

CAREER COUNSELLING FOR CLIENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES IN MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

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This paper addresses career counselling for clients with physical disabilities in response to the Government's call for inclusiveness in Malaysia. The concept of inclusiveness is discussed as recognizing persons with disabilities as capable of making informed choices in employment and training with potentials of being active members in the Malaysian society. It is not the intention of this paper to deal with the types and degree of severity of clients' physical disabilities or to conduct career intervention programmes. The intention of this paper is to create awareness among career counsellors of the need (1) to understand diversity issues associated with career counselling for clients with physical disabilities in the Malaysian context and (2) to use this insight to develop strategies and future directions for helping clients. It is pointed out that career counselling for clients with physical disabilities calls for serious work in helping clients to integrate their self-esteem and self-concept toward attaining well-being by transforming their disabilities into abilities. This entails the in-depth understanding of diversity issues of (1) prejudice in employment, (2) discrimination in career development, (3) abusive life experiences, (4) trauma experiences and (5) poor mental health that create tension and conflicts in clients with physical disabilities. In career counselling for clients with physical disabilities, it is important that the counsellor practises a multicultural approach and works towards empowering clients with preparedness for advocacy as well as towards assisting the Government in advancing inclusiveness in the Malaysian society.

Keywords: Career counselling, clients with physical disabilities

Career counselling empowers clients with physical disabilities through career assistance. Career assistance facilitates clients with physical disabilities in their career development. It is reported that career assistance facilitates clients with physical disabilities by integrating their self-esteem and self-concept toward attaining well-being with outcomes of meeting their personal, family and work needs through adjusting themselves in harmony with others in social settings including their workplace and at home (Etherington, 2002; OECD, 2003; Turner & Turner, 2004; Quek, 2008a, 2010).

Clients with physical disabilities are defined as people with physical impairments that limit their performance of activities in daily life and in work (Hays & Erford, 2010; World Health Organization, 1980). In addition, it is reported that performance of activities in daily life and in work tended to depend on the severity of a physical impairment (OECD, 2003; Quek, 2008b, 2010). According to these same reports, the heterogeneity among persons with physical disabilities includes limited mobility of limbs or loss of bodily ability to attend to personal care due to injury from accidents as well as severe congenital disabilities (OECD, 2003). In some instances, the severity of a physical disability requires the individual to use aids such as a wheelchair, or a pair of crutches, or to require the assistance of another person.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It was reported that in 2007, there were 220,250 persons with disabilities in Malaysia, of which 73,559 were persons with physical disabilities (Chang, 2010). Accordingly, persons with physical disabilities accounted for about one-third (33.4%) of the total number of persons with disabilities (Chang, 2010). Over a span of nine years (2000-2009), the number of persons with disabilities in Malaysia increased from 98,452 to 283,204 (Malaysia, 2010). The Executive Director of the Malaysian Employers Association in a recent press release pointed out that only 4,000 persons with disabilities were employed (Maizatul Ranal, 2010). In addition, the Executive Director expressed that 4,000 reflected a rather low number when compared to developed countries such as the United States of America which had 15.6 million or 34 per cent of persons with disabilities in their labour force.

In recent times, public policies in Malaysia to augment the employment of persons with disabilities are documented as supporting inclusiveness in society (Malaysia, 2010). This means persons with disabilities, including those with physical disabilities are counted in the total potential Malaysian workforce to contribute to greater productivity that is needed to transform the nation into a developed country by 2020. This inclusive approach is an endorsement of the International Labour Office's framework of decent work for all people by Malaysian public policies (International Labour Office, 2002). This inclusiveness is enhanced further by Malaysian public efforts to support the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2008-2010). All these efforts translate into recognising persons with disabilities as capable of making informed choices in employment and training with potential of being productive members in Malaysian society.

Accordingly, it is documented in the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2016) (Malaysia, 2010) the need to build "a progressive and more inclusive society" (Malaysia, 2010, p. 178). The inclusive policy stated in the Tenth Malaysia Plan advocates inclusiveness (Tables 1 and 2) whereby respect is upheld for all Malaysians in their diversity for building a workforce that can help the country

attain the status of a developed nation as envisaged in Vision 2020. According to the Tenth Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 2010), “no one gets left behind... and active participation from all” (p. 178) Malaysians are encompassed in the concept of “1Malaysia”.

Table 1
Employment Enablers for Persons with Disabilities in the Tenth Malaysia Plan

Employment Enablers	Ways of Implementation from 2011-2015
Providing More Employment Opportunities	In the Malaysian civil service, the Government has set the employment target of one per cent (1%) for persons with disabilities
Expanding Career Knowledge	Expansion of career knowledge to enhance the employability of persons with disabilities. This includes the upgrading of the Job Coach programme and all work-related services.
Providing Electronic Accessibility to the Labour Market	The Labour Department is to operate an electronic labour exchange for better assisting persons with disabilities in seeking employment.
Providing specialised training and vocational education	The Government plans to establish specialised training institutions and vocational schools to equip persons with disabilities for greater employability
Providing Inclusiveness in Employment and Monitoring by the Government	Employers of listed companies are required to submit details of employee composition including persons with disabilities to the Securities Commission for monitoring effectiveness of inclusive employment. Employers of all non-listed companies are required to submit details of employee composition including persons with disabilities to the Companies Commission of Malaysia for monitoring effectiveness of inclusive employment.

Table 2
Public Measures Supporting Inclusiveness in Malaysia

Providing a Disabled-friendly Environment with Better Accessibility	Transportation is to be made accessible to persons with disabilities. Buildings, public parks and recreational areas are to be benchmarked along universal design standards to ensure accessibility to all.
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Upgrading of Community-based Rehabilitation Centres to One-stop Service Centres	The one-stop service centres provide comprehensive services for the convenience of persons with disabilities. The services include registration of persons with disabilities, disability testing and screening, career assistance, vocational training and job placements.
Providing Disabled-friendly Forms of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Services	The comprehensive services of one-stop service centres are enhanced by the Government's effort in improving the PDKNet programme and other ICT services for use by persons with disabilities>Note: Data sourced from the Tenth Malaysia Plan 2011-2015 (Malaysia, 2010)

OBJECTIVES

In the Malaysian context, one way to implement inclusiveness in society for enhancing national productivity is to input the potentials of persons with disabilities into the country's human resources. In response to the Government's policies of inclusive employment, this article addresses career counselling for clients with physical disabilities in the Malaysian context. It is not the intention of this paper to deal with the types and degree of severity of clients' physical disabilities or to conduct career intervention programmes. This paper is aimed at creating awareness among career counsellors of the need:

1. To understand diversity issues associated with career counselling for clients with physical disabilities in the Malaysian context; and
2. To use this insight to develop strategies and future directions for helping clients.

DISCUSSION

Diversity issues concerning clients with physical disabilities pose challenges to career counsellors. Some of these diversity issues concerning clients with physical disabilities in Malaysian context are:

1. **Prejudice in Employment**
Prejudice in employment refers to preconceived beliefs and stereotyped attitudes in employment which are not evidence-based (Szymanski & Parker, 2003; Wright, 1983). Persons with physical disabilities face prejudice in employment that impact negatively in their life (Chang, 2010; Hays & Erford, 2010; Quek, 2010; Quek & Teoh, 2010). For instance, some people presuppose that persons with physical disabilities as also mentally incapacitated. Whist still others believe that persons with physical disabilities

are also incapable of productive work. These forms of prejudice pose barriers to persons with physical disabilities in getting employment.

2. Discrimination in Career Development

Persons with physical disabilities who encountered discrimination in career development are reported to experience frustration and a loss of self-esteem (Chang, 2010; Hays & Erford, 2010; Quek, 2010; Quek & Teoh, 2010). Discrimination in career development refers to generalised behaviour that is culture-based held by people against persons with physical disabilities in career development (Quek, 2003; Szymanski & Parker, 2003). Discrimination against persons with physical disabilities is manifested in unequal opportunities in recruitment, being by-passed for promotion at work, segregation based on social class and gender and other oppressive forms that are culture-based including racism. These forms of discrimination pose barriers to persons with physical disabilities in their career development.

3. Abusive Life Experiences

Abusive life experiences refer to threats or physical injury as well as emotional pain and stress that outcome negatively on career development of some clients with physical disabilities (Quek, 2008a; Szymanski & Parker, 2003). For instance, the abuser may intimidate persons with physical disabilities by threats of terminating employment, or even manipulating their access to work promotion and decision making opportunities, or using derogatory language in communication, as well as causing emotional pain and stress to clients through sexual harassment at the workplace. These abusive episodes experienced by some persons with physical disabilities outcome in self-limiting perceptions about career which pose barriers to their career development.

4. Trauma Experiences

Trauma experiences refer to anxiety disorder found among people who are exposed to life-threatening events leading to helplessness and feelings of fear (Herr, Cramer & Niles, 2004; Hershenson & Liesener, 2003). Career counsellors for clients with physical disabilities must be aware that the exposure to trauma (such as being involved in serious traffic or work accidents or being trapped in a burning house or being swept away by swelling flood water) can evoke recurrent bouts of extreme fear which pose barriers to their career development.

5. Poor Mental Health

Poor mental health refers to the maladjustment in thoughts, feelings and behaviour of people due to the mismatch between their self-concept and their actual experiences (Hays & Erford, 2010; Quek, 2008a; Szymanski & Parker, 2003). Career stressors (such as fear of being found out to be of lower

intelligence or less talented at work, anxiety over unrealistic images of body shapes, and disparity in salary for work done) have negative repercussions for persons with physical disabilities. These career stressors can result in poor mental health which poses internal barriers (distorted thoughts) and external blocks (unwilling to seek help) to persons with physical disabilities in career development.

Insights into these barriers enable some strategies and future directions to be aligned for helping these clients in their career development. The strategies in the Malaysian context are:

1. Practising a Multicultural Approach in Career Counselling

In counselling clients with physical disabilities, who originate from diverse cultural and regional backgrounds (for example, from East or West Malaysia), it is essential to take note of the social values, norms and attitudes that exist in the clients' community. Counsellors also need to be aware of the prevailing prejudice in employment and discrimination in career development faced by clients with physical disabilities. In addition, counsellors have to be aware of other career barriers such as abusive life experiences, trauma experiences and poor mental health that create tension and conflicts in clients with physical disabilities. The multiracial society of Malaysia also requires counsellors to take note of the personal career needs of clients with physical disabilities in context of the expectations of their family and community (Quek, 2009a, 2009b). The future direction in helping clients with physical disabilities is to have culturally competent career counsellors.

2. Empowering Clients

In career counselling of clients with physical disabilities, it is essential that the counsellor work with the clients as the person and help clients remove maladaptive beliefs as well as self-limiting perceptions. In empowering a client, the counsellor should treat the client with positive regard and with dignity whilst facilitating the client to take charge of his or her life. Here, the counsellor guides the client in building self-confidence for facing conflicts and to participate in active problem solving for career development. Clients are facilitated to explore their strengths to overcome their disabilities and to optimise motivation for removing negative emotions of helplessness. The counsellor should help the clients with physical disabilities to integrate their self-esteem and self-concept toward attaining well-being with outcomes of meeting their personal, family and work needs through adjustment in harmony with others in social settings including their workplace and home. In this direction, career counsellors need to be trained in methods of empowerment.

3. Having Preparedness for Advocacy

Regarding career counselling clients with physical disabilities, it is important that the counsellor takes the role of the advocate for the client. Here, the counsellor participates actively in promoting equal opportunities for employment and decent work for all. This is also seen in the counsellor's involvement in various non-government bodies that promote self-advocacy of clients with physical disabilities. Other activities include informing and supporting clients to empower them in problem solving and decision making so that they are able to come up with informed choices in their domestic and working life (Quek, 2009c; 2010). In this direction, training career counsellors for clients with physical disabilities needs to ensure that preparedness for advocacy is well understood.

4. Assisting the Government in Advancing Inclusiveness

In career counselling for clients with physical disabilities it is important for the counsellor to assist the Government in advancing inclusiveness in Malaysia (Malaysia, 2010). This means that counsellors need to be knowledgeable in government policies that assist in advancing inclusiveness (Tables 1 and 2) so as to render effective career counselling for clients with physical disabilities in the Malaysian context. In addition, career counsellors must also take cognisance of the current economic framework in Malaysian society including policies for “transformation towards productivity-led growth” (Malaysia, 2010, p. 52) for facilitating clients in their career development. In this direction, career counsellors need to keep abreast with Malaysian public policies and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2008-2010) as well as other legislative developments to facilitate empowerment of clients with physical disabilities.

CONCLUSION

In career counselling for clients with physical disabilities it is important that the counsellor practises a multicultural approach and works towards empowering clients with preparedness for advocacy in tandem with assisting the Government in advancing inclusiveness in Malaysian society. In other words, career counselling for clients with physical disabilities calls for serious work in helping clients toward integrating their self-esteem and self-concept for attaining well-being by transforming their disabilities into abilities.

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