

Reflective Approach to Career Development Practice for Diverse Clients

Roberta A. Borgen^a and William A. Borgen^b

^aLife Strategies Ltd.

^bUniversity of British Columbia

We are well aware that the saying “One size fits all” is untrue. Nevertheless, we continue to be tempted to offer career development programs and services that have worked for us in the past, despite the rapidly changing social and economic context and the increasing diversity of clients seeking support.

Arthur et al. (2024) identified five core practices underpinning effective career development across a variety of theoretical approaches and client groups: **Reflect, Connect, Contextualize, Customize, and Collaborate**. Together, these practices offer an effective framework for supporting clients across contexts and cultures.

Begin with **reflective practice**. Be aware of your own culture, assumptions, values, and biases and how these may differ substantially from those of the individuals you serve. Recognize the intersectionality of identities, both your own and your clients’. What your client sees and knows about you does not fully represent who you are, does it? Similarly, reflect on your clients’ multifaceted identities and how these might affect the career challenges they currently face (R. Borgen, 2022).

Building a strong **working relationship** (i.e., connecting) is central to providing effective

career support. Listen deeply, connect genuinely, co-create goals and plans, and attend to the emotional roller coaster (W. Borgen & Amundson, 1987) associated with career transitions.

Based on your ongoing reflection and meaningful connection with your clients, recognize the impact of your clients’ unique **contexts** and adjust your approach accordingly. Bronfenbrenner (1977) identified a myriad of systems influencing all individuals, from the microsystem (our immediate environments) through the exosystem (formal and informal social structures) to the macrosystem (cultural elements), and more! What supports and resources are available to your clients through family, friends, colleagues, community, or government policies? How are the local labor market, sector-specific dynamics, and even the global economy affecting their career opportunities at this time? How can you adjust your own practice to better meet the unique contextual realities of the individuals you are serving?

We live in an era of **customization**. Many people are used to having choices regarding the food they eat, the clothes they wear, how they furnish their homes, their methods of transportation, and the social events they

attend. They will similarly expect customization and flexibility from you. How can you guide them to make career decisions that are a good fit for them right now but flexible enough to change going forward? W. Borgen (1999) described five employability dimensions (Readiness, Career Decision-Making, Skills Enhancement, Work Search, and Employment Maintenance). Attending to context and adopting a client-centered approach can guide career development professionals in selecting appropriate starting points for their work with clients, building on the strengths their clients bring, and intervening where the need is greatest.

Finally, effective career practice across contexts and cultures requires **collaboration**.

As career development professionals in a complex, rapidly changing labor market, we simply cannot know everything there is to know about every occupation, industry, culture, or unique need for accommodation. Instead, what we can offer our clients is the knowledge we have about career development processes, labor market realities, and relevant resources and services. We rely on our clients to contribute knowledge of themselves, the occupations they are pursuing, and the requirements necessary for them to perform at their best in the workplace. The career engagement model (Pickerell & R. Borgen, 2023) emphasizes the importance of aligning meaningful opportunities, motivating work, and capacity, with capacity comprising resources, relationships, workload, well-being, and fit. Collaborating with clients to better understand the factors that contribute to their unique sense of engagement creates a strong, synergistic partnership that can support their career success.

Collaboration, of course, extends well beyond the practitioner–client relationship. You have likely encountered the adage that

“**It takes a village** to raise a child.” Similarly, facilitating career success for the diverse clients you serve in practice also requires a village. Consider whom you might add to your own network of support: other professionals with whom to consult or to whom clients can be referred, cultural informants, counselors, and health professionals who can help you maintain balance in your own life. Encourage your clients to expand their own “village” as well. Collaborate with clients to identify and strategically address gaps in support, enabling them to develop networks of people and resources that facilitate their ability to thrive in the workplace.

References

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