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Overview of this issue

Welcome to the Journal of the National Institute of Career Education and Counselling. In this edition established academics, new writers and practitioner researchers bring us useful insights into career learning and the interplay between theory, practice and research. The UK government's recent career strategy placed renewed emphasis on career learning in schools in England making it a highly topical subject for consideration. However, career covers all stages of life and needs to be supported by a life-long engagement with learning, hence the articles extend beyond the school setting. Our authors reflect on programme design, review the development and implementation of career learning frameworks and tools, and explore external and internal contextual factors that influence the career learning process. Whilst different in focus and context, at the core of all the articles is the theme of client and participant career learning leading to progression in career development.

A particular landmark for NICEC is the publication of an article by **Laura Walker** which was awarded the Bill Law Student Memorial Award 2019. In this opening piece, Laura explores the implications for career guidance practice of late career decision making, where she characterises the learning as a process of discovering more of themselves – 'more of me'. The findings are set out using a visual which is unique to the author and very helpful for use by practitioners. The image of 'dancing with fear' is powerful, and reminiscent of Bill Law's use of imagery in his concern to help practitioners to apply the lessons learned through research to practice.

In the two articles that follow, **Lis McGuire** and **John Gough** write from different perspectives about the process of designing learning experiences. Liz explores adopting a collaborative approach between the provider and the user of services. Although the article focuses on addressing the needs of persons with mental health problems, her findings and reflections are equally relevant to programme design for other user groups. Similarly, John's reflections on a collaborative process in training careers leaders in England highlights the importance of engaging the voice of the learner in enabling them to develop this role effectively in complex and demanding educational environments.

The next three articles focus on specific aspects of working directly with clients, and present new career learning tools and a career framework. These developments, rooted in practice, include a mix of 'what works' along with reflection on what was less successful, and insights into why that might be. First, **Katie Dallison** describes the development and implementation of Plan: Me. Piloted within higher education, this tool takes a holistic approach to career decision making, integrating goal setting, and allowing clients to map out a process of how they can move themselves forward independently. Second, we have an article by **Keren Coney and Ben Simkins** in which they consider the potential of using 'screencasting' technology to support students' C.V. writing. Third, **Lewis Clark and Carolyn Parry** review their creation of the INSPiRED teenager framework designed to support collaborative career-based learning between parents/carers and their teenage child.

The final two articles are concerned with the wider context within which career learning takes place. **Szilvia Schmitsek** explores the educational experiences of young people in England, Denmark and Hungary who had been at risk of dropping out, but later gained a qualification at a second chance provision. In contrast, **Nikki Storey** is concerned with the influences on the career beliefs of students in an ethnically diverse state school in London. Using an adapted short version of the 'Careers Beliefs Patterns Scale', Nikki examines the interlinked impacts of ethnicity and socio-economic status, and draws out recommendations for practitioners.

Lyn Barham & Michelle Stewart, Editors

Plan: Me – a practical tool for career decision making

Katie J Dallison

Due to the realities of modern career service provision within most universities, clients attend short (often one-off) career interventions. Hence, practitioners require simple, adaptable tools that are underpinned by career theory and can be explained easily, and empower clients to progress through their career journey independently. This paper explains a tool that has been developed from theory and through practice, and is now positioned to become the subject of further research and formal evaluation. This tool, referred to in the article as 'Plan: Me', takes a holistic approach to career decision making, integrating goal setting and allowing clients to map out a process of how they move themselves forward.

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The issue

To cope with the pressures on most university careers services today, students are encouraged to use online support and attend group workshops before accessing one-to-one support. When students do use the one-to-one support they are generally offered a short appointment, between 15-30 minutes. In many services they may then be referred for a longer session - if deemed necessary. However, referrals are made sparingly as practitioners have high workloads, especially at certain times of the year such as the autumn term. While clients generally self-select to attend a careers appointment, there is often confusion as to what can be achieved during the consultation. To unpick this confusion, support a client to explain their narrative, help them to define their choices, empower them to create actions to move forward and often check the tools (e.g. C.V., cover letters) they need to

achieve these steps, is challenging. Much research is predicated on the idea that practitioners will be able to see their client for more than one session which, in the current tertiary environment, is seldom the case. Also, while many models for careers counselling exist, their complicated nature makes it difficult to integrate them within a limited time period.

In university careers consultations where career direction is discussed, one of the frequent overarching issues is 'how do I make a decision?' Often clients will present with a stream of thought, outlining areas of subjects/jobs/industries they are interested in. It is up to the practitioner to support them in unpicking their narrative and help to define better what they are choosing between. They have to build the client's confidence to a point where they feel they can make a decision without creating reliance on further support. Finding a way for the practitioner to do this, and enable the client to continue their career journey independently, has been the driver behind the creation of Plan: Me.

Plan: Me

The Plan: Me tool has been developed over ten years of practice with hundreds of students across many disciplines of study. The majority of students involved in the research were from six London Universities, while a separate group comprised around one hundred doctors at various stages of their training who had accessed one-to-one careers support through the London Deanery, British Medical Association or Health Education England, East of England.

In essence Plan: Me is the systematic development of a career pathway diagram constructed during a careers consultation to help the client visualise a

series of actions to progress their decision making. The practitioner runs the consultation as normal, supporting and guiding the client to help them tell their story and define what decisions they need to make. Clients are invited to share their own narrative surrounding their careers decision making process. For example:

- What job roles/industries have they explored so far?

- What have they cancelled out?

- What are they concerned about?

- Do they have any timelines such as application deadlines or exams, which they know of?

During this initial stages of the consultation the practitioner begins to draw a visual representation, capturing and clarifying elements identified by the client. This representation, referred to as a Plan-Me diagram, can be broken down into four stages. Often, as the intervention progresses and the client's understanding of Plan: Me model increases, they will take over the drawing from the practitioner.

At stage one, goals (specific or general job titles, industries, companies, global destinations) are added as a series of circles on the right of the page. These are the elements that the client has to decide between. Empty circles may also be added if, during the process, clients discover other end goals of which they were unaware, or had not disclosed earlier.

During stage two the rest of the scaffolding of Plan: Me is drawn by linking all of the circles back to a common start point, and adding a timeline from this joining point back to the left-hand side of the page.

In stage three, the client is encouraged to focus on the individual goals represented in the circles, defining them further if required. By asking open questions around what the client needs to know about each goal to be able to make a decision, a first action can be created. This is added to the left-hand side of the timeline. Actions can also be extracted from the client's earlier narrative (e.g. they may know someone to talk to in that industry; they could express that they have never researched this area on-line) but actions must be attainable and specific, to encourage further research and build confidence. Simple statements such as 'applying for a job is not making a decision, it is part of the process' can be used to include in the plan a diversity of actions. Working through all of the goal circles, a picture will emerge allowing the client to visualise how to move forward in their decision making process.

Figure 1: The basic structure of Plan: Me

Articles
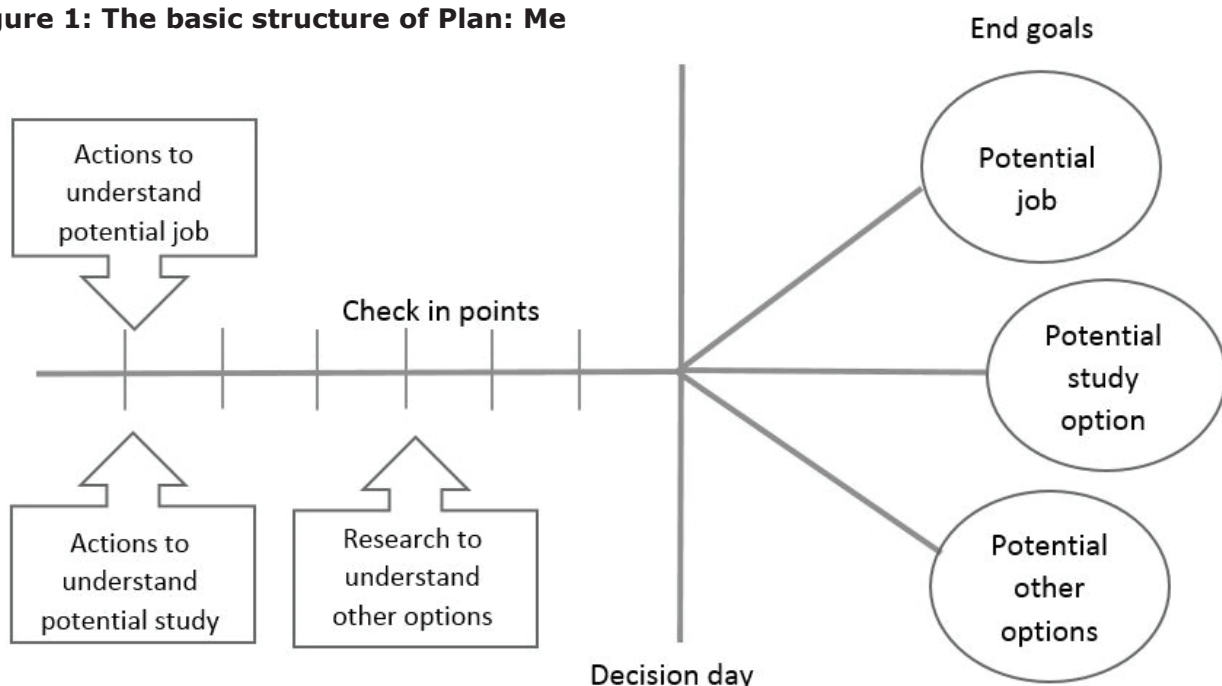
The final stage of Plan: Me brings the decision making process into the life of the client by creating a holistic and realistic plan. Dates can be added to certain actions (e.g. careers events, application windows etc.) however, it is not always necessary or possible to have a date for the decision to be made. Check-in point marks are added to ensure that the client treats this as a plan and can relate it to similar plans they have created in their life, e.g. study plans or project plans. The client decides how often they wish to check-in with themselves, with the stipulation that it is on a regular basis such as once a month, once a week - whatever works with their life. At each check-in point, the client self-assesses what they have done and revises their Plan: Me to ensure each goal circle is still relevant and linked to an action. They then establish further mini-goals to be achieved by their next check-in point.

For mini-goals to be effective and support motivation, they need to be in line with the client's life and accommodate other commitments. Setting mini-goals and keeping check-in points helps ensure the Plan: Me maintains momentum by making the process more attainable, and allowing clients to set small, achievable actions without feeling overwhelmed by the larger, life-changing decision. Practitioners should reassure any client who lacks sufficient information to make their decision and to use the development of Plan: Me to empower clients, building confidence and agency.

The name Plan: Me was chosen for its two separate meanings. Plan, helping clients to understand that career is not a nebulous concept and can be achieved through a focused plan. Me, giving ownership of this process and this document to the client. This is their progression plan and they can change, adapt and engage with it however they see fit. Overall, it highlights that clients can take control of their future and create a set of actions to target their progression to achieve goals.

Figure 2: Example Plan: Me
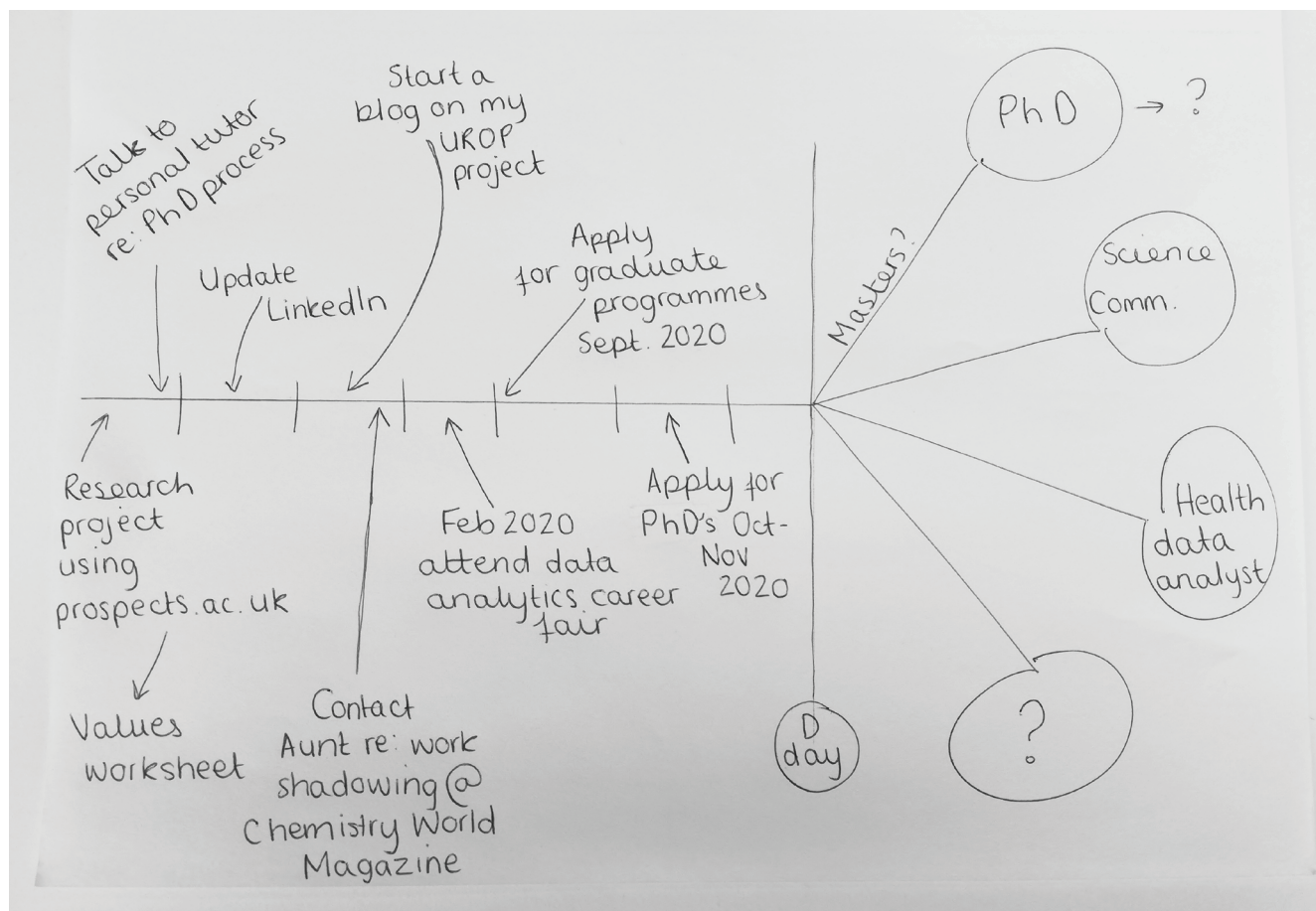
Theory behind Plan: Me

Snyder (1995) created Hope theory in a counselling context, supporting clients' development of confidence, building agency and developing the ability to problem solve. This resonates with many clients seeking careers support and has formed the theory underpinning Plan: Me.

Snyder and colleagues (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991, p.287) define hope as 'a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)'. Similarly, the main constructs of Snyder's Hope model (1995) are agency and planning. Hope Theory has been explored in a range of contexts such as understanding suicide (Grewal & Porter, 2007), possible treatment of sexual offenders (Moulden & Marshall, 2005) and human resource development (Luthans & Jensen, 2002). It has also been used as a lens to explore many elements of early adult development such as academic success (Snyder, Shorey, Cheavens, Pulvers, Adams & Wiklund, 2002) and problem solving and coping (Chang, 1998).

Snyder's model is grounded in the notion that individuals like to work towards a goal, giving them purpose. He defines this as agency thinking and argues that its development will moves a person towards creating a pathway to achieve the goal (pathway thinking). If developing a full pathway to achieve the goal is not possible, first steps should be identified and undertaken, building confidence in the client as they achieve the steps. Also, as the goal pursuit moves forward, should surprise or unplanned events (stressors) occur that challenge the pathway thinking of the client, agency and planning offer sufficient flexibility for individuals to reimagine their pathway and continue their journey towards the goal. These important concepts are evident in the construction of Plan: Me.

Likewise, the main constructs of Hope Theory - agency and planning - resonate with many widely used careers theories, particularly Egan's Skilled Helper model (2002). Egan outlines a three-stage model supporting the practitioner and client through a journey, exploring what is going on, what solutions make sense and finally how to get what is needed/wanted. Egan's model is

solution focused, supporting the development of a plan (or creating pathway thinking as it is called in Hope theory) to move toward a goal (creating agency).

Applying Egan's three stages to Plan: Me, the goal in the circles can be equated what is wanted (the desired outcome) with the steps and check-in points being in line with solutions, actions and pathway creation. As with Snyder's Hope Model, creating one action for each goal at a time allows the client to develop their confidence by achieving smaller actions which, in turn, reinforces their agency to continue creating the pathway.

Fundamentally, what differentiates Plan: Me from Egan's model is the element of creating a visual representation of the process. The concept of using diagrams with clients is explored by Amundson (2003) who describes 'active engagement' in careers counselling as including elements such as visual imagery and physical activity. By committing thoughts to paper, many clients are able to clarify better what their goals are and construct a starting point on a pathway to achieve them. Moreover, having a physical map to take away from a careers session supports the psychological transition from viewing their career as abstract into a more tangible concept.

Elements of Plan: Me are also similar to the GROW model of coaching (Alexander, 2006; Whitmore, 2002). GROW looks at developing people through a four-step process. First, establishing a goal, secondly examining the current reality, thirdly exploring the options and finally establishing the way forward. GROW was developed for use with clients who were professionals with an assumption that they have a certain amount of experience to draw on in order to explore future options. When working with younger, less experienced clients, the ability to define all of the options to explore may be more limited. In contrast, Plan: Me offers additional flexibility by having goals that are undefined but still contain actions to define them. Importantly it allows for a more holistic overview of a client's life, exploring multiple goals at once in order to move towards a point where a decision can be made.

Plan: Me similarly draws on the concept of solution focused counselling (de Jong & Berg, 1996) which was adapted into solution focused careers counselling by

Miller (2004). Her three-stage model takes clients and practitioners through problem clarification and goal identification, then builds client self-helpfulness and finally, constructs a meaningful message. Miller's method requires the client to adopt a forward focus in their approach, putting emphasis on expectation and progress. This same focus in used in Plan: Me, although it differs in method. In Miller's model clients are invited to use scales to self-assess where they are on their journey, using a progression from 1 (being stuck and confused) to 10 (being clear about what they want to do). Much research supports this type of approach, however it is based on practitioners working with clients over a series of interventions. Often this is not possible in a university context, hence the inclusion of check-in points as an alternative means of independent self-assessment in the development of Plan: Me. Moreover, this approach reflects Snyder's Hope theory (1995) and supports clients in identifying goals and linking these to first actions. The process builds confidence through initial achievements and models a method clients can adopt for future action, letting the plan grow in an organic way and allowing for adaptations to counter negative discoveries or setbacks. Although Snyder described these as blockages, we found that if a client is able to view them as more information, the movement towards decision making and the building of their confidence is less likely to be derailed.

As mentioned, progressive outcomes continue to build confidence, encouraging the client to explore further, creating new actions to build their knowledge and progress towards a point when decisions can be made. In line with Skinner's early work on Operant conditioning (Skinner, 1948) this positive reinforcement builds confidence and helps a client to propose an action they may not have felt able to complete before, like attending a networking event, or approaching people via a networking site such as LinkedIn. Activities like this help to build social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and expand what Hodkinson & Sparkes (1997) identified as a client's 'horizon for action'; that is being able to envisage the possibilities – 'What we can see is limited by the position we stand in, and the horizons that are visible from that position' (Hodkinson, 2009, p.5). Hodkinson's theory of Careership explores career decision making and found that often, the greatest influence was not the person

supposedly making that decision but the interaction and unequal force of external factors such as the client's geographical location, educational providers and the labour market.

Crucially, through the actions of Plan: Me clients are encouraged to expand their horizons (e.g. by meeting different people outside their normal professional circle or undertaking work experience/shadowing experiences) although the value that individuals put on these experiences will differ depending on their disposition. It can be difficult to incorporate these elements into a short session, yet by applying Careership to Plan: Me practitioners may be able to challenge clients to push themselves towards actions which – although they may have a higher level of risk – could expand horizons for action.

Of relevance in today's unpredictable labour market, the progressive building of a careers pathway and confidence opens up the opportunity for clients to include planned happenstance as part of their decision making process. Krumboltz's theory of planned happenstance (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999) actively discourages a linear approach to decision making and planning, identifying three elements that dominate our lives: external factors; chance events; and the unexpected. While practitioners know and accept this to be true, trying to integrate this concept into a career session is challenging. However, by not prescribing a full pathway within Plan: Me, clients are naturally more flexible and adaptable to all three of Krumboltz's factors. More recently within the list of attributes that will be required of future employees and industry leaders, the World Economic Forum Future of Jobs report (Centre for the New Economy and Society, 2018) identifies cognitive flexibility, complex problem solving and decision making among their top ten requirements. By introducing a tool to support clients in accepting their inability to plan everything but still enabling them to put concepts into a framework when making life decisions, practitioners are equipping their clients for the future.

Limitations

Like all practical tools, Plan: Me has not been designed to be used in isolation. While the basic elements of

Plan: Me (creating actions to move towards a goal) may be useful, the richness of experience provided by a professional practitioner is required for the tool to reach its optimal potential of building confidence and agency in clients.

Plan: Me was developed with a basic assumption that clients have a certain amount of agency to move towards a goal. However, implementation of Plan: Me could be problematic with clients who are not in a position to consider making a decision due to personal circumstances such as unstable emotional states, or dealing with other trauma. Plan: Me also assumes that the client comes from or is accepting of an individualistic goal-driven culture evident within western society. In today's global environment this is not always the case and different clients may prefer to align the Plan: Me model to more community-based values and principles.

Further research

Plan: Me has been developed over the past 10 years through discussions with fellow practitioners and the application of theory to develop practice. Feedback from clients and practitioners has been overwhelmingly positive and anecdotally, practitioners felt clients left the intervention with a clear action plan. Also, there seemed to be fewer repeat visits to the service with clients who did return often bringing with them an updated Plan: Me, showing new actions and revised goals. However there has been no formal evaluation of the Plan: Me process.

This lack of formal feedback opens up many potential research questions such as: how useful do clients find the tool? What type of students engage more/less? How could Plan: Me be adapted to work optimally with all student groups? Can it be used effectively in a group or workshop environment? Research focused on practitioners using the tool would also be interesting. For example, did they find it helpful and if so, with what clients? What did they change/adapt?

At the heart of Plan: Me is the concept of agency and the assumption that this is a quality possessed by students who self-refer to a careers consultation. Taking this assumption and incorporating it with Hodkinson's (2009) research on Careership, which

explores horizons of action, would also form an interesting topic. This could help researchers and practitioners explore how tools like Plan: Me relate to the realities experienced by adolescents when making career decisions.

In moving forward, a blended short course – Attributes and Aspirations - is being developed and will be piloted in the academic year 2019-2020 in which an online version of Plan: Me will form the basic building block of career planning. It is targeted at taught postgraduate medicine students at a London university, and will take students through the main stages of career development and implementation via four interactive online units, supplemented by four two-hour face-to-face group sessions, run by a careers consultant. The course evaluation plan will have elements that focus specifically on Plan: Me. Ethics approval will be sought to research further, with the focus and topic of the research being based on information gained from the initial evaluation.

To conclude, Plan: Me was developed largely based on the needs of a population of clients who were attending university and self-assessed that they required careers support. It has also been used with doctors in training who were struggling with decision making. The tool is underpinned by career theory, and found by clients and practitioners to be effective in supporting the career decision-making process. However, formal evaluative research to verify this and establish the usefulness of the tool on different populations is required.

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