Psychologists' dilemmas in career counselling practice

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Abstract   In this study, we explored main dilemmas psychologists face in career counselling in two main professional settings: employment and education. Participants included 24 experienced Portuguese psychologists, working in employment ($n = 14$) and educational ($n = 10$) settings. We used consensual qualitative research to conduct and analyse semi-structured interviews. Results revealed dilemmas' in five domains: neutrality, assessment, dual loyalty, role boundaries, and confidentiality, with the typical dilemma in the domain of neutrality. Differences between groups were found in the domains of dual loyalty and role boundaries.

Résumé.   Les dilemmes des psychologues dans la pratique du conseil en orientation. Dans cette étude, nous avons exploré les principaux dilemmes rencontrés par les psychologues dans le conseil en orientation dans deux milieux professionnels centraux: le placement et l'éducation. Parmi les participants figuraient 24 psychologues portugais expérimentés travaillant dans des contextes de placement (n = 14) et d'éducation (n = 10). Nous avons utilisé la recherche qualitative consensuelle pour mener et analyser les entretiens semi-structurés. Les résultats ont révélé des dilemmes dans cinq domaines: la neutralité, l'évaluation, la double loyauté, les limites du rôle, et la confidentialité, avec le dilemme typique dans le domaine de la neutralité. Les différences entre les groupes ont été identifiées dans les domaines de la double loyauté et les limites du rôle.

Zusammenfassung.   Dilemmata von Psychologen in der Praxis der Berufsberatung. In dieser Studie untersuchten wir die hauptsächlichen Dilemmata, mit

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denen Psychologen in der Berufsberatung in zwei wesentlichen professionellen Einrichtungen konfrontiert sind: Beruf und Bildung. Zu den Teilnehmern gehörten 24 erfahrene portugiesische Psychologen, die in Einrichtungen von Beruf ($n = 14$) und Bildung ($n = 10$) arbeiteten. Wir verwendeten einvernehmliche qualitative Forschung um semi-strukturierte Interviews durchzuführen und zu analysieren. Die Ergebnisse zeigten Dilemmata in fünf Bereichen: Neutralität, Beurteilung, doppelte Loyalität, Rollengrenzen und Vertraulichkeit, mit dem typischen Dilemma in der Domäne der Neutralität. Unterschiede zwischen den Gruppen wurden in den Bereichen der doppelten Loyalität und Rollengrenzen gefunden.

Resumen. Dilemas de los psicólogos en la práctica de orientación profesional. En este estudio, hemos explorado los principales dilemas que enfrentan los psicólogos en orientación profesional en dos ámbitos profesionales principales: el empleo y la educación. Entre los participantes había 24 psicólogos portugueses con experiencia, trabajando en empleo ($n = 14$) y en educación ($N = 10$). Se utilizó la investigación cualitativa consensual para llevar a cabo y analizar las entrevistas semi-estructuradas. Los resultados revelaron dilemas en cinco ámbitos: la neutralidad, la evaluación, la doble lealtad, los límites de roles, y la confidencialidad; con dilema típico en el ámbito de la neutralidad. Las diferencias entre grupos se encontraron en los esferas de la doble lealtad y los límites de conducta.

Career counselling is a process of meaning co-construction where the counsellor participates in the client's experience, facilitating the free expression of his or her subjectivity while exploring emerging meanings and constructing new representations (Savickas, 2011). Rather than a rigid, rational process, it is an ongoing, face-to-face interaction between counsellor and client, with the relationship between counsellor and client serving an important function. Career counselling differs from other counselling modalities because it focuses primarily on work or career-related issues, and quantitative assessment procedures and information are used more frequently (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2009; Swanson, 1995). It is an intersubjective, multidimensional process that varies according to the context, the intervention's theoretical framework, the counsellor's subjectivity, and the counselling relationship. The combination of such variables has implications for the theoretical and ethical foundations of the counselling process, constituted as dilemmas, which should not be addressed in a simplistic or unilateral manner. By exploring the main dilemmas psychologists face in the delivery of career counselling, we aim to further the understanding of this intersubjective process in its singularities and communalities with other modalities of counselling or psychotherapy.

Counsellors' and psychotherapists' dilemmas

Counsellors' dilemmas include doubts or conflicts about what to say or do when all the possible alternatives are equally unsatisfactory (Scaturo, 2005; Scaturo & McPeak, 1998). In these situations, the level of anxiety involved in choosing between two mutually exclusive courses of action depends on the difficulty of evaluating the best alternative and the severity of the consequences associated with a poor decision (Scaturo, 2002). The experience of a dilemma is transtheoretical, because it occurs in different counselling or psychotherapy modalities, regardless of the counsellor's or therapist's theoretical framework (Scaturo, 2005). The inevitability of this experience is rooted in the complex nature of human relationships and the need to manage interactions in processes that are not linear or rational, which raises questions about the most appropriate course of action to choose. In counselling and psychotherapy, this complexity is synthesized by Paul's classic question: "What treatment, and applied by whom, is most effective for this individual with this particular problem in these circumstances?" (as cited in Moreira, Gonçalves, & Beutler, 2005).

In an effort to understand the experience of a dilemma, Scaturo (2002, 2005) attempted a classification of dilemmas in two dimensions: ethical and technical. The first involves doubts related to the proper professional conduct concerning the client's wellbeing. The second includes doubts concerning which therapy or counselling tasks to implement. However, these dimensions tend to overlap, because the relational nature of psychological intervention always involves ethical principles. Since ethics concerns the intentionality of our behaviour, then all the decisions made in a counselling relationship depend on ethical reasoning.

Other ways of addressing dilemmas allow more specific and contextualized classifications. Among these systems, we used Dryden's (1997) to guide the data analysis in this study. Dryden identified six main categories of dilemmas: compromise, boundary, allegiance, role, responsibility, and impasse. Compromise dilemmas centre on the tension between the *ideal* and the *pragmatic*. Boundary dilemmas involve the choice of whether or not to cross multiple barriers, such as therapist self-disclosure, or whether or not to devise an alternative approach. Allegiance dilemmas describe the conflict between maintaining allegiance to a particular school of thought or therapeutic orientation or following a different orientation more suitable to the client's interests. Role dilemmas characterize the conflict between the roles of *educator* and *healer* or *clinician* and *researcher*, for example. Responsibility describes the therapist's struggle to find a balance between taking responsibility for his/her client's welfare, and respecting the client's autonomy and ability to make informed decisions about his/her own life. Finally, impasse dilemmas describe the therapist's doubts about which strategy may be required when the therapy seems lost, impossible, or interminable. This classification system has the advantage of clarifying the main challenge presented to the therapist, and therefore, facilitating a greater differentiation in the analysis of counselling and/or psychotherapy dilemmas.

The process of counselling and psychotherapy from the standpoint of frequently occurring dilemmas

Counselling and psychotherapy have been analysed concerning the identification of dilemmas related to counselling's theoretical framework, modality, and/or context. The analysis of dilemmas related to theoretical background concern the fit of theoretical assumptions to the challenges of real practice. Examples of these kinds of dilemmas are the typical dilemmas of psychodynamic and insight-oriented psychotherapies—*focus versus comprehensiveness* and *confrontation versus support*—and of cognitive-behavioural therapy—*balancing directive and non directive elements of treatment* (Scaturo, 2005). Whereas in the first type of dilemma the question is to introduce more directivity, in the second the matter is the contrary. *Who is to blame*? is one of the most frequent dilemmas in family therapy (Watchel, 1979). In this case, the counsellor must adjust the systematic perspective of the problem to the linear perspective clients have of the problem.

The main dilemmas related to the modality of intervention concern the client's problem. Fay Fransella, who was interviewed by Dryden (1997), considered that the core dilemma with people suffering from anorexia nervosa is whether or not to intervene with a client who doesn't want help. This dilemma evidences the management of resistance to intervention as the critical task in counselling. In these cases, the main question is to achieve a balance between believing that individuals are responsible for themselves and managing the risk of the client's death associated to such beliefs. In a study about dilemmas in multicultural counselling, Sadeghi, Fisher, and House (2003) found that the most common experienced dilemma is "fostering independence of the client to solve his or her problems *conflicts with* the client's cultural expectation that the counsellor will offer solutions" (p. 186). For researchers, this dilemma identifies a fundamental cultural tension between the values of independence in a traditional counselling culture versus the values of interdependence of some multicultural clients (Sadeghi et al., 2003).

Finally, the context of intervention also involves questions related to the singularity of counselling or psychotherapy. For example, confidentiality is the most frequent issue cited in forensic settings, where psychologists are expected to share their assessments (Arcaya, 2008), and in industry and business, where psychologists could be pressured to share information obtained in counselling (Toomer, 1980). In addition, in health services (Bilynsky & Vernaglia, 1998) and industry (Toomer, 1980), the pressure to reduce costs and to increase rates of productivity lead counsellors to wonder whether their intervention mainly serves the needs and goals of the organization or of the client.

Career counsellors' dilemmas

Despite the importance of counsellors' and psychotherapists' dilemmas for the counselling and psychotherapy process and psychologists' training, very little is known about career counsellors' dilemmas, as there are few approaches to this matter. The first, offered by Gati (1994), is an analysis of dilemmas and problems

involving Computer-Assisted Career Counselling (CACC), some of which are also relevant to and likely to occur in face-to-face career counselling. Two of these dilemmas are related to information giving. In the first, called *image of accuracy*, the counsellor's challenge is how to avoid the influence of his/her stereotypes on the selection and transmission of career information. In the second, *providing just the relevant information*, the counsellor struggles to provide relevant information without overloading the client. The last dilemma referred to in CACC, which is also likely to occur in individual career counselling, is known as *eliciting aspirations while encouraging compromise.* In this case, the challenge is to achieve a balance between facilitating the client's expression of aspirations and helping with the process of compromising career plans. Savickas (2006) listed this as the main dilemma in career counselling, due to the dual role that the counsellor plays: the helper, developing a relationship of proximity and facilitating the exploration of new possibilities; and the representative of society, in a position of greater distance, against which career plans are confronted.

Dilemmas have also been analysed in chapters addressing career counselling ethics, allowing to illustrate both the risks of violating ethical principles and managing those risks (Kidd, 2006; Zunker, 2006) Dilemmas of counselling engagement are mentioned, such as dual relationships dilemmas occurring when the counsellor has a different relationship with the client, dilemmas of accountability, when the practitioner questions on whose behalf he/she is working, and dilemmas of confidentiality, which may, for example, result from the pressure to disclose information to others without the client's consent. Other types of dilemmas are also mentioned, such as referral dilemmas, when doubts have to do with directing the client to another service, and assessment dilemmas, which may occur when the choice of assessment instruments or the transmission of the evaluation results puts the client's benefit at stake.

Finally, Sultana and Watts (2006) listed the most frequent dilemmas in Public Employment Services (PES) across Europe based on career-guidance research in this setting: (a) the tension between the humanistic and client-centred perspectives of the psychologist's personalized services and the realities of restricted labour market opportunities; (b) the conflict between job-placement targets and deadlines established at a political level, pressuring career counsellors to guide clients into choices that are not in their best interests; (c) the short time allocated to guidance interview, which makes counsellors wonder whether they are counselling or processing individuals; and (d) the conflict between adopting a model based on empowerment and "career guidance services which position the client as a passive recipient of services" (p. 43). These researchers suggested that the everyday context of PES, such as time constraints, pressure of maintaining a number of clients', and the imperatives of swift job placement shape the counsellors' practice, in general, and their experience of dilemmas, in particular.

The aim of the present study is twofold. On one hand, we seek to explore the main dilemmas that psychologists face when delivering career counselling, thus contributing to the analysis of career counselling in its complexity by considering the interplay of the technical and the ethical dimensions of the intervention with the relational dimension and the context in which it takes place. On the other hand,

we aim to compare two groups of career counsellors according to the main settings where counselling occurs: employment and education. This goal is supported by research that emphasised the role of context in the experience of dilemmas (Arcaya, 2008; Bilynsky & Vernaglia, 1998; Toomer, 1980), as well that conducted by Sultana and Watts (2006), who suggested that despite similarities between career guidance in educational setting and in PES, there are also substantial differences.

Method

Participants

A group of 24 Caucasian psychologists working as career counsellors (22 women and 2 men), ranging from 30 to 53 years of age ($M = 41.54$; $SD = 5.89$), participated in this study. Among them, ten work in educational settings: five in high schools (HS) and five in universities (U); and 14 in employment settings: two in private practice (PP), one in an outplacement service at a corporation (OS), one in human resources (HR), five in PES, and five in New Opportunities Services (NOS). The NOS employees manage the assessment and recognition of prior experiential learning. People of all ages and backgrounds receive recognition and formal credit for learning acquired in the past through non-formal and informal learning, as well as through work and other experiences. These citizens benefit from career counselling to help them make career plans supporting lifelong learning.

Participants' experience in providing career counselling ranged from 7 to 30 years ($M = 15.56$; $SD = 6.69$). The decision to interview psychologists experienced in personal and career counselling who work in different occupational settings was driven by the need to ensure both an accurate reflection of career counselling dilemmas and a full picture of the most significant career counselling areas of activity in Portugal. Two of the participants had a PhD and seven of them had completed a master's degree in vocational psychology. All participants' degrees were in Psychology and they all received formal training with supervision in career counselling. The sample heterogeneity and the intention to organize the two sub-groups led us to consider 24 participants, a number above Hill, Thompson, and Williams's (1997) recommendations (10–15 participants), but still within the limits required for a critical mass of information.

Researchers

All four authors constituted the research team of interviewers and data analysts. The interviewers were a 48-year-old White man and a 52-year-old White woman, both Assistant Professors and researchers in vocational psychology. These two researchers are highly trained and experienced career counsellors in listening and showing empathy, two important skills that help psychologists explore their dilemmas in career counselling. The first interviewer also assumed the role of judge. The second researcher acted as the external auditor of the main team of judges. The main team of judges also included a 49-year-old White woman, an Associate

Professor and researcher with a psychodynamic orientation, and a 44-year-old White woman, Assistant Professor and researcher with psychodynamic and humanistic orientations. All researchers share interests in studying the process of counselling and are familiar with qualitative research.

Prior to data collection and analysis phases of the research, the researchers discussed their expectations about the outcomes of the study and the biases that they felt regarding the dilemmas under analysis. We did this in order to raise our awareness of potential dilemmas and encourage objectivity throughout the analysis. The first judge expected neutrality to be the main dilemma experienced by career counsellors, especially when they have to confront clients' career plans. The second judge expected that her tendency to focus on the clients' internal experience would lead her to ignore the role of external influences and environmental constraints in the participants' dilemmas experience. The third judge stated that her tendency to focus on the client's internal experience led her to infer dilemmas even when they were not expressed in the participant's own words. The auditor expected dilemmas related to the use of psychological assessment devices and with the management of parent–child conflicts concerning life or career plans.

Interview protocol

After a review of the literature and extensive discussion of current views of dilemmas in counselling and psychotherapy, a semi-structured interview protocol was designed to examine career counselling dilemmas. Specifically, we formulated one central question, "Would you like to talk about the dilemmas you experience most when performing career counselling?" and two associated questions: "Could you talk about a time when you experienced that dilemma?" and "It seems that your dilemmatic experience expresses two sides of you, two conflicting voices. Could you tell us more about each of them?" The first question was used only when the participants were unclear in their descriptions and when there was a need to clarify the descriptions that they offered. The second question was used only when there was a need to differentiate the conflict underlying the dilemma under analysis.

Procedure

Recruiting participants

Purposive sampling was used to identify psychologists who had been trained an experienced in career counselling. During the first contact, psychologists were informed by telephone or e-mail about the focus and nature of the study and assured of data anonymity and confidentiality, and then invited to participate in the study. One week after the first contact, a second contact was initiated, and subjects could inform us about whether or not they would like to participate in the study. Next, those who agreed to participate received a letter explaining the objectives of the study, the process of data collection, information about confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The letter also included the main interview question so that they could think about dilemmas that they frequently

experience in their own sessions and be prepared for the interview and an informed consent statement. In PES and NOS, the interviews were scheduled after participants received permission from the relevant authorities.

Data analysis

We used Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR), an inductive method, ideal for an in-depth description of career counsellors' inner experiences. The information collected in small samples from the semi-structured interviews, was analysed by a team of researchers who look for consensual decisions (e.g., Hill et al., 1997, 2005). The process took place in three moments. First, the primary team developed domains by independently reviewing 24 cases and coding responses into those domains within the cases. We accomplished this task by using a previously compiled list of ten domains derived from the review of critical literature in this domain. Then, the judges discussed their individual considerations in order to achieve domain consensus. The auditor reviewed these domains and provided feedback.

Secondly, each judge summarized each participant's responses from the first 24 cases into a list of core ideas in each domain, discussing discrepancies so as to reach consensus. These core ideas were not interpretative; instead, they were sets of similar statements or ideas. After the team members reached a consensus about the list of core ideas, the auditor examined the resulting consensus version.

Finally, a cross analysis was carried out to determine similarities and differences between cases. The initial cross-analyses were conducted on 20 of the 24 cases, because four randomly chosen cases were set aside to serve as a stability check. The core ideas were separated into domains, examined independently and clustered into categories. Each judge accomplished such a process on his/her own, followed by a discussion to reach a consensus regarding the titles of the categories and the core ideas to be placed in each category, which required a continuous revision of previous cases to assess whether the cases contained evidence not yet coded for any of the categories. As experienced in previous phases of the data analyses, any suggestions made by the auditor were incorporated if agreed upon by consensus, leading to a revised analysis. The analysis of the remaining four cases did not significantly alter the results, and the findings were considered stable.

Results

Categories of career counselling dilemmas are shown in Table 1 for the total sample and for work/employment and educational subsamples. Following Hill et al.'s (2005) suggestion, core ideas were considered *general* if they occurred in all the cases, *typical* if they occurred in more than half of the cases, *variant* if they occurred in less than half but at least two cases and *rare* if they occurred in only one or two cases. We added an index of the percentage of participants who mentioned each core idea as a way of capturing the representativeness of the core idea in the total sample and in both subgroups. Due to the extension of core ideas examples, the

Table 1 Domains, categories, frequencies and percentages regarding psychologists' dilemmas in career counselling

Domain[a]	Category[b]	Participants					
		Total $N = 24$		W/E $n = 14$		E $n = 10$	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Neutrality	To confront or to support career plans	Typical	70.1	Typical	57.1	Typical	90
	How to inform without biases?	Variant	12.5	Rare	7	Rare	20
Assessment	Should I satisfy demands for psychological tests?	Variant	12.5	Rare	14.3	Rare	10
Dual loyalty	To give or not to give more time to this client?	Variant	29.2	Variant	50	Rare	0
Role boundaries	Whether or not to intervene in the client's emotional problems	Variant	29.2	Variant	42.9	Rare	10
	Is the question relevant to me or to the client?	Rare	8.3	Rare	14.3	Rare	0
Confidentiality	To disclose or not to disclose information about the sessions	Rare	8.3	Rare	14.3	Rare	0

Note W/E = Work/employment setting, E = Educational setting

[a] The interviewees' direct quotes were used to elaborate each domain and categories are presented throughout the text

[b] Categories were *general* if they occur in all the cases, *typical* if they occurred in more than half the cases, *variant* if they occurred in less than half but more than two cases, and *rare* if they occurred in one or two cases

presentation of this material will not be provided in Table 1, as typically happens in CQR.

Data analysis led to the definition of five domains: (1) neutrality, (2) assessment, (3) dual loyalty, (4) role boundaries, and (5) confidentiality. In the domain of Neutrality, the typical dilemma was *doubt about whether or not to confront the client's career plans*. This dilemma arose in three situations: (1) when the counsellor thought that the client's psychological profile did not fit his/her career plans; (2) when the counsellor believed that the client's career plans would be difficult to achieve in the current job market; and, (3) when the counsellor considers the client's career expectations exceeding the reality of what is appropriate for him/her. The dilemma raised the issue of preserving the working alliance. Regarding the first case, one participant mentioned:

> The dilemma is between what one thinks is good for her and what I think are the person's abilities and cognitive limitations. This raises the dilemma whether to indicate what we think is good for the person or what the person really wants and intends. (participant # 17, NOS)

Illustrating the second situation, another participant stated, "There, I feel that between the heart and reason there is a huge dilemma; between what I know will be a good way or a good work opportunity, and what they really feel they would like to do (participant # 6, HS)." Finally, regarding the third situation one of the counsellors said that:

One of my dilemmas is feeling that youngsters are not up to their own expectations… I often feel as if I am destroying their dreams and showing them a reality that they refuse to accept. On the other hand, as a psychologist, it is important to confront them with the real world. (participant # 2, HS)

In all of these circumstances there is a doubt between questioning the realism of career plans and frustrating the client's hopes and dreams versus not questioning career plans and thus allowing for investment in unrealistic plans with possible negative consequences. This dilemma challenges the ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, and respect for clients' rights to make autonomous and informed decisions about their own careers. These principles and the principle of respect for people's rights and dignity are also defied with career information. The dilemma of *how to inform without biases* challenges neutrality, as illustrated above, when the participant wonders whether or not his/her values influence the client's decision when he/her delivers career information:

I am really fond of sciences, and I feel that thinking scientifically is very helpful for most people; I myself have a scientific background. When people come to me with that kind of problem … I am careful not to convey to them how much I value science just because I feel that an open-minded person, with a scientific spirit, is more likely to get a job (participant # 3, HS).

Psychological assessment implies the dilemma of whether or not to give into the pressure to use standardized psychological measures. This conflict is present for different reasons. First, the psychologist feels the pressure to use measurement procedures commonly used by his/her organization despite the fact that the types of tests available are not suitable for the specific population and that they may harm the client. In this case, the participant wondered, "Should we carry out a psychological assessment of someone who only completed the 4th grade, when our tests are designed for people who completed the 9th grade? Should I run the risk of hurting their self-esteem with this psychological assessment?" (participant # 8, PES). Second, this dilemma also occurred when the counsellor felt that the client's desire to use standardized measures conflicted with the need to consider not using this type of assessment.

Even though I am not so keen on tests, I have realized that some clients do need to undergo some tests because they feel that these are valid tools, something that delivers significant results. "I am doing a test with a doctor"; it is important; it provides status. There comes the doubt, should I apply tests or not? (participant # 24, U)

In both situations the risk of violating the ethical principle of beneficence and non-maleficence underlied the doubt about the most appropriate assessment method.

In the domain of dual loyalty, the counsellor wonders whether his/her intervention mainly serves the needs and objectives of the organization or of the client. This kind of dilemma, of variant frequency, often happens when responding to a client's needs through a more prolonged intervention; this is frequently incompatible with the organization's objective that the counsellor will meet with a

certain number of people, on a daily basis. The vignette below illustrates this dilemma:

> My dilemma is about failing to provide more or longer sessions when I feel that it would offer a better insight… on the one hand, I am all for giving clients the time they need for proper decision-making and, on the other, I tell them that there are other clients waiting for their turn, and if they take too long to decide (participant # 9, PES).

Since the answer to these needs is threatened, the dilemma challenges the ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, and fidelity and responsibility. These ethical principles are also challenged in the last critical moment with variant frequency: *to decide whether or not to intervene in the client's emotional problems*. In the domain of role boundaries, the dilemma reveals the tension between the roles of the career counsellor and the clinical psychologist, because there is a risk of exceeding the limits of their competence and/or established boundaries for a career-counselling relationship. The vignette that follows illustrates this dilemma:

> Some people require psychological advice, but we have neither the resources nor the time to provide it. Procedures here run too quickly, and I am not even a clinical psychologist; hence, I am not prepared to support them, that is where it all starts. However, as a psychologist, and as a person, I feel that it is my duty to provide some help, when needed. So, here you have ambivalence (participant # 7, PES).

Another psychologist said:

> Many times we are in this situation. Should I help this person beyond my work and what is asked to me or should I go further, when I have neither the conditions nor the authorization to do it? (participant # 20, PES).

The analysis of results according to the setting suggested differences in the domains of dual loyalty and role boundaries. As shown in Table 1, counsellors involved in the employment setting more frequently expressed (50 %) the dilemma of *whether or not to spend more time with their clients*. In a close relationship with this dilemma, the participants in this subgroup also experienced, with varying frequency (42.9 %), doubts regarding *whether or not to intervene in their clients' emotional problems*. Such dilemmas are mostly related to the employment setting.

Discussion

The participants' dilemmas show the intersubjective nature of the career counselling process: not only in its specificities but also in what it has in common with other modalities of counselling and psychotherapy. As far as its specificities are concerned, our results suggested that giving support to career decision-making is one of the most challenging tasks that career counselling psychologists face. The psychologists' typical dilemma - *whether or not to confront the client's career plans*—is just such an expression of the issue. In fact, support and confrontation are

clinical tasks that research has described as crucial for a successful practice (Kirschner, Hoffman, & Hill, 1994; Whiston, Lindeman, Rahardja, & Reed, 2005), and therefore obtaining a balance between both is a transversal challenge for the different counselling and psychotherapy modalities (Scaturo, 2005). Our findings revealed that in career counselling the balance between how much to confront and how much to support clients is especially challenging when psychologists confront clients' career plans. Being one of the most challenging tasks psychologists can face, this dilemma is an extension of the challenge that clients have to cope with: to design realistic career plans based on the balance between dream and reality. In other words, the challenge is to support clients to manage the dynamic balance between aspirations and realism, between personal goals and the conditions of the labour market, as well as to maintain the balance between closeness to the client, which facilitates the exploration of new possibilities, while also maintaining a position of greater distance, representing the society against which career plans are confronted (Savickas, 2006). Our results showed that this is the only typical dilemma consistent with the work of Dryden (1997) and Scaturo (2005), who described a reduced number of typical dilemmas according to the theoretical framework or psychotherapy modality.

The second specificity concerned the use of standardized measures to promote self-knowledge and facilitate career decision-making. In fact, the use of such tests has been a distinctive mark of career counselling, and impacts assessment dilemmas related to the pressure of assessment routines in the organization where the psychologist works or to the pressure of the clients to use tests. This pressure may be due to the economic advantages of standardized assessment (in terms of time and money), but also to the traditional use of tests. In clients, it may also be related to a traditional perspective of career counselling as a rational approach focused on psychological assessment and information processing. The interplay of ethical and technical dimensions was present in this type of dilemma. The ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence and respect to clients' rights and dignity are at risk because the use of tests challenges the best interest of the client. However, the decision of what to do also includes technical know-how about the limits and possibilities of the measures, as well as of how to manage the organization's and the client's expectations about the nature of psychological assessment. A possible solution for this problem is to communicate the reasons of not using regular assessment procedures. When the client requests the use of tests, the solution must include the correction of expectations according to the process and an agreement concerning the counselling tasks as well.

Participants' dilemmas also revealed similarities between career counselling and other modalities of counselling or psychotherapy, which seems to confirm the idea that career counselling *is* personal counselling. The first common aspect relates to the importance of the working alliance for the success of career counselling. Accordingly, most dilemmas that occur in this process revealed the psychologist's attention to possible ruptures in the working alliance resulting from frustrating the client's hopes/dreams (e.g., *to support versus to confront career plans*), expectations (e.g., *asking oneself, "Should I satisfy demands for psychological tests?"*), and needs (e.g., *whether or not to intervene in the client's emotional problems* and *to*

give or not to give more time to this client). These results could contribute to understanding counsellors' behaviours that lead to the development and maintenance of the working alliance. Moreover, they confirm the importance of relational aspects as common factors to success in psychotherapy (Warwar & Greenberg, 2000) and career counselling (Masdonati, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2009).

Masdonati et al. (2009) showed that the working alliance explained up to 19 % of the effectiveness of career counselling and up to 48 % of the client's overall satisfaction with the intervention. These results on the importance of the working alliance for career counselling were confirmed by a recent study on a larger sample (Masdonati, Perdrix, Massoudi, & Rossier, in press). The intersubjective nature of career counselling is also present in the apparently objective task of providing information. In this study, participants frequently wondered about the extent to which their personal values could be transmitted when providing career information.

The second common aspect related to the possibility of intervention in emotional issues originating in career issues. Results suggested the possibility of intervening in emotional issues is a more frequent dilemma in work/employment settings. This could be explained by the combination of three contextual particularities, not limited to the Portuguese culture: (1) career counsellors are not trained to intervene in profound emotional problems; (2) in work/employment settings, the intervention addresses unemployed and low-skilled people with whom it is more likely that career problems coincide with personal problems; and (3) the pressure for cost containment leading to pressure for briefer interventions. This contextual particularity may also explain why the dilemma of *whether to give more time to client counselling* is exclusive to this setting.

The wide approach on career counselling versus personal counselling allowed us to draw two conclusions with implications for dilemmas management: (1) career management is a dimension of life management demanding for holistic interventions that consider the relationship between career and non career domains across all life roles (Cochran, 1997; Gysbers et al., 2009; Hackett, 1993; Savickas et al., 2009); and (2) interventions in career counselling are located on a continuum from exclusive focus on career issues to exclusively psychotherapeutic approaches, through comprehensive practices that embrace the working aspects of life as well as the nonworking aspects (Blustein & Spengler, 1995; Super, 1993). Thus, there is a need to assess whether the clients' problems have an emotional or career-related nature and to think about the limits of counsellor's competence to intervene. However, dilemma resolution is not linear, as evidenced by the participant's concern regarding the ethical dimension of his/her decision: the responsibility for clients' welfare.

The role of the context in dilemmas that counsellors face lead to the third parallelism: the pressure for briefer interventions resulting from the pressures of cost containment. In the dual loyalty domain, the dilemma *to give or not to give more time to this client* is illustrative. The short time allocated to interventions leads to the doubt filled by questions like, "Who is my client? The person who needs a more prolonged session or the organization that pays me?" This dilemma, which is present across a variety of cultural contexts, organizations, and intervention modalities (Amundson & Borgen, 2000; Bilynsky & Vernaglia, 1998; Scaturo, 2005; Toomer, 1980), showed how the global modern-day economic forces

influence the dilemmas in psychological practice, which in turn impact the nature of psychologists' working relationships with clients and the type of service provided. This is the case for our participants: The higher frequency of this dilemma in the subgroup work/employment setting can be explained by the increasing incompatibility between rates of productivity and clients' needs resulting from the fact that data from this investigation were collected over a period of economic recession that increased both the number of unemployed persons and the pressure on PES and NOS to help these persons. Amundson (2006) considered this to be one of the greatest challenges for career counsellors working in organizations. To solve this dilemma counsellors use interventions that are briefer, more directive, and more focused in short-term goals, and they rely on their good judgement to make compromises between the "ideal" and the "pragmatic." Although behavioural change has its limits, this dilemma calls for re-thinking the organizations' criteria of efficiency and productivity in order to maintain professional standards in relation to personalised services (Sultana & Watts, 2006).

The close relationship between the dilemmas *whether or not to intervene in the client's emotional problems* and *to give or not to give more time to this client* shows that one, or more than one, dilemma coexists in the same situation. Because counsellors deal more often with career problems related to personal problems, they therefore require longer interventions with clients, and they tend to experience these two dilemmas interdependently. This close relation also revealed the paradox of intervention that is so frequent in these settings: There is pressure on counsellors to have briefer interventions with populations that require longer interventions. The dilemmas of *whether or not to intervene in the client's emotional problems* and *to give or not to give more time to this client*, work almost limited to work/employment settings, showed the influence of settings in the career counselling process, and thus added new data to the discussion provided by Sultana and Watts (2006) on the differences between educational settings and PES career interventions.

The fourth cross-cutting issue concerned the appropriateness of standardized measures to the specificities of certain populations. Indeed, participants' assessment dilemmas also revealed this issue, related to the present population's mobility. The importance of a comprehensive, culturally sensitive approach to assessment adds to previous suggestions offered for the management of dilemmas. For example, counsellors should be invited to complement quantitative assessment with qualitative techniques that take cultural issues into account, like, for example, the semi-structured interview developed by Ponterotto, Rivera, and Sueyoshi (2000).

The last communality was related to the centrality of the client's benefit in all the dilemmas described by the participants. This result, which focused the concern with the client's wellbeing, was at the centre of ethical reasoning in career counselling, and suggested one more parallelism of this type of intervention with other counselling modalities. In fact, ethical guidelines in career counselling, in particular, and personal counselling, in general, name this assumption as a central feature in the definition of an ethical professional conduct for psychologists and psychotherapists. Examples of such a concern are present in the American Psychological Association's (APA, 2010) ethical code, which established a collection of principles to protect the client's welfare; as well as the ethical

guidelines of International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG, 1995) and the National Career Development Association (NCDA, 2003), which also established the protection and respect of the career counselling client's integrity and dignity as a primary goal. However, because these organizations suggested that the experience of a dilemma includes multiple ethical and technical interrogations, the results of this study are according to the perspectives that consider professional ethics a comprehensive and dynamic process (e.g., Betan, 1997; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011), which goes beyond regular ethical norms. Based on this conceptual framework, the ethical principle of serving the client's benefit acts as a reference guide for the assessment of what type of action to take in a given context. Accordingly, the concern with the client's well-being does not hinder the specificities that make each dilemma such a unique experience. As with other principles established by ethical guidelines, it should adjust to the context and the interpersonal demands of a particular ethical situation (Betan, 1997).

Implications for counsellor training

Our results offered implications for counsellor training. Considering that participants' dilemmas parallel the dilemmas that career counselling theory and research have been trying to resolve (e.g., the role of the working alliance in career counselling, the cultural appropriateness of standardised measures, the nature of career counselling and its relation to other counselling or psychotherapy modalities), the identification of dilemmas could stimulate a broad reflection of the career counselling process during psychologists' training. First, a reflection on the central questions made by theory and research about career counselling, grounded in the real problems counsellors face in the moment-to-moment process. Second, a reflection considering information from various sources (e.g., what we learn about counselling, the client and our personal experience) to facilitate an understanding of the intersubjective reality in which dilemmas occur and to support ethical decision making. Supervision is a privileged context for these reflections, due to the possibility of reviewing and discussing dilemmatic experiences, and interpreting ethical principles applied to the therapeutic alliance and the counsellor's subjective responses. Moreover, this reflection allows the counsellor to develop a critical attitude about him/herself regarding counselling, as well as to serve as a role model for the clients as they manage their own dilemmas (Scaturo, 2005).

Limitations and research implications

Limitations in sample size and gender characteristics of the sample are cause for caution in the interpretation of these results. The small number of men in this sample, which may lead to gender-biased problems, was due to the combination of two factors: the selection criteria for the sample, and the fact that, in Portugal, there are more female psychologists than male psychologists. In 2011, 12,095 psychologists were registered in the Professional Organization of Portuguese Psychologists (POPP) of which 8,347 (69 %) were women (POPP, 2012).

Since research has shown that work experience and theoretical orientation can influence the attitudes and behaviours of therapists, including an increase in

reflectivity (Vasco & Dryden, 1997), a weak point of this study was that we relied on the accounts of experienced counsellors, which prevented us from generalizing results to career counsellors without a background in psychology or to those who are just beginning their careers.

Results of this study suggested implications for future research. The first is a study using global methods to examine counsellor support and confrontation of clients' career plans. By estimating how frequently support and confrontation are used and how it impacts clients and counsellors, it could deepen our understanding of how counsellors deal with the typical dilemma they face in the career counselling process. The second one implies studies of input variables influencing the experience of dilemmas in order to clarify the relation of setting, counselling (e.g., career counselling self-efficacy, psychologists' experience and epistemological development) and counsellor variables (e.g., anxiety, self-esteem or personality) to the experience of dilemmas. To use a measure of career counselling dilemmas it would be helpful to know more about the extent to which the various dilemmas are a significant challenge. These studies may contribute to an integrated understanding of career counsellor's dilemmas, placing them in the social context in which they occur and in relation to counsellor's psychological and technical skills and limitations.

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