
The Case of Damia

- 23-year-old female student from Malaysia
- at a Canadian university
- accelerated English-as-a-second-language program
- plans to transfer to an undergraduate program in business
- asking herself about her suitability for a career in business because she saw herself getting angry and irritated with others very often.

The counsellor, Ms. C

- a Canadian woman of European heritage.
- a university counsellor for 12 years.
- a humanistic, relationship-oriented approach,
- has worked closely with contextual action theory as the basis for counseling.

Important features

- Understanding counseling and guidance practice as goal-directed, intentional action
- Client’s life as composed of intentional actions, joint projects, and careers.

First Counselling Task

Creating and maintaining the working alliance

- anchored in the cultural rules and conventions of politeness, good manners, empathy and related actions.
- alliance deepens when the counsellor engages in ongoing, goal-directed careers, projects, and actions -- co-constructed to support the goal-directed, facilitator-driven process of the client.
First counselling task in the Case of Damia

- Describing Damia’s experience
- Your counselling began by Ms. C welcoming you
- Feel comfortable
- tell her about yourself;
- describing yourself
- listening closely, encouraging you
- your underlying concern was the anger you were experiencing
- subsequent anxiety
- “I can't seem to do anything without getting mad, I'm afraid it's affecting my schooling, and the kind of occupation I would like to get in the future.”

- The counsellor’s perception
- tell the story of her life
- ask more questions th
- cultural differences
- construct stories
- made connections
- presented herself as an agent
- what was working for her in the present.

Counsellor’s second task

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identifying projects and action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Providing a space for an extensive client narrative</td>
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<td>• Helping the client frame it in terms of actions and projects</td>
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Standard ways of intervening in career counselling

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<th>Personality</th>
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<td>Skills</td>
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Narrative Construction

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<th>Retrospective</th>
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<td>Prospective</td>
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- Personality
- Skills
Second counselling task in the Case of Damia

• Describing Damia’s experience
  • identified the important actions and projects in your life
  • identity project
  • anticipate an identity career
  • destructive actions that are interfering with these projects and careers.
  • “This anger I’m feeling is going to destroy the good things that are happening in my life.”
  • you couldn’t understand why you get so angry

• The counsellor’s perception
  • I thought that it was very helpful that she could see these patterns in her life. She resonated with the idea that these were her projects and careers.

Counsellor’s third task

• Helping resolve at the level and domain that the action and project are challenging

Addressing problematic projects and actions

Third counselling task in the Case of Damia

• Describing Damia’s experience
  • specific project
  • not to be so angry with others
  • being angry seemed normal
  • “I can’t seem to do anything about these feelings. My future will be ruined, I am disappointed in myself.”
  • standing in the way

• The counsellor’s perception
  • it was almost like Damia had too much energy for her projects, that that energy was representative of some unconscious process that may have been operating in her. Her project and career goals made sense to her but there was a disconnect between them and her anger and anxiety. I was struck by what she said in second session: ‘All of the good things I accomplish seemed to be wasted because of my anger toward others.’
Counsellor’s fourth task

Dealing with emotion and emotional memory

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<th>Emotion is expressed behaviorally</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emotion in internal processes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Emotionally sensitive</td>
<td>Relevant to career</td>
<td>7. Long-term meaningfulness</td>
<td>8. Socially integrated</td>
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<td>17. Allowing predictability and novelty</td>
<td>18. Attendance to emotional issues</td>
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<td>25. Functional emotional regulation</td>
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**Emotion is expressed behaviorally**

**Emotion in internal processes**
Emotion at the level of meaning (motivation)

Fourth counselling task in the Case of Damia

- Describing Damia’s experience
  - clear to you that emotions and emotional reactions were central
  - identifying other more positive emotions
  - connection between your troubling emotions and the actions
  - to early memories
  - retell your story in which your anger and anxiety became more understandable

- The counsellor’s perception
  - Clearly emotions were an important part of counseling
  - Did not express very much anger
  - showed uncertainty and at times anxiety
  - identified positive emotions

Counsellor’s fifth task

Connecting with daily life

- What is the connection between what is addressed in counselling and the client’s daily life?
- Constructing narratives
- Inviting the client to make sense or provide a structure

Fifth counselling task in the Case of Damia

- Describing Damia’s experience
  - strong link
  - between the anger and anxiety
  - and longer terms plans
  - able to act positively to reach goals that you have

- The counsellor’s perception
  - Did much more in our counselling
  - how emotions work
  - identify emotions as they develop in certain actions
  - to be aware of them
  - to regulate them
  - address some of the residual feelings
With regard to practice

1. We consider counselling as joint action.

2. We encourage joint action with others in counselling.

3. We help clients identify actual, present projects (based on goals, internal processes, and behaviour).

More practice

4. We incorporate narrative as a way of understanding.

5. We encourage journal writing.

6. We use regular follow-up by phone.

7. We review changes with a view to stabilizing them toward present/emerging projects.

8. Other …

Contextual action theory

- a conceptual approach to goal-directed behaviour developed in vocational psychology, counselling, mental health, and human development.

Doing ➔ Acting ➔ Action ➔ Action Theory
Identifying actions and projects

• “Because my thoughts were at home on how to keep the family peace, I did not concentrate at school, which made me miss being promoted. ... At the apprenticeship, my superior expected the best results from me which I failed to deliver. He told me he was disappointed and since then treated me as any other worker.”

Findings

Three projects were identified in these sessions: relationship, identity, educational-vocational.

Counseling for the transition to adulthood as joint, goal-directed action
doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2011.02.005
Educational-vocational Project

Educational and vocational concerns were often the presenting problem:

"Maybe science is just not my thing, but I don't want to change my major."

"I'm lost, I can't get my feet firmly planted on the ground."

Integration of projects

"I'm lost, I can't get my feet firmly planted on the ground."

"I really don't know where to turn and what's next."

Relational

Refers to similar feelings about boyfriend

Identity

"I'm really not sure what I'm all about a lot of the time. I just want to figure myself out a little more."

Client reflecting on viewing her counselling session

• "I was thinking that I should stop talking about work once again and start focusing on me more, because I thought that, you know, the sessions would be more useful for me if I talked about me more, but especially at that moment I was, I started talking about work and specific clients ... I was thinking, "Yeah, I should stop talking about work and start talking about me more.""
Adolescent Career Development in Urban-Residing Aboriginal Families in Canada
Sheila K. Marshall, Richard A. Young, Alison Stevens, Wayne Spence, Stewart Deyell, Adam Easterbrook, and Martin Brokenleg
December 2011, Volume 59, Number 6

Joint projects – Aboriginal youth and families

Key task for counsellors...

• How to best identify, intervene in and support the joint projects that clients are engaged in that complements the ecological validity of these projects.
Thank you.
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