

The Career Diamond: A Teaching Tool Illustrating The Process Of Career Counseling

Patricia Andersen, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor
Midwestern State University
patricia.andersen@mwsu.edu

Patricia Andersen is the primary author for a book entitled, *Career Counseling and Development in a Global Economy* published by Lahaska Press of Houghton Mifflin, 2006. She taught graduate courses in counseling at the graduate level for over 15 years. She also has extensive counseling experience, and has worked as a consultant in industry.

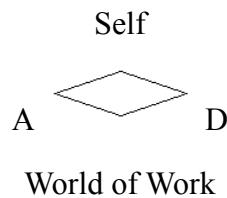
I remember the career counseling course I took in my masters program many years ago. The instructor repeatedly lectured, “Career counseling is the same as personal counseling.” He made it abundantly clear that “test and tell” was not appropriate. But how to implement a career counseling process was not fully explicated. It has taken me years, counseling career clients and teaching graduate students, to develop practices to overcome the “test and tell” conundrum.

What’s missing in most teaching texts regarding career counseling is a clear sense of process. I have come to the conclusion that, career counseling is not fully the same as other forms of counseling. Typically career clients come to counseling asking for a test and/or expecting a decision-making orientation. Counselors, following the client’s lead and wanting to help, quickly fall into the trap of seeking resolution. The collusion of the client and counselor to find an answer seems easily solved with a test that will, if not give outright answers, offer alternatives from which the client can choose.

The Career Diamond illustrates the internal movement experienced by careerists who examine their self concepts in the context of realistic external demands. Using the diamond model in teaching career

development and in counseling demonstrates the process to students and to clients. The purpose of the diagram is to show the process of exploring followed by an integration of personal and external factors in career decisions. A second purpose of emphasizing process is to relay the ever evolving nature of career change across the lifespan as careerists adapt to self growth and job market demands. Career counselors can use the Career Diamond to visually depict a process where the need for self exploration is obvious, overcoming "test and tell" expectations, and the press for a final "answer."

The Career Diamond places the Self on top of the diagram, representing the person in charge of managing career issues. The World of Work is placed along the bottom representing the external factors influencing career choices.



A stands for "awareness" as the client becomes aware of the need to determine a career choice or to make a change. D stands for "deciding" as the client determines a choice for this particular career movement.

The diamond shape depicts the first phase (Exploring) as expansive, $<$, representing self exploration and expanding information, coming together to a Vision in the center of the diamond. The second half of the diamond, the Deciding phase, is characterized as contracting, $>$, where personal priorities are set, options are eliminated, and compromises are made to meet external demands. This expanding and narrowing process, $\langle \rangle$, represents developmental movement as well as the process of each career transition. Of course, the process illustrates career development and decision-making according to the theories of Super (1994) and Ginzberg (1972).

A string of diamonds illustrates the process taking place throughout each careerist's lifetime. Each time a major job change is made, the process will repeat itself illustrated as $\langle \rangle \langle \rangle \langle \rangle \langle \rangle$. Clients can learn that the exploring-to-convergence process is a natural reoccurrence. The self can manage change if awareness is in tune with new opportunities and with the need to continually build personal strengths. In a fluid economy, the self becomes the only stable factor as external influences continually change. Post

modern career development requires an expectation of change, divergent thinking, and a decision-making process where the convergence of personal and external factors reoccurs regularly.

The Career Diamond illustrates Gelatt's (1991) sense of positive uncertainty where optimism prevails when change occurs. Openness to serendipity as Krumboltz et. al (1999) describe can also be shown by reopening diamonds. Finally, Waterman's (2000) phrase of informed opportunism is demonstrated by the convergence of external information and personal factors. Career counselors will serve clients well by helping clients develop such coping attitudes to deal with change.

The Career Diamond also illustrates the importance of self-efficacy which may be critically important for students of diverse racial and lower economic backgrounds. If the diamond is turned upside down with the external factors on top, the pressure of outside realities presses down on the self and flattens the self out, reducing self exploration and expression. The dominating external factors create demand decisions where survival realities take precedence over the person's preferences.

External Pressures

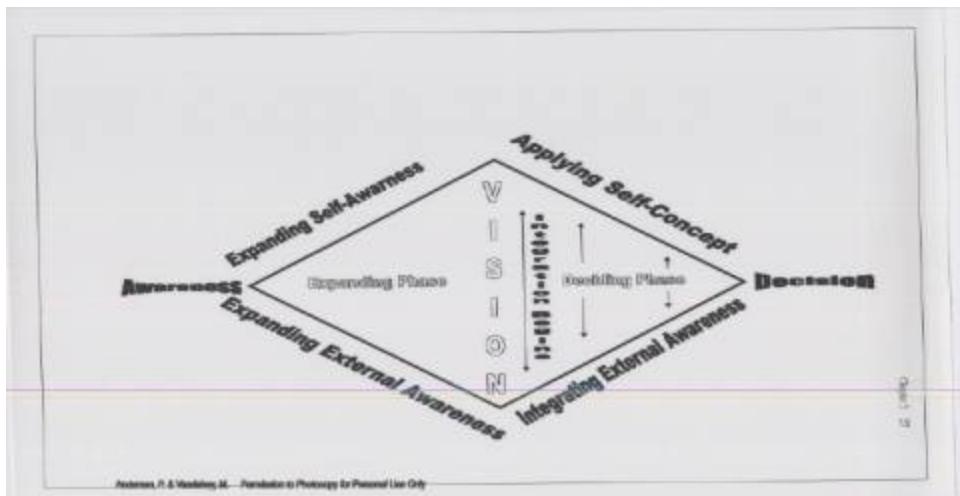


Of course, managing the career development or change process is affected by personality preferences, strengths and blind spots. The Meyers Briggs Type Indicator's 16 labels for personality factors can be used to demonstrate how individual styles affect a client's natural reactions to each stage of the process. The expanding and narrowing process, , has a differential impact on MBTI 16 types. A is associated with the I/E continuum as stylistic preferences determine how a person deals with the inner and outer worlds. The S/N function operates during the expansive, exploring phase. The N function supports the expansive movement while the S inserts facts of world of work reality. Together the functions can create a realistic vision of a future career choice. The T/F function manages the contracting movement of the deciding phase. The F activates the sorting of personal priorities while the T function logically analyzes the integration of values and realistic considerations. Both the T/F functions bring together the self concept and the world of work demands to form a decision. The J/P polarities predict the pace and definitiveness of the person's decisions. J organizes the factors to firm conclusions, resisting a reopening of the process.

P struggles to determine a final decision point while readily reopening to a new exploring process and a new vision.

The Career Diamond depicts a fluid process, where self concepts adapt to new realities with new visions, and ever evolving choices. As careerists desire and require change, client's personality characteristics will come into play regularly. A person's strengths determine how each phase of the process is experienced by the client. Clients can approach the career tasks with ease or discomfort depending on the demands of each phase. Each person has strengths that can be used to enhance the process, and each type has areas where movement can be difficult. Counseling interventions can be individualized to encourage clients where natural strengths may dominate, neglecting an essential part of the process. For example, clients favoring the S function may need extra support to create an expansive vision whereas the dominant N function might need interventions that point to realistic facts for vision building. See the following chart showing personality functions interacting with the career diamond process. An additional chart showing the reactions of each of the sixteen types to the career change process is available from the author upon request. Career counselors can utilize both the visual depiction of career movement through the diamond's phases as well as knowledge of personality preferences to help clients achieve growth and cope with the demands of change.

It takes considerable counseling skills to determine a client's unique needs. The readiness and willingness on the part of the client to engage in an identity quest and to do the necessary reality testing depends partly on the counselor's skill in facilitating such a process. On one side, career counselors and clients examine personal considerations such as values and interests, personality traits, family of origin issues, and personal needs. On the other side, clients examine occupational information describing career activities, training, and personnel interactions. The integration of both sides allows a client to develop an adaptive career identity. The goal of career counseling is not to make a decision or to determine an answer but to create a picture of self that can adapt to changing personal needs and realities. Learning to manage such a process prepares clients to renew career self-concepts and to cope with external requirements each time change happens.



Personality Type and Career Diamond Process

	ST	SF	NF	NT
Function:	Sensing+Thinking	Sensing+Feeling	Intuition+Feeling	Intuition+Thinking
Focus Their Attention On:	Facts	Facts	Possibilities	Possibilities
Explore:	Realistic Facts	Realistic Values	Expansive Values	Expansive Systems
Vision:	Practical	Pragmatic	Enthusiasm	Logical
Integrating:	Step by step, Thorough	Grounded Values	Subjective Missions	Ingenious Combinations
Deciding:	Logical	Personal/Relational	Personal/Relational	Analytical
Need Help with:	Personal Vision	Projecting Vision	Realistic Grounding	Personal values Impact on others

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