

Empowering high-risk clients to attain a better quality of life: a career resiliency framework

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Career counselors frequently encounter clients who are at high risk for career and life development difficulties. Research suggests there is a connection between resiliency and successful career development in high-risk clients. Many high-risk individuals have poor decision-making skills and lack motivation to succeed in life and career development. This article describes a career resiliency framework in which career resiliency is best understood within the context of psychological resiliency. Specifically, this article explicates how career counseling from a resiliency theory perspective may promote successful career development for populations dealing with multiple barriers.

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Career counselors in Canada encounter clients who have various needs. These clients often come from cross-cultural environments or high-risk environments that are characterized by poverty, abuse, and the challenges of mental and/or physical disabilities. Personal experience can directly influence the development of constructs that affect work-life identity. Specifically, personal experience can influence a person's knowledge structures of the world-of-work, meanings about work, decision-making processes that affect career options, and views of personal success (Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 1991). In the field of career development, the theory of resiliency can factor into the counselor's selection of career counseling frameworks and practices, especially in the cases of clients at high risk for difficulties in life and career development. North American career counseling literature, however, has largely ignored the connection between resiliency and career development. In this article, we explore existing literature on resiliency and examine a career resiliency framework (Rickwood, 2002) that can be used by counselors to empower high-risk clients to seek meaningful career paths.

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In the current North American society, career seekers and counselors must manage an ever changing world-of-work. Career and employment counselors, therefore, are required to continuously expand their scope of practice and knowledge of career development when working with high-risk clients or clients who face multiple barriers. High-risk clients are people whose life histories include membership in minority groups (such as gay men and lesbians, people with disabilities, single parents, people who are poor, immigrants and refugees, racial or ethnic minorities, women, and so on), who are experiencing current or historical abuse, who have limited access to education or health services, or who possess any factor that can limit physical or psychological health and success (Diller, 1999). Career counselors can use resiliency theory as a basis for assisting high-risk clients in meeting their needs. Career development research focusing on youth indicates that high-risk clients can obtain meaningful employment when resiliency is fostered (Herring, 1997). By merging resiliency with the field of career development, career counselors can expand the scope of their practice and better assist high-risk clients to overcome barriers and meet their career needs (Bernard, 1996).

Resiliency is the ability to avoid negative outcomes despite being at risk for psychopathology (Mash & Wolfe, 1999). Resiliency varies with the context and the type of stress, and therefore resiliency is not a universal or categorical attribute of human personality. In the context of career counseling, Collard, Eppelheimer, and Saigo (1996) suggested that career resiliency is "the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, even when the circumstances are discouraging or disruptive" (p. 36). To gain further insight, this article explores the roots of resiliency theory and examines it within a career resiliency framework.

RESILIENCY THEORY

Early resiliency research was an extension of studies of child and adolescent development, family dynamics, and ethnographic studies (Bernard, 1996). Although researchers once thought resilience was an inborn capacity for change and transformation (Lifton, 1993), resilience is now seen as the ability of individuals to adapt to diversity by learning and developing resilient behaviors, thoughts, and actions (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Resiliency theory is also rooted in the longitudinal research of Werner (1993). Werner found that resilient individuals were people who, despite being raised in environments characterized by environmental hardships and extreme stressors, were able to lead successful lives. Characteristics of these resilient individuals included having positive temperaments, having well-developed cognitive and academic skills, having an internal locus of control, having realistic educational and vocational plans, taking pleasure in hobbies, assuming responsibility, helping others, taking advantage of opportunities during periods of transition, having at least one unconditional relationship, and having religious affiliation and inner faith (Werner, 1993). In the 1970s, youth development researchers began conducting similar life-span studies of inner-city children.

such as families where parents were mentally ill, alcoholic or abusive" (Benard, 1996, p. 1). Findings of the research indicated that despite having disadvantaged upbringing, many children found success in life because they exhibited resiliency characteristics. In their research, London and Mone (1987) identified several elements of career resiliency and, based on their research, the term *resiliency* emerged to describe people who have overcome serious risk factors to attain personal and professional success.

The resiliency paradigm became, and continues to be, an attractive theory because it applies to human development. In the 1980s, characteristics of resiliency, such as having positive relationships and a healthy self-concept, were identified (London & Mone, 1987). By the late 1990s, resiliency researchers were interpreting and publishing their findings. Benard (1996) stated, "The astounding finding from these long-term studies was that at least 50%—and often closer to 70%—of youth growing up in high-risk conditions developed social competence despite exposure to severe stress and overcame the odds to lead successful lives" (p. 1). Since the mid-1990s, service providers in youth and career development fields have applied resiliency theory to assist high-risk clients in gathering information about the self to motivate them to overcome barriers (Brown, 1996).

Employees of previous generations often held long-term positions and frequently worked for the same employers throughout their working lives. According to Brown (1996), "In the 1960s, the employer-employee relationship was characterized as a parent-child relationship: the organization provided employment in jobs that were narrowly defined, status in the community, and job security in exchange for employee hard work, loyalty, and good performance" (p. 2). Today, the duration and nature of the employee-employer relationship is very different because the workplace has undergone radical changes in the last 30 years. The nature of employment has changed, and a new economy has evolved because of dwindling raw resources, free trade, downsizing, reengineering and rapid growth of information technologies, and globalization. Changing employment patterns indicate that employees can expect to hold multiple jobs and careers throughout their lives (Rickwood & Roberts, 2002). A new psychological contract between employers and employees has also emerged. "The emphasis in this new contract was on worker employability rather than job security" (Brown, 1996, p. 2). Consequently, a new reality has emerged for workers, and employees are now required to maintain employability by studying market trends and continually developing their skills (Brown, 1996).

Currently, career counselors actively promote characteristics of resiliency as a means to empower workers who are affected by the radical changes that have occurred in the workplace. Career development practitioners can access the works of Waterman, Waterman, and Collard (1994) to develop an understanding of how fostering resiliency can influence and be of benefit to high-risk clients. By enhancing their knowledge, practitioners can enhance their ability to assist high-risk clients in meeting their career and life goals.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF CAREER RESILIENCY

When working with unemployed workers, career development counselors can apply the principles of career resiliency theory to foster resiliency and enable their clients to meet their career and life goals. Benard (1996) indicated that fostering resiliency occurs at a deep, structural, and human level where all interactions and interventions involve relationships, beliefs, and opportunities for participation and power. Byster (1998, p. 18) described five guiding principles of career resiliency:

1. The client is, or needs to become, the primary architect of his or her life.
2. The client needs help to find and be motivated by his or her core values.
3. Clients need to stay competitive in their fields of work by furthering their education.
4. Clients need to make connections within their communities by developing relationships with mentors, job shadowing, and attending job support groups.
5. Clients must learn to accommodate to the changing needs of employers while keeping a clear sense of self and direction.

Furthermore, Rickwood (2002) suggested that career counselors should practice using a career resiliency framework to address client self-understanding. This framework could consist of career resiliency activities such as the following:

1. Encouraging clients to enhance their intrinsic motivation by exploring and acting on their inclinations, dreams, and goals rather than conforming to a job that does not fully support their make-up
2. Encouraging clients to promote a sense of well-being by cultivating hobbies and activities during their job search
3. Advising clients to develop connections with others who are looking for work by pooling resources and forming a job search club
4. Actively discouraging clients from blaming themselves when they face difficulties in the career planning process

An example that demonstrates how these activities can be used to develop career resiliency was presented at the 28th National Consultation on Career Development Conference by Rickwood and Roberts (2002). This anecdote was based on Rickwood's (2002) career counseling experience and describes how a young First Nations man was encouraged to explore his own inclinations before enrolling in a job-training program. This client faced numerous barriers, including having little motivation, being disconnected from his First Nation's community, and not having a high school diploma. Rickwood learned that the young man did not feel welcome in his community because he was always getting into fights. Despite a reluctance to explore his own culture, this man indicated that he had always wanted an Elder to show him how to stretch deer hide and make a drum. Although unconventional, Rickwood developed an action plan with the young man that enabled him to return to his com-

munity and have an Elder show him how to make a drum. Rickwood believed that the young man's optimism, motivation to meet a goal, and need for connection enabled him to develop and act on barrier-removing plans.

Clients who are challenged with multiple barriers face obstacles that often seem insurmountable. To empower these high-risk clients, career development professionals must, therefore, exhibit patience when working with them (Rickwood, 2002). If practitioners adopt the framework for career resiliency, clients may be empowered to make and achieve life and career goals. By creating an environment that focuses on a supporting community and on resiliency, clients may become confident in their abilities to remove employment barriers (Rickwood, 2002).

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

The career resiliency framework (Rickwood, 2002) can guide career development practitioners in helping high-risk clients better navigate through challenging employment circumstances. This framework encourages several processes that can be adopted by all career counseling programs and can guide the selection of career counseling and intervention methods. The career resiliency framework suggests that counselors should create therapeutic environments in which clients can develop knowledge and skills to enhance their motivation, build relationships, explore work possibilities, make decisions, set goals, and create plans for action. Practitioners can develop these environments by focusing on four main elements: (a) theme acceptance, (b) support for self-awareness, (c) conversion, and (d) connectedness.

Theme Acceptance

In the context of the career resiliency framework, theme acceptance denotes the widespread use of resiliency theory by an organization. An agency can establish theme acceptance by actively promoting the use of resiliency theory by its counselors and practitioners. Specifically, agency policy, staff education, and professional development should be based on the theme of resiliency.

Support for Self-Awareness

Support for self-awareness is the promotion of self-awareness by career counselors, which is achieved by selecting or modifying career counseling processes or tools that facilitate a client's deep understanding of his or her core values and interests. Values are the guiding principles of a person's life, whereas interests are the activities and pastimes to which a person is drawn (Rickwood & Roberts, 2002).

Conversion

Conversion refers to changing clients' abstract ideas (e.g., hopes and dreams) into concrete, real-life events and actions. This element entails focusing on and enhancing

clients' intrinsic motivation so that they are driven to develop plans of action. By using conversion, clients can identify and overcome barriers and convert their dreams into career realities.

Connectedness

Connectedness fosters a client's sense of community because it encourages meaningful connections between people. This element also encourages clients to pool resources (for instance, to form a job search group) and to celebrate successes in a group context. Connectedness works to promote a client's life-long relationships with various institutions that support continuous learning.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

By using the career resiliency framework (Rickwood, 2002), high-risk clients can enhance self-knowledge and self-efficacy and thus develop efficient goals and plans that will lead to a satisfying career. However, career counselors may question how they can implement the career resiliency theory to assist someone who is experiencing long-term unemployment or a young person who desires to enter the workforce and hold a personally meaningful job. The career resiliency theory can be used by encouraging clients to draw on their self-efficacy for relationships and non-work-related tasks to improve their occupational motivation. On a more personal level, clients can be encouraged to become self-employed by exploring how they can use mastered capabilities and skills for traditional occupations in alternative careers. For instance, trained estheticians or hairstylists could investigate how their skills could be used by theater or TV companies.

Career counseling theories suggest that it is important for counselors to consider the experiences of clients when they attempt to focus the counseling process on the strengths, self-efficacy, self-concept, and self-esteem of their clients (Diller, 1999). These theories, however, fail to take into account profound issues such as the factors of resiliency that are evident in the current career counseling literature. Researchers and practitioners must acknowledge that resiliency can affect the career journeys of high-risk clients. Future researchers, however, must identify the factors that promote and negate resiliency and determine how these factors affect the present and future careers of high-risk populations. Such research would enable practitioners and researchers to better understand how resiliency and career development are connected.

In summary, the career counseling and development literature presents many approaches and interventions that can guide counselors who work with high-risk populations. Little research, however, addresses the concept of resiliency from a career counseling framework. Rickwood and Roberts (2002), therefore, outlined a career resiliency framework that connects resiliency and career counseling processes. This framework encourages practitioners and clients to focus on and promote resiliency. By understanding how to implement the career resiliency framework and how high-risk clients can benefit from this framework, career counselors can begin to empower high-risk populations to meet their career and life goals.

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The impact of life role salience on life satisfaction

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The authors examined the relationships among life role salience, role strain, coping efficacy, and life satisfaction for adults ($N = 125$) who combine multiple life roles. Causal modeling procedures were used to test hypotheses based on D. E. Super's (1980) life-span, life-space theory and the social cognitive career theory (R. W. Lent, S. D. Brown, & G. Hackett, 2000). They hypothesized that high role salience would be related to high levels of role strain and that coping efficacy would mediate the impact of role strain on participants' life satisfaction. Results indicated that the proposed model fit the data for the present sample.

It has become increasingly common for both women and men to balance multiple roles, such as those of career person, student, spouse, and parent, and to experience high role salience for a combination of these life roles (Luzzo, 1999; Nauta, Epperson, & Kahn, 1998; O'Brien, Friedman, Tipton, & Linn, 2000). There are many interpersonal differences regarding how individuals combine life roles and view the roles they occupy. Some perceive their life roles as enhancing one another, others see their roles as conflicting, and many see roles as both complementing and conflicting with one another (Cook, 1994; Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997). The importance an individual places on a life role has been termed *role salience* by career theorist Donald Super (1980, 1990). Often, a high degree of salience for multiple roles can cause role strain, especially when each role demands a substantial time commitment (Crosby & Jaskar, 1993; Duarte, 1995; Scheck, Kinicki, & Davy, 1997). Role strain refers to feelings of stress that may result from the demands of multiple life roles. Role strain has been linked to negative outcomes such as psychological distress (Woydandorf & Donnelly, 1989), decreased quality of life (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991), and decreased relationship quality (Suchet & Barling, 1986). However, when individuals perceive themselves as coping well, this may lessen their feelings of role strain and increase life satisfaction (Matsui, Ohawara, & Onglatco, 1995).

In the present study, we examined the relationships among life role salience, role strain, coping efficacy, and life satisfaction for adults who combine multiple life roles. Gaining knowledge about the effects of these variables on life satisfaction is valuable in understanding current patterns of societal roles and increasing overall

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