CHAPTER 10

Using the U-Cube for Career Counselling With Adolescents to Develop Career Conversations

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Abstract. The U-Cube is a play-based tool for constructivist career assessment and counselling. The U-Cube is fashioned on the famous Rubik's Cube. Each face of a square side has career-related words that can be manipulated as part of a counselling process. Clients can be asked to find words that are personally meaningful and talk about these words with the counsellor. This tool is particularly useful for clients who benefit from additional support to engage in dialogue in relation to their career. The case of "Reece" demonstrates the utility of the cube for facilitating career conversations.

Key Words: career education, career counselling, working alliance, gamification, career decision-making

INTRODUCTION

The chapter focuses on counselling for adolescents' career planning and decision-making. Success in the contemporary world of work requires the psychological qualities of adaptability, capacity to change and compromise, problem-solving, entrepreneurial thinking, and self-management. Career counselling for the contemporary and future world of work must support clients to develop these qualities. The constant and ever changing modern world of work, combined with casualisation, globalisation, and mechanisation demonstrate how paramount career adaptability, and the development of that adaptability is, and the part career counselling can play in this space. Adaptability could be conceived as consistent, and often concurrent planning, exploring, deciding, and taking actions (Rottinghaus Buelow, Matyja, & Schneider, 2011; Rottinghaus, Eshelman, Gore, Keller, Schneider, & Harris, 2017).

Engaging adolescents in career counselling requires practitioners to understand counselling processes and content that adolescents find meaningful and relevant to their experiences. Gamification is an engagement strategy that may appeal to young clients. This term is bandied about in education, and has a range of different meanings, the differences will not be discussed in this chapter but certainly are worth reading about. For the uses of this chapter the definition is "The use of game design elements in non-game contexts" (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, &

Nacke, 2011). The use of persuasive design and persuasive technology in career exploration and education can support the career development process through providing a conduit of relevance or engagement through which the practitioner can gain access to the student's motivation or interest.

In this chapter we describe examples of gamified career counselling instruments. One specific instrument, the U-Cube, which is based on the Rubik's Cube, facilitates a positive working alliance between client and counsellor. In addition to its relational utility, the U-Cube uses career language in a gamified manner to enable the client to explore career ideas and stimulate conversation between client and counsellor. This chapter bridges career development theory and practice to highlight a way forward for practitioners to develop adaptability and resilience in adolescents through gamification in counselling.

As the world turns to the fourth industrial revolution with its exponential changes in technology, paradigm shifts in economies, businesses and societies, there is a need to support youth to understand how important their future is, and can be, to both themselves and to society overall, and to understand the skills necessary to be successful and content in this digital age. The postmodern movement and the social constructionist paradigm for vocational psychology career development (McIlveen & Schultheiss, 2012) opens a new vista on theory and practices for career counselling in this era (e.g., Busacca & Rehfuss, 2016; Maree, 2007; McMahon, 2017). In particular, constructivism and social constructionism provide impetus to qualitative approaches to career assessment (McMahon & Watson, 2015), along with an emerging literature that articulates principles for their design (e.g., McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003).

Along with the critical five ingredients of career interventions' effectiveness (Brown et al., 2003), the working alliance is a key predictor of counselling outcomes (Masdonati, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2009; Whiston, Rossier, & Barón, 2015). Working alliance refers to the relationship between client and practitioner, and is a tripartite model made up of goals, tasks, and bonds. Goals relates to the agreement between client and practitioner on what needs to be done. Tasks relate to how the goals are to be completed. Finally, bonds denote the emotional connection or relationship between client and counsellor.

Engaging young clients in career services is a complex issue (Sampson, McClain, Musch, & Reardon, 2013), and young people who are in need of career counselling are not necessarily going to first engage in a dialogue with a school or campus career practitioner (Fouad et al., 2006); instead, those early influential conversations may be with a parent (Powers & Myers, 2016; Young et al., 2008). Therefore, it is incumbent upon practitioners of career counselling to ask, "How can we support youth to learn about themselves so as to actively participate in conversations that about the design of their careers?" Moreover, it is important to ask, "Why would they bother to listen to career practitioners, let alone engage in a constructive conversation?" Thus, we present here the conceptual and practical utility of a counselling tool that is designed to enhance the working alliance between client and practitioner: the U-Cube (Alchin, 2014), shown in Figure 1.

Case vignette: "Reece"

To demonstrate the U-Cube, we describe its usefulness to the client, Reece (pseudonym), a 15 year old student referred for career counselling because his teacher saw a consistent lack of interest and motivation at school. His school is situated in a low-medium socio economic area and is a public school. It has 1500 students from a wide diversity of cultural backgrounds and is co-educational. Approximately 15% of year 12 students are accepted into university when they finish school, 65% are accepted into vocational education, and 20% are either working, or attempting to look for work.

Reece's initial presentation is of a pallid, lanky, and spotty teen, who is somewhat unresponsive to the usual pleasantries of conversation, along with poor eye contact. Reece sometimes completes homework, but often attends school sleepy, and slightly dishevelled. According to his teachers, Reece achieves fair marks, with minor effort but much cajoling. He lives at home with his mother (33 years of age), who is not currently in paid work, having been made redundant from an administrative position. His mother bought him a new X-box with some of the redundancy payout. Reece spends each Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night at the residence of his father (35 years of age), who works 20 hours per week at the local abattoir, and is wanting more hours. Reece has a girlfriend of one month, Chloe (pseudonym), who, according to Reece, is "really pretty". Despite his reluctance to talk with adults and teachers, Reece has no difficulty talking with his friends—his phone has been confiscated five times in the past year because at his school phones are not allowed in class.

Much of this case material about Reece was relatively easy to obtain, despite his apparent lack of interest in attending career counselling with the first author. The U-Cube was instrumental in enabling Reece to share his personal story.

The U-cube

The U-cube (Alchin, 2014) was conceptualised as a tool to encourage and develop dialogue with young people around the areas of career influence. The U-Cube, fashioned on the Rubik's Cube (shown in Figure 1) was designed to support clients to consider their career influences in a safe environment, not from a list or a survey, but instead from a colourful toy, allowing them to fidget, manipulate, and move the faces to different connections, scenarios and collections of words. In an era in which ICT and online career resources have proven invaluable (Sampson & Osborn, 2015) and digital game ware proliferates, the U-Cube is a tangible alternative to games delivered online or on a smart phone or table device. We believe that the tactile experience is inherent to the U-Cube's attractiveness to clients.

If a practitioner is talking to a student who is not "engaged" in the conversation, it may be because the student sees the encounter as irrelevant. If Reece does not have role models who value work, why should he value it? If work cannot be connected to his career influences, why would Reece be interested in discussing his career future? If Reece is unaware of his strengths, skills or abilities, or has never reflected upon these, how can he choose appropriate? career opportunities? If something is not engaging, how can it be fun or enjoyable? Why would anyone do it again, unless they could see the value in it? Thus, when designing the U-Cube, Alchin was attempting to ease the personal nature of discussion through the provision of a problem solving toy which used the literacy of career and career influences to stimulate discussion.

The U-Cube was designed around a constructivist and social constructionist perspective, inclusive of people, environments, strengths, values, skills and interests (see Table 1 for the included words on each face of the U-cube). The U-cube's development attempted to facilitate a process leading to a more holistic perspective on career, trying to define how to use constructivism in practice within a Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2014). The U-cube was designed to allow individuals to use it to help them construct their career influences prior to working with a practitioner or support person and to introduce career influence literacy to initiate their thought processes around career.

A constructivist perspective, together with the practical nature of narrative storytelling and the focus on supporting clients to self-reflect from a wider view than that of trait and factor, or interest inventories, led to the development of the U-Cube as a tool for client and counsellor career exploration (Alchin, 2014). Within the frame of constructivist career counselling, the U-

cube is used as a tool for supporting the development of a working alliance, and playfully exploring and changing negative career thoughts.

The Client Reece

The client (i.e. Reece) is requested to hold the cube and to find four words on the cube that are relevant to his life. Reece is asked to see if he can get the four words on the same face of the cube, but not to worry if he cannot. Reece is told that the counsellor (Carolyn) will return in 5 minutes for the appointment.

Countering Negative Career Thoughts Through Play

Career thoughts can be defined as "outcomes of one's thinking about assumptions, attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, feelings, plans, and/ or strategies related to career problem solving and decision making" (Sampson, Reardon, Peterson, & Lent, 2004, p. 91). Cognitive information processing theory suggests that career thoughts are mediated by the relationship between life stress and career and the resultant career decision state (Bullock- Yowell, Peterson, Reardon, Leierer, & Reed, 2011). Negative career thoughts can impact on an individual's readiness to engage in career problem-solving (Sampson, Reardon, Peterson, & Lenz, 2004) and identifying career related opportunities. Carver and Scheier (2001) hypothesised that individuals with negative career thoughts may be less motivated, although still be committed to a goal. When the above factors are considered, the U-cube's effects (i.e. fun and enjoyment) may have the effect of challenging negative career thoughts.
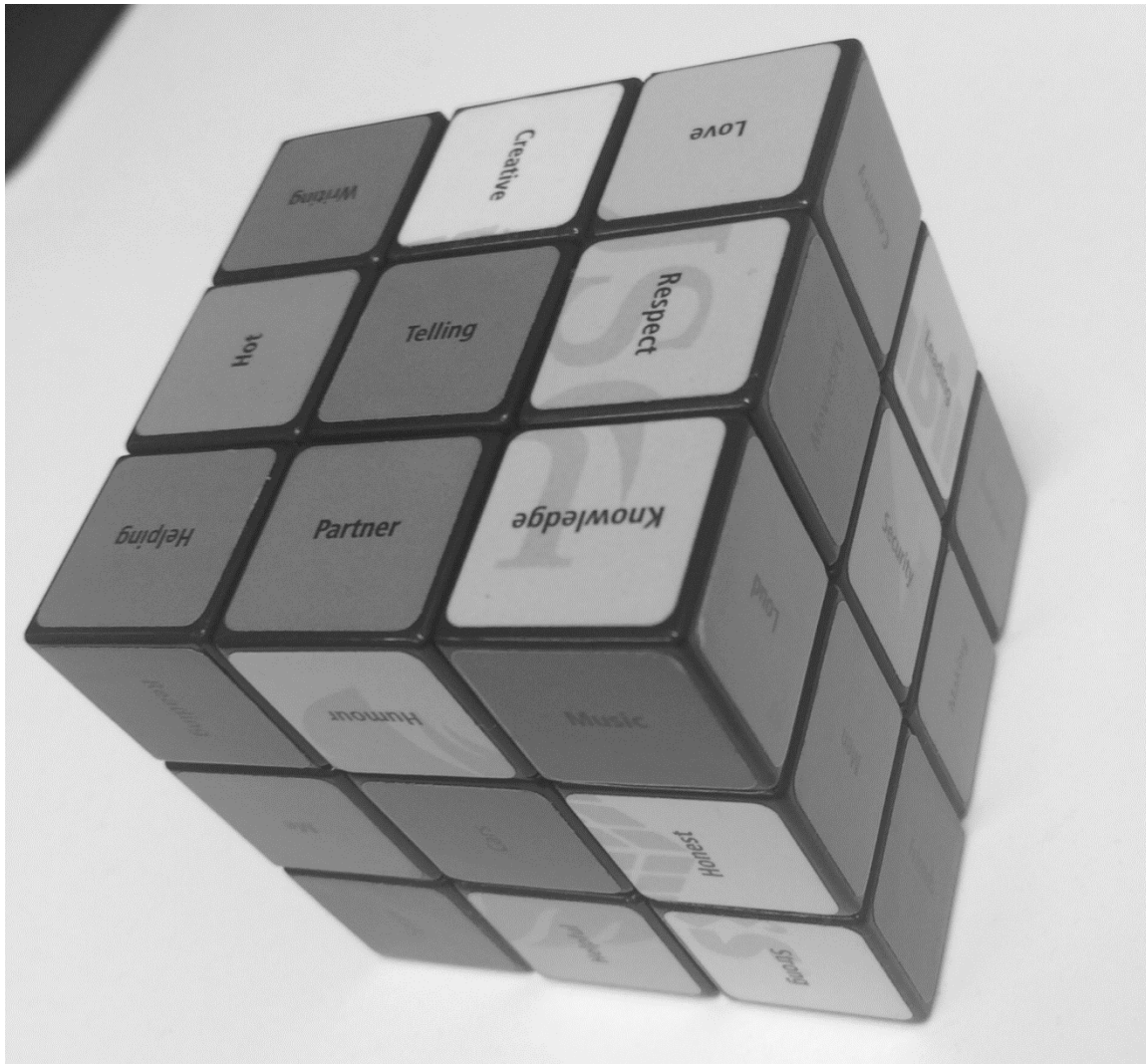
Table 1. Defined U-Cube elements (Alchin, 2014)

People	Environments	Strengths/ Values	Strengths/ Values	Skills	Interests
Women	Cold	Knowledge	Planning	Listening	Sport
Men	Hot	Respect	Leading	Talking	Movies/TV
Everyone	Loud	Independent	Strong	Helping	Music
Family	Inside	Helpful	Creative	Doing	Nature
Friend	City	Security	Hard Working	Telling	Cars
Kids	Outside	Freedom	Sporty	Explaining	Shopping
Me	Quiet	Love	Patient	Fixing	Reading
Culture	Busy	Humour	Honest	Making	Art
Partner	Country	Faith	Caring	Writing	Friends

Figure 1. The U-Cube (Alchin, 2014).

When asked what his 4 words were, Reece stated Hot, Girls, Strong, and Cars. When Carolyn asked Reece what Strong applied to, and why it was relevant to his life, he stated that he wanted to be strong for his mum, and that he wanted to be strong at the gym. Carolyn asked Reece how long he had attended a gym. Reece stated that he had been going every day for 3 weeks. When asked how he became interested in the gym, he stated that his girlfriend went there.Carolyn discussed with Reece how people are influenced by those around them, and that his initiative to be stronger and healthier was supported by his girlfriend. Carolyn discussed how being around people who support you and help you focus on your success is a positive way forward. Reece stated that he also needed to make sure he stayed hot enough for his girlfriend Chloe, he worried that he was not hot enough. Carolyn, through this statement was able to demonstrate to Reece that he was problem-solving, and taking steps to solve any issues.

Carolyn was also able to discuss Reece's skills and strengths with him at this point – and how they added to his capacity from a career point of view. Carolyn was able to discuss with him his feeling of accountability and responsibility as a family member and to his mum. She was also able to question him around why he felt responsible and accountable, and how he planned to be strong. Reece discussed his worry that he wouldn't work hard enough to get a job and be able to help his mum out financially. Carolyn was then able to ask Reece who decided

how much motivation Reece had. Reece replied he knew it was up to him, but that it was hard. Carolyn was able to again discuss his problem solving strategies above and work with Reece on ways to support his own levels of motivation and minimising procrastination.

When asked why he chose "Hot" he stated that it went with girls. "Hot Girls". He laughed after this, and Alchin again was able to learn about Reece and his humour. In addition this further enabled Reece to build a working relationship with Carolyn- providing a more fertile environment for growth (Reference).

Utilizing the U-Cube has enabled Reece to discuss his negative feelings, and enabled Carolyn to better understand Reece's career influences. The narrative developed has enabled discussions to support Reece's growth and self-understanding and further discussions around the world of work, attitudes and expectations that Reece may place on himself, and those that the people around him may expect.

The U-cube can enable practitioners to dismiss some of the oft used small talk around weather, or nice shoes. Instead the tool becomes the small talk, "check out this cube- have a look at all the words, and try to find 4 that are relevant to you and your life, if you like, you can try to get them on the same face. I will pop back to chat about it in 5 minutes or so". Immediately the client is considering words related to career and career influences. They are able to work independently and unwatched.

When Reece chose cars as one of his words, this provided Carolyn an entrée into understanding his interests. From this point she asked him about what cars he liked, and why. Reece commented that he liked old cars that he could make work again, and that he had a cousin who was an apprentice mechanic and that he liked working with him on cars. Carolyn reflected that maybe Reece liked fixing things, and solving problems, and that he seemed to like doing practical things. Reece stated that he guessed so; however, he had not considered the matter that way before. Carolyn was then able to discuss problem-solving as a skill or strength, cars as an interest, responsibility to his mum as a value, and to better understand Reece's family influences

In the case of the U-cube, the gamification can persuade the client to "play" and as such begin to use career influences language which may assist in a narrative style counselling session. The encouragement and option to get them all on the same face is voluntary, and necessary, as the client is not there to be forced. "Tell me about yourself" is a challenging, if not daunting, stimulus for some clients. This challenge is made easier through the use of the U-Cube, whereby clients are given 72 example words across the 6 faces of the cube, and then asked to choose 4. Thus, rather than generating self-descriptions without assistance, the process of "telling" is supported by the presence of career-oriented words that may be used by the client to talk about self.

DISCUSSION

In this chapter we introduced the U-Cube as both a tool for career exploration in counselling and for developing the working alliance between client and counsellor. Quite literally, the U-Cube is in the hands of the client as a tool for exploration and interpretation with the career practitioner. It is evident that career development interventions can enhance individuals' careers (Brown & Lent, 2016), including employability (Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2013). The U-cube is used in what is stipulated by Lent et al. (2002) to be the strongest career intervention, namely a one-to one counselling environment. Face-to-face career counselling is confirmed as being a very effective intervention, more so than those interventions which were counsellor free (Whiston, Li, Mitts, & Wright, 2017) and one that has positively influences

other areas of functioning for the client, such as satisfaction with life (Masdonati, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2009).

A critical ingredient for effective career interventions is individualised interpretations and feedback. This ingredient is inherent to the working alliance between client and counsellor. However, Whiston et al. (2015) surmise that there is very little research about how to facilitate a working alliance in career counselling. The U-Cube is a tangible medium that connects the client and counsellor in a conversation and it is this conversation that becomes the grist of career exploration .

Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

It is important to acknowledge that not all counselling clients are the same, and as such there needs to be further research into how different personalities, cultures, and perspectives of clients may affect the effectiveness of career interventions. Therefore, whilst we argue that the U-Cube is an alternative tool for practitioners to build rapport and conduct career exploration with their clients, its utility for different groups of clients is yet to be properly explored. Our clinical experience (kindly elaborate on the extent of your research and the contexts in which the research was conducted?) suggests that the U-Cube is not only enjoyed by young clients, but also by older clients who remember the Rubik's Cube craze in the 1980s. Indeed, older clients' reverie about the 80s is, in and of itself, a point of conversation about how life progressed since way back then.

Conclusion

Whilst there are evident improvements in the labour market in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2016) member countries during the recovery from the global financial crisis, young people remain at risk of being excluded from participation in the labour market in this post-industrial era of automation marked by the reducing availability of traditional forms of work. Their marginalisation places even greater importance on education and training interventions that engage youth in discussions, collaborations, and explorations around careers and their futures.

If youth are to secure for themselves work that is appropriately remunerated, and in safe and democratic workplaces (that is, facets of *decent work*) (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren, & Diamonti, 2016), they will need a constant focus on learning skill development, and an ability to recognise and exploit opportunities to sustain and enhance their *employability* (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). Moreover, they need self-reflective capacities required in contemporary workplaces. Developing those self-reflective capacities is the bailiwick of career development practitioners who can integrate learning into career counselling and career education activities.

Considering the vital role of the working alliance in career counselling (Masdonati et al., 2009), a tool that helps a young person to engage in dialogue has much to offer. We believe the U-Cube offers practitioners and clients an alternative approach to self-reflection, assessment, and exploration in career counselling, that contributes to the rapport and working alliance between client and counsellor in a fun way that is friendly to young people.

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