



The Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the Practice of Quebec Career Guidance Counsellors?

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Abstract

This research presents the results of two surveys carried out in 2015 and 2016 among Québec career counsellors on the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) into their practice. We will present results of the use of ICTs in interventions, namely: the purposes for which ICTs are used in practice; the level of confidence to use the Internet, to conduct interviews at distance; and incentives to integrate ICTs into its practice. It turns out that while ICTs have been in the career guidance profession for more than 40 years (Watts, 2002), their uses are often limited to disseminating and transmitting information.

The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has been part of the practice of career guidance counsellors for more than forty years (Watts, 2002). Since the arrival of the Internet, the possibilities of offering various forms of provision of distance educational and vocational guidance

have multiplied (Sampson and Makela, 2014; Savard, Gingras and Turcotte, 2002; Watts and Dent, 2006). Despite the presence of ICTs in career guidance practices, their use are largely limited to managing and communicating information, offering clients engaged in self-directed guidance processes some support and administering tests (Bimrose, Kettunen and Goddard, 2015; Bimrose, Hughes and Barnes, 2011). Few guidance counsellors offer counselling services at distance, yet one of the first motivations for using ICTs is to reach populations who would otherwise not request career counselling services (Backhaus, A., Agha, Z. Maglione, M, Repp, A., Ross, B., Zuest, ..., Thorp, 2012; Mallen, Jenkins, Vogel and Day, 2011). The fact that a growing proportion of the population uses and integrates ICTs in their daily activities also puts pressure on the integration of ICTs in the provision of career guidance services (Bimrose et al., 2015; Hooley, Hutchinson and Watts, 2010).

Research has been increasing over the last fifteen

years and some observations have emerged on the questions of effectiveness, ethical dimensions and modalities of intervention. What we know about these questions comes largely from researches related to the field of personal counselling and psychotherapy. The findings of distance interventions show that the majority of interventions are provided via email exchanges or asynchronous or synchronous chat sessions (Barak, Hen, Meyran and Shapiro, 2008; Richards and Vigano, 2013); that few online counselling is done through the use of videoconferencing (Barak et al., 2008; Kraus, 2011). In addition, these interventions are usually of short duration (Barak et al., 2008; Kraus, 2011) and are not well integrated into the initial training of counselling and guidance specialists (Anthony, 2015; Kraus, 2011; Richards and Vigano, 2013). These remote interventions can respond to a variety of challenges related to the field of mental health and human relations, particularly those related to relational dimensions, family, career development, mood

and anxiety disorder (Bimrose et al, 2015; Finn and Barak, 2010; Kraus, 2011). Research also shows that distance counselling practices are as effective as face to face practices (Barak et al., 2008; Kraus, 2011; Richards and Vigano, 2013). It should be noted that these surveys were conducted with personal counselling specialists who already use various modalities of distance intervention. However, counsellors and guidance counsellors questioned their role of integrating the Internet and distance counselling practices in career guidance (Vuorinen, Sampson and Kettunen, 2011). In Canada, very little is known about the intensity and type of use of ICTs by career guidance counsellors in their daily practice. In this paper, we present the main results of two surveys conducted in Québec in 2015 and 2016 with groups of career counsellors.

Methodology

Participants

Participants in both surveys are career guidance counsellors from the province of Quebec in Canada. The first survey was conducted in 2015 (29 counsellors) by the author in collaboration with the College of Quebec Career Counsellors (OCCOQ). Initially, the OCCOQ launched an invitation to participate in this survey to nearly 2,500 Québec career guidance counsellors asking if they were using ICTs other than telephone and e-mail in their practice. 185 counsellors

responded positively, and of these, 112 agreed to receive the questionnaire. 29 counsellors completed the questionnaire. The second survey was conducted in 2016 by the CEFRIO and the Conseil interprofessionnel du Québec (2016) with the assistance of twelve professional orders in the fields of mental health and human relations. 3784 professionals responded including 236 career guidance counsellors. In total, both surveys benefited from the participation of 265 guidance counsellors, 81% of whom were women with an average of 14 years experience. They came from all sectors of guidance practice and the majority of counsellors were working in the public sector. Most of them were employees. Both surveys were conducted using web questionnaires.

Results

The nature and wording of the questions in the two surveys are not identical. We will indicate, if necessary, how these questions could differ and provide the results according to the survey and according to the following themes: use of ICTs in intervention; purposes for which ICTs are used in practice; level of confidence in using the Internet, conducting interviews at a distance; and finally the incentives for the integration of ICTs in its practice.

Use of ICTs in Intervention

In both surveys, guidance counsellors indicate that the telephone (51% for 2015 and 38% for 2016) and e-mail (respectively 48% for 2015 and 40% for 2016) are “often or very often” used to intervene with their clients, but also social networks (82%) as evidenced by the results of the survey of 2016. Very little use is made of videoconferencing and Web conferencing; the two surveys reported a use “often or very often used” in a proportion of only 6%.

Purposes of the use of ICTs in its practice

Both surveys included questions about the purposes for which the professional was using ICT.

Overall, the results presented in Table 1 show that ICTs are mainly used to search for and disseminate information, make appointments or follow-up with clients and, increasingly, according to the survey of 2016, for the keeping of records; from time to time to administer tests, get training; and finally, very rarely to conduct career guidance interviews at distance.

Here are two comments from the 2015 survey that illustrate the mindset in which counsellors see the use of ICTs in their practice:

“... it is mainly for educational and professional information via email or telephone, distance education and testing that I use ICTs ...”

“... I encourage my clients to use these technologies for targeted information searches and to answer questionnaires. We take over this information during the face to face interviews ... “

Level of confidence to use the Internet, to conduct interviews at distance

The 2016 survey asked counsellors to assess their ability to use the Internet. The counsellors gave themselves a high average to self-efficacy to use Internet, a score of 8.7 out of 10, particularly to find the information that they search for (9.0 out of 10). In the 2015 survey, using part of questionnaire developed by Glasheen, Campbell and Shochet (2013), a section was devoted to measure self-confidence in conducting distance interviews. Counsellors showed a moderately high level of confidence in conducting interviews at a distance. They self-rated “high to very high” at 55% for technical skills, 65% for understanding the legal consequences, 45% for keeping control of the interview, and 65%

to ensure confidentiality.

Incentives for integrating ICTs into its practice

On what guidelines do consultants refer to use ICTs? In the 2016 survey, 83% of respondents answered “yes” that they relied on the guidelines provided by their professional order, and “yes” at 55% from the guidelines provided by their employer.

In the 2015 survey, the question “How did you learn to conduct interviews at distance?” counsellors reported that it was through informal means that they were trained, in a proportion of 45% by peers, 27% by trial and error and 27% by personal readings. In the 2016 survey, few questions were asked on their perception of being sufficiently informed about digital issues: respondents answered “yes” to: 74% to secure access to digital devices; 47% to ensure confidentiality in the transmission of information; 50% to know how to ensure data protection. When asked in the 2016 survey, “What could help you to integrate more ICTs,” they say “yes” to 73%

that they expect to receive clear guidelines from their order, and to 58% if there was an increased offer of training on technical aspects of ICTs integration, and “yes” to 51% if this offer relates to standards and regulations. In the 2016 survey, counsellors responded “yes” to 41% that if they were seeing increased demand from their clients, this could be an incentive to integrate more ICTs into their practice.

Discussion

The objective of this article was to present the results of two surveys conducted in 2015 and 2016 with career guidance counsellors in Quebec, Canada on the use of ICTs in their practice. There are limitations to this study, particularly the size of survey samples and the fact that the questions were not asked in exactly the same way from one survey to another. The analysis of the results shows however that from one survey to another, similar and complementary findings seem to emerge.

The results indicate that the counsellors who participat-

Table 1

For what purposes are ICTs is "often or very often used"?

Purpose	Survey 2015 (n=29)	Survey 2016 (n=236)
Find / disseminate information	66%	53%
Appointment / follow-up	58%	37%
Test administration	31%	
Training	21%	
Record keeping	28%	59%
Career guidance interview	3%	

ed in these studies are already comfortable using the Internet as evidenced by the high scores obtained on the level of self-efficacy in using the Internet in 2016. The fact that participants in the two surveys were recruited via the Web, could be an element of explanation. A larger sample, drawn from lists of members of different associations of counselors and guidance counsellors, may have revealed a greater disparity in the averages obtained on this scale. Three types of technologies stand out from the rest in terms of the use of ICTs in intervention: telephone, e-mail and the Internet, especially via social networks such as Facebook. The averages obtained on these technologies suggest that they are generally integrated into the practice of career guidance counsellors.

It should also be noted that some of the aims for intervention appear to more than others likely involve the use of ICTs, in particular those related to: accessing and disseminating information, making appointments or follow-up with clients, record keeping; a little less to administer tests, to be trained; and finally, rarely to accompany clients at distance. These results are substantially similar to those of the studies conducted by Bimrose et al. (2011) and Hoolley et al. (2010) which indicated that guidance counsellors used ICTs primarily to communicate and transmit information to their clients. Participants in our study do not seem to make wider use of ICTs in their practice. The re-

sults, on the other hand, indicate that if the professional order of guidance counsellors provided clear guidelines for the use of ICTs and offered more training on the technical and ethical aspects of distance career guidance, we could see greater integration of ICTs in professional interventions. Similarly, as Glasheen et al (2013) noted in their study with guidance counsellors in Australia, if these specialists were able to note higher demand from their clients, this may increase the use of ICTs into their practice, possibly at the level of conducting distance interviews.

This study found that although ICTs have been an integral part of guidance counsellors' practice for more than 40 years (Watts, 2002), their use is often limited to managing and transmitting educational and vocational information.

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