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IAEVG International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance
IVBBB Internationale Vereinigung für Bildungs- und Berufsberatung
AIOEP Asociación Internacional para la Orientación Educativa y Profesional

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A psychodynamic approach on group career counseling: A Brazilian experience of 40 years

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Abstract Career guidance and career counselling have traditionally been conducted in an individualized fashion focusing on the counsellor-client relationship. Specialized literature, however, points to the potential use of group strategies. This article seeks to contribute to the advancement of studies in group career counselling practices, by introducing and discussing the theoretical-technical group career counselling model that was developed, evaluated and consolidated in Brazil over the past 40 years. It is an unstructured group intervention model with a therapeutic objective based on a psychodynamic approach. Limitations and potentialities of this group intervention and model are discussed.

Keywords Group counselling · Psychodynamic counselling · Career counselling

Résumé. Une approche psychodynamique du conseil de carrière de groupe: 40 ans d'expérience au Brésil. Le conseil en orientation et le conseil de carrière sont traditionnellement menés de manière individuelle, se focalisant sur la relation conseiller-client. La littérature spécialisée, toutefois, met en avant l'utilisation potentielle de stratégies de groupe. Dans cet article, nous visons à faire progresser les pratiques du conseil de carrière de groupe en introduisant et discutant le modèle théorique-technique du groupe en conseil de carrière qui fut développé, évalué, et consolidé au Brésil durant les 40 dernières années. Il s'agit d'un modèle d'intervention de groupe non structuré comprenant un objectif thérapeutique basé sur une approche psychodynamique. Les apports et limites de ce modèle d'intervention de groupe sont discutés.

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Zusammenfassung. Ein psychodynamischer Ansatz zur Berufsberatung in Gruppen: 40 Jahre Erfahrung in Brasilien. Laufbahn- und Berufsberatung beziehen sich auf die Berater-Klient Beziehung und wurden traditionell individuell durchgeführt. Die Fachliteratur weist jedoch auf den möglichen Einsatz von Gruppenstrategien hin. In diesem Artikel wollen wir die Karriereberatungspraktiken in Gruppen durch die Einführung und Diskussion des Modelles der theoretisch-technischen Gruppenberufsberatung fördern. Das Modell wurde in den vergangenen 40 Jahren entwickelt, ausgewertet und in Brasilien konsolidiert. Es ist ein unstrukturiertes Gruppen Interventionsmodell mit einem therapeutischen Ziel auf der Basis eines psychodynamischen Ansatzes. Die Vorteile und Grenzen dieses Gruppen Interventionsmodelles werden diskutiert.

Resumen. Un enfoque psicodinámico para la orientación profesional en grupo: 40 años de experiencia en Brasil. Tradicionalmente, tanto la orientación como el asesoramiento profesional han sido ejecutados de forma individualizada, centrados en la relación asesor-cliente. Sin embargo, la literatura especializada señala la importancia de las estrategias grupales. En esta artículo, se exploran los avances en la práctica de un modelo de orientación profesional grupal desarrollado, evaluado y consolidado en Brasil durante los últimos 40 años. Es un modelo de orientación grupal no estructurado con un objetivo terapéutico fundamentado en un enfoque psicodinámico. Finalmente, se discuten las ventajas e inconvenientes de este modelo.

Career guidance and career counselling have traditionally been conducted in an individualized fashion and focused on the counsellor-client relationship. However, at the start of vocational guidance, group intervention proposals were also developed. It is an interesting and differentiated model of action, as Jones, Stefflre, and Stewart (1970) specify. Authors like Blustein (1987), Brown and Ryan Krane (2000), Kagan (1966), Spokane and Oliver (1983), and Zimpfer (1968) underscored the relevance of group interventions both in vocational and career guidance and in career and vocational counselling. Although used, the group counselling modality has not attracted as much theoretical-technical research and development as desired. Di Fabio and Maree (2012) recently corroborated that, “for a number of reasons, little has been written on ways career counselling can be provided in group contexts” (p. 100). We noted several areas of group practice that can be classified in different forms.

Zimerman (1993) classified groups according to the kind of relationship established between counsellor and client. He created four major categories: (a) *by the group*, wherein the counsellor defines the group process in a directive manner and the clients do what is asked of them; (b) *in the group* signifies individualized intervention but conducted within the group; (c) *of the group* interventions are directed at the group as a unit; and (d) *in-group*, interventions focus on group relationships as well as on the individuals in the group. Fernandes,

Svartman, and Fernandes (2003) divided group work in two large sets according to their objectives: (a) groups with operative purposes, focused on a task and aiming to promote learning skills through which the person can develop; guidance would fall under this category; and (b) groups with therapeutic purposes, centered on intersubjective relationships and striving toward self-awareness and knowledge of the social and working world that is produced by these relationships; counselling would fall under this latter category.

Jones et al. (1970) proposed four models of guidance and counselling group work: (a) Group Guidance Model, intervention via readings, discussions, and questionnaires for large groups of students; (b) Structured Groups, intervention through a pre-defined program of activities; (c) Group Process Model, intervention focused on group unity; and (d) Group Counselling Model, unstructured intervention focused on individual interests and the psychological implications of decision-making processes elicited by group interaction.

The first two models proposed by Jones et al. (1970) could be defined as groups with operative ends, according to Fernandes et al. (2003), who linked them to guidance. Some examples are: Pelletier, Noiseux, and Bujold's (1974) activation of vocational and personal development (AVPD) model; Westbrook's (1974) discussion groups; operative groups (Foladori, 1987); the school-to-work group method (Koivisto, Vuori, & Nykyri, 2007); and, more recently, Di Fabio and Maree's (2012) proposal of group-based life design counselling; and training groups (Analysis Consulting and Interdisciplinary Research, 2012). The last two models mentioned by Jones et al. (1970) described groups with therapeutic purposes. These are less evident in the counselling literature mainly because they are unstructured group intervention modalities and have yielded fewer statistically significant results when compared to more structured workshops and groups, such as the AVPD model (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Oliver & Spokane, 1988; Whiston, Brecheisen, & Stephens, 2003).

Despite these findings, Whiston et al. (2003) indicated that the specific variables to be studied in unstructured groups should not be the same as those of the structured groups. They argued that by selecting appropriate variables in such a comparative study, the former modalities may prove more effective than the latter. Blustein (1987) and Hanson and Sander (1973) suggested that that more research is needed on the unstructured group intervention modalities. Although the group practice is rarely studied, it has been an integral part of the career counselling field since its beginning (Jones et al. 1970), but the use of a psychodynamic approach is not common. Therefore, how a psychodynamic approach is used to lead, animate, and understand group sessions and counselling processes will be the main contribution of this article.

Objective

In this article, we present and discuss the group career counselling model, which has been developed, evaluated, and consolidated over the past 40 years at the University of Sao Paulo's Vocational and Career Counselling Service. This model can be

characterized as a unstructured group intervention modality that includes the therapeutic function and develops participants' career and life projects within a psychodynamic framework. This unique and original career counselling model stands as Brazil's theoretical base for practice since the 1980s (Hutz-Midgett & Hutz, 2012; Lehman, Silva, Ribeiro, & Uvaldo, 2011; Melo-Silva, Bonfim, Esbrogeio, & Soares, 2003; Sparta, 2003).

In Brazil, non-institutionalized practices predominate vocational guidance and career counselling. These specific actions or programs are either private or linked to universities and schools. Mainly pedagogues and psychologists conduct these practices, with 61 % of the counsellors using group counselling (Melo-Silva et al., 2003). In Brazil, it is important to note that the psychodynamic focus proposed in career counselling and guidance did not emerge from the better-known psychodynamic proposals of Anne Roe or Edward Bordin (Lehman et al., 2011). In the 1970s, Professor Maria Margarida Carvalho and Argentinian psychoanalyst Rodolfo Bohoslavsky adapted career counselling to Brazil's reality at the University of Sao Paulo's Institute of Psychology. They created their own psychodynamic focus and adopted a clinical strategy (Bohoslavsky, 1977), and integrated these foci into a group intervention modality (Carvalho, 1995).

Proposal for a psychodynamic approach: Bohoslavsky's clinical strategy

In the 1970s, Bohoslavsky (1977) developed a clinical strategy using British psychoanalytical theory, mainly Klein (1984) and Wenders's (1965) hypotheses that vocations reveal the self's need to repair internal objects via the choice of a profession. The clinical strategy emphasizes the individual, who can choose what to be and what to do, as the main protagonist of his or her own life. It introduces an awareness model in the process—the process of linking profession with identifications, future projects, and the kind of person the client aims to be. This non-directive fashion helps clients establish a non-conflicting image and build a professional identity, which allows the client to choose whom *to Be* and whom *not to Be*. The strategy is based on four assumptions.

First, a conception of the human being as a subject of choices that occur through identification processes as well as current, past, and potential links established with the world, that define not only what must be done, but also whom to be, whom not to be, and what not to do. Secondly, the vocational choice is a possible synthesis between the demands of the unconscious desire expressed in vocational identity, and those of conscious needs expressed in occupational identity (demands of the production system). The vocational choice is the result of the basic vocational conflict, or the “conflict involved in choosing a way to be through something to do (an occupation)” (Bohoslavsky, 1977, p. 66). The individual seeks to elaborate his or her past and create future relationship possibilities (reparation process). This is done by taking into consideration the individual's subjective demands (vocational identity), through established links (current, past, and potential), and his or her identifications with other significant adults in the social and working worlds

(occupational identity). The strategy helps clients develop their lives, professional identity, and career project.

Thirdly, the psychological interview (individual or group) is the fundamental instrument of the clinical strategy. It constructs, integrates, and articulates as view, thought and decision to act or intervene, as well as reflection and action as an operational unit. Finally, three intervention stages are established in the career counselling model: diagnostic (identification of the basic vocational conflict), prognosis (identification of the client's capacity to start and continue the counselling process), and career counselling (individual or group counselling process).

Reasons for group career counselling

There are several advantages of doing group work. First, the sensation of relief created by the socialization of singular problems ends isolation. Despite the group's diversity, there are common denominators that strengthen and contextualize each person's choice (Foladori, 1987). Second, the cooperation instead of competition is stimulated, when is given to the client the opportunity to learn from the experience of others and help is received from those who are in the same vocational conflict situation (Carvalho, 1995). Third, dependency models are shattered, encouraging clients to assume responsibility for their decisions and projects (Di Fabio and Maree, 2012). Finally, the instrumentation for the construction of projects within a relational context allows this process to create characteristics and forms that are similar to what could emerge in concrete social relations (Klivilghan, 1990). The group represents a micro society that gives each person a global view of the situation in which he or she is inserted (Blustein, 1987). It allows for self-questioning and for the elaboration of their projects (Blustein, 1987; Jones et al., 1970). In short, the group facilitates the exploration of existing possibilities, the individuals' potential, and his or her environment, experimentation with future roles, the construction of career projects, and the social-historic contextualization shared via group relations.

Group career counselling with a psychodynamic focus: Proposal for a conceptual-methodological model

The following strategy is the result of 40 years of experience obtained through research and interventions with career counselling group practices conducted by a specialized service at the Institute of Psychology of the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil. This service has helped an average of 600 clients a year, 80 % of whom attended career counselling groups with a psychodynamic focus. Approximately 19,000 clients have been served and 1,600 groups have been held. The University of Sao Paulo is a public institution located at the most populous city in Brazil, which offers free assistance services for the entire population, not only college students. The vocational guidance and career counselling services are offered at the Institute of Psychology. Over the years, the group of clients has been mainly composed of young

high school students 16–18 years old (about 60 %), mostly from private high schools (about 70 %) and with interest in attending college (about 60 %); about 65 % were women and about 62 % people were in upper and upper-middle social classes.

This specialized service also has another group of clients (about 40 %) composed by working men and women, 25–50 years old, coming from the middle and lower social classes, interested in developing their careers or thinking about strategies to obtain jobs or to begin small enterprises; about 15 % of these people are unemployed, disabled, and vulnerable. About 80 % of the clients from the two described groups have attended career counselling groups and showed the preference for this model of counselling. This is of cultural significance in Brazil, because a considerable part of their everyday activities usually occur collectively with others.

The model has some important and unique characteristics that may contribute to career counselling practices around the world. We underscore that the conceptual and methodological bases of the model consist of an unstructured intervention modality with a psychodynamic focus, something that is not very common in career counselling in other countries. In the Latin American context, one must be alert to major socio-economic inequalities and social instability, precarious employment, and high levels of informality in the labor market. These must be considered when constructing life projects during the client's professional life.

Another characteristic is that the proposed unstructured group technique opens the possibility for members to engage in new experiences, spontaneous situations, and to learn how to deal with what is different and unexpected. The experience allows members of the group to live crises and prepare themselves for unexpected changes, like those that mark the context of everyday life. Finally, another important issue is that this model has been developed in a university setting; research and intervention with a large number of users and students, besides professionals taking courses, has led to improvements in the technique. Beyond that, the model has been used with people of different ages, gender, socio-economic status, level of education, and life stage.

Conceptual model

The theoretical base of this group model stem from the psychodynamic contributions of Donald Winnicott, Didier Anzieu, and René Kaës. According to Kaës (1993), each group is formed by three distinct and simultaneously interlinked psychic spaces: the intra-psychic space, the attached space, and the group's own space. The simultaneous presence of these intersubjective and intra-psychic group phenomena brings to mind Winnicott's (1965) conceptualization of the transitional and potential space and the intermediate area of experience. Kaës (1993) described some group processes as intermediate formations—those that serve as bridges between different elements. Intermediate formations are those that allow one to articulate, re-articulate, turn on, turn off, and mobilize contrary forces in conflict. These processes articulate the intra-psychic space and the group. Intermediate formations are shaken by crises and traumas that shattered the once continuous area between spaces. The group technique favours the presence of these intermediate

formations, which are worked on and used to deal with these various spaces, their articulations, and disjunctions (Käes, 2005; Käes & Kirshner, 2006).

Following Winnicott's line of thought, Anzieu (1984) specified that the group includes the illusion of how our group is good, which could lead to greater creativity. The group's facilitator, some of its members, and/or the group as a whole could have the maternal function of sustaining, supporting the holding, and providing a shared experience. The group can function as a transitional object, enabling the creative and productive experience proposed by the encounter with multiplicity, plurality, and diversity. It would also help individuals cope with critical situations and depressing experiences, share with others, leave their inner world, and expose themselves to live with the demands of external reality. The group technique can provide a holding environment—a sustenance aimed at supplying stable reference points needed for time–space integration—fine tuning qualities and holdings (Lehman, 2001; Winnicott, 1965).

The group process mobilizes internal displacements and questions the preconceived stereotyped ideas that clients have of themselves, of the world, of the labour market, and of professions. This helps social representations become more flexible and allows truths to be discussed. Once these *truths* are exposed, a space for doubts and new questions is opened. Experiencing crises promotes ruptures in the continuity between plans, illusions, and old certainties. In this respect, the group can function as an intermediary between what the client was and what the client can become. This transitional space allows for the re-establishment of symbols of union within the rupture experience. The client who seeks career counselling must reorganize and articulate his or her intra-psychic, intersubjective, and social relationships. Nevertheless, s/he may find it hard to do so if this process is carried out directly in the social world. The group technique whose basic configuration forms a temporary space of external sustenance, holding, and transition can help clients build their projects for a professional life.

In conclusion, the group can provide participants with an intermediate articulation and passage space between different instances: the intra-psychic and the external world; the personal reality and the labour market reality. It is a space for the construction of personal projects because of the qualitative holding functions of the facilitator and the group members.

Technical aspects

The main components of the model include career counselling objectives, the kind of group modality used, the size and make-up of the group, the facilitator's function, the strategies and procedures used in the group process.

Career counselling objectives

In a context marked by instability, job precariousness, unemployment, and informality, and with limited possibilities of constructing the self in the working world, the career choice is linked to the construction of the project of a professional

life (Metz & Guichard, 2009). From this perspective, the objective of career counselling is to help the clients' self-construction projects, which could be defined as actions involving the construction of a future in the me/other relationship along two dimensions: (a) the subjective and identity dimension of constructing a professional life project (seeking meaning in life), and (b) the operative and instrumental dimension of a professional action plan meant to achieve a specific objective. In short, group career counselling with a psychodynamic focus is a clinical-operative method that involves the exploration of self and basic psychosocial issues (clinical method), as well as ways to elaborate them as actions in the world (operative method) via constant choices within the construction of a professional life project (Müller, 1988).

The type of group modality used

The group technique used is defined as a group work with therapeutic function and an unstructured model of intervention, which, according to Zimmerman's (1993) classification, is group work characterized by interventions focused both on group relationships and on the individuals in the group. It is a relational, back-and-forth process in which the facilitator receives the demands of each person and uses them to inspire the group's reflection on them. In other words, an individual demand has an echo in the group's work and is returned as content to be elaborated on by the client who presented that demand. This is the basic movement in the group work. The therapeutic function aims at dealing with the basic vocational problem, which is usually related to the difficulty the individual has in projecting himself or herself into the future and allowing the construction of the self and the relations within the labour market (Fernandes et al., 2003).

It is an unstructured in that the group work has no previous planning in terms of activities and content sequence. There is, however, an open planned with central themes to be worked on in sequence and in intensity that emerge during the group process. This is similar to the group counselling model proposed by Jones et al. (1970). The proposal occurs in moments of crisis and transition that demand choices, decisions, and projections, all of which lead to changes. The crisis is generated by a rupture in the feeling of life continuity and integrity, which can be understood as a rupture in the clients' sense-making process about their own lives and their social and work reality (Lehman, 2001; Winnicott, 1965).

Formation and composition of the group

The group process is composed of six sessions of 2–3 h each. This number was shown to be sufficient and avoids dispersion to other life themes. The number of participants ranges from 5–15, which is considered adequate for the maintenance of group integration dynamics and for a wealth of contributions. The ideal strategy to form the group is to bring together people who find themselves at similar moments in life and with similar conflicts (Carvalho, 1995; Lehman et al., 2011). The limited time frame (finite time) and the focus on constructing a professional life project (specific theme) can lead to resistance responses from group members. However,

that resistance allows for the emergence of a vocational conflict from which the professional life project can develop.

The facilitator(s) function

The group facilitator works together with a co-facilitator. Both have a nondirective function and help participants to build strategies, seek job market information, elaborate representations and meanings of self and jobs, and articulate subjective desires and objective possibilities. They help construct a space in which the reality of the labour market can be considered including aspects of flexibility and plurality of possibilities. They intermediate actions and processes needed for the construction of a professional life project. In this model, the group becomes a space for the exchange of experiences; group facilitators help clients understand their fantasies, fears, perceptions of self, and career projects. Besides facilitating the career choice, they help clients with personal development.

Main strategies used

In the first session, the facilitators strive to integrate the group; they encourage members to communicate and share their issues by posing questions and expressing their concerns and doubts. The emerging content allows the members of the group to recognize what belongs to each person as themes are shared. The sharing, the reflection on personal projects, and the reality of the labour market are themes that emerge and that allow each member to think about his or her own project as well as appropriate themes from the experiences of other members.

The facilitators encourage members to share experiences, interests, concerns, and doubts; they also help group members make links to the profession to be chosen and to parental models, while reflecting on social and cultural pressures. The group leaders facilitate intermediation and communications, questioning, appropriation of desires and goals and the development of a life project. They must also facilitate the difficult passage from dependency on parental and family models to the construction of personal models, going from preconceived internal models to the demands of external reality. The importance of the contract established between the facilitators and the group, in order to make an agreement about the main rules for the group functioning, are fundamental. The facilitators are always focused on the proposed task and this allows all that takes place in the group to be understood as an element of the construction of a career project.

Psychodynamic counselling as a listening model prioritizes the word and what is being said in the group. Facilitators often use words as mediating objects. This assumption is the basis of the facilitators' interventions and can be achieved through the notes of feelings not made explicit, alerts on facts or relationships among facts that have gone unnoticed, contradictions between what is spoken and the attitudes and nonverbal elements, and the interpretations of the transference elements.

Transference is a psychoanalytical concept understood as a phenomenon defined by unconscious redirection of feelings from the client to the therapist. The unconscious projections from clients to facilitators enable everything that happens

in the group, consciously or unconsciously, can be understood as an element of vocational conflict, and should be worked through in the group. Additionally, there are some playful group techniques, collages, and games that facilitate access to the word, exposing internal contents or unexplored contents in a non-threatening manner. When necessary, the facilitators provide some information or clarify doubts regarding the group's task, the reality of the labour market, or additional training requirements.

Group process realization procedures

According to Bohoslavsky (1977), before any group is formed, a vocational triage interview is conducted to seek: (a) recognition of the basic vocational conflict; (b) identification of the client's conditions and his/her capacity to begin a counselling process; and (c) referral to treatment in a group formed according to pre-established criteria, such as schedules, availability, ages. Each individual undergoes an evaluation interview where the facilitators determine if the group process will benefit the person. This is not a final evaluation to be used for treatment planning, but a preliminary evaluation that will be repeated during the course of each session. During the process, the facilitators assume a questioning role and assess the person's areas of tension and the way s/he resolves conflicts. Thus, evaluation is an on-going task performed by the facilitators.

One fundamental characteristic of this specific group career counselling approach is the handling of transference, for it includes aspects of the transference to the future. Here, the facilitator's counter-transference is a fundamental element for the construction of these on-going evaluations. It can be stated that, from the recognition by the facilitators of the transference and counter-transference feelings, some hypotheses can be made in order to assist and enable access to critical points of unconscious conflict; these hypotheses assist facilitators in conducting the group. The transference to the past is neither systematically stimulated nor interpreted, except when it becomes an obstacle to the group's development. Transferences and counter-transferences, present and future, are instruments that facilitate the understanding of what is taking place in the group.

Although there is no pre-defined content sequence for the group's functioning, a tentative group process trajectory can be outlined. The first two sessions focus on the expectations involving the construction of a life project. In the first session, there is presentation, recovery of career and life histories and a survey of the issues to be addressed. In the second session, there are discussions of the changes taking place in the labour market and their implications for group members. The third session is an intermediate moment between subjective construction and reality. In the third session, each person reports on research and more realistic outlooks on the labour market and on himself or herself. The last three sessions are dedicated to the elaboration of an action plan, defined as the practical concretization of the life project. The fourth session is important for defining projects and potential risks. Finally, the fifth and sixth sessions address the presentation of projects, mourning the end of the group, and evaluating the counselling process.

Case illustration

As a way to illustrate the proposed model, we report a brief excerpt of the beginning of a career counselling group and an analysis of the methodological aspects involved. During the first session of a career counselling group with unemployed adults, after the presentation of its objectives, the facilitator asked to each participant introduce himself or herself to the rest of the group. The participant called C. (housekeeper, 37 years old, divorced with four children at an early age), said she wants to join a medical college, which has made the others declare their career projects. The facilitator asked, “What criteria should be considered in building a career project?” Each participant thought about their own projects, and the group discussed the various possibilities and limitations of them, including the time dedicated to carrying out these projects. At this time, C. realized that the medical programme is full-time and that she has no one to care for her children, and said, “Not every dream is possible for everyone. I cannot attend a medical programme because [I have to take care of] my children. I should think about an alternative plan.”

The group is composed of people at similar moments of life and with similar conflicts (unemployment situation) in seeking employment, which has facilitated mutual identification and group communication. This situation became clear when an individual solution to unemployment (attending a university) turned into a possible solution for the group (individual issue becomes a group issue). This group movement was only possible by the facilitator actions that turned an individual issue into a group issue (group work). The facilitator encouraged members to share experiences (group goals) through his earlier question, “What criteria should be considered in building a career project?” It is important to note that the facilitator also reconfigured the steps previously planned to the intervention by benefitting from C.’s speech (1st stage—presentation of the participants) to propose that others think about their own career projects (5th and 6th stages of the model). This highlights the flexibility of the unstructured intervention.

Finally, the group assignment allowed for the individual issue that was reflected upon by the group to be returned to C.; she reconsidered her own issue in light of the group discussion, both in personal terms by saying that, “Not every dream is possible” (drawing the boundaries of reality—therapeutic function of the model), and in operational terms by stating that, “I should think about an alternative plan” (reconstruction of the career project—operational function of the model). It underscores the proposed model as a clinical-operative method.

Limitations and perspectives of the model

In terms of its application and theoretical-technical construction, the model presented above may have some limitations. First, it is focused on crisis and may be only recommended for specific periods. The model is not designed for long-term counselling as a developmental strategy in non-crisis moments. Second, it requires training and specific knowledge of psychodynamic (group) counselling, which is not

always available in various countries or localities. Third, this process consists of fifteen or 18 h of intervention and follows a sequence that should not be interrupted. Fourth, it introduces a new modality of providing career counselling that has not been extensively empirically tested. The existing evaluation studies of this model are qualitative in nature and there has been no systematic or meta-analytic study of its effectiveness to date. Despite this acknowledgement, it may be worthwhile providing some qualitative evidence of the career counselling effectiveness. These may be obtained in examining the statements of the clients at the end of the groups, which invariably highlight that the group experience provided: self-knowledge, a holding for their main fears and difficulties in the career planning and career choices, a more realistic understanding of the world of work, a decrease in their fear of making mistakes, and references for career planning. Former clients usually recommend the treatment to other prospective clients.

The main limitations of the model can be potential strengths and can identify an agenda for future research and interventions. Because is known about the applicability of the model outside Latin America, testing its use in different countries outside of Latin America, which are also facing labour market issues would evaluate the model's effectiveness with other populations. Further systematic and/or meta-analytic investigations should be carried out.

Final considerations

The Brazilian experience with this locally-developed model, gathered over the past 40 years, underscores the importance of the group technique in career counselling. Herein, we have highlighted two basic functions: acceptance and understanding of the difficulties of choice, mediated by the comparison with others, is necessary in order to construct new representations of the self and of the world. Furthermore, the support for the intersubjective articulation of people and work through the (re) construction of the career life project is a basic foundation of this model. The group technique can help in this process by becoming an intermediate space or holding environment (Winnicott, 1965) for the development of career projects that begin with the space in the group and later occupy a place in the personal/social world relationship—a space for the concretization of career life projects.

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