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CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

# The Career Development Handbook

## The Foundations of Professional Career Practice

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# Chapter 11
# Leading career development services

Whether we work alone or alongside other career development professionals, we are all managers. We need to manage ourselves and our work and manage projects we are working on. Some of us might also manage people, supervising the work of others who are also involved in delivering career development services. Similarly, we all have a role in relation to leading career development services, whether it is responding to leaders in our workplace or contributing to the process of determining the vision and purpose of our services.

## Recognising the big picture

When we talk about 'career development services', we are using this term to describe the management units in which career development support is organised. These might be standalone careers development services operating as individual companies, or they might be services which are parts of larger organisations – such as a career development service within a university.

Regardless of where they are situated, as you start to think about issues related to leadership and management, it is important to recognise the wider context within which career services operate and the drivers and barriers that they are negotiating. A career development service does not exist in isolation and does not have complete autonomy over what services to offer and how to deliver them. Instead, it is subject to wider forces which include

- **Public policy influences.** As we explored in Chapter 5, the majority of career services are publicly funded. This means that the public policy context can have a strong influence in directing what kinds of services are delivered, how and to whom. This might be direct, in the case of countries with a national career development service, where national career guidance policies or strategies have a strong influence. In other cases, the influences might be indirect or multiple. For example, in the case of services provided within schools or universities, educational as

well as youth employment policies are likely to matter, shaping both the availability of funding and regulation.

- **Wider organisational goals.** Where services are provided within an organisation, wider organisational goals or objectives are also important. So, for example, a service within a university might be tasked with addressing the priorities that matter to that institution.
- **Professional requirements.** Services which employ career professionals need to ensure that they provide an environment that allows these individuals to work in line with their professional requirements and codes of practice. For example, an organisation employing career professionals must make sure that confidential spaces are provided for in-depth conversations.
- **Theoretical influences and evidence-based practice.** Exactly what is delivered by a career service is influenced by existing career development theory (see Chapter 6) and evidence about best practices in the delivery of different types of services (see Chapters 7–10). Career development professionals often have a key role in helping to shape the practices of a service through their ongoing CPD and learning about best practices.
- **Quality standards.** Services sometimes sign up for quality standards or join membership associations as a way of demonstrating the high standard of their services. In the UK, for example, career development services in universities can sign up to be members of AGCAS (the representative body for the career development services in higher education). Some services will also aim to achieve quality standards; for example schools in England, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands can undertake the Quality in Careers Standard, while standalone career development services and those in colleges can seek the matrix Standard. Other quality awards include non-careers-specific awards such as Investors in People. Engaging with these kinds of frameworks and standards has implications for how services are organised, managed and delivered.
- **Changing labour market and economic conditions.** Changing economic and social conditions can result in shifting priorities for career development services. Sometimes these impact directly on services as they reorientate their priorities or indirectly through public policy or organisational responses to these circumstances. In recent years, for example, the Covid-19 pandemic and economic crises have been important factors.

The way that services are framed by public policy assumptions and organisational contexts highlights that the ways senior civil servants, school leaders and university leaders understand career services have a very significant influence on service delivery. It is worth remembering that although many of these individuals have a good understanding of career development services, not all do. For many, assumptions about what career

developent services are 'for' and how they are delivered might be based on particular approaches to delivery (e.g. one-to-one counselling and coaching) or focused on narrow outcomes (e.g. finding people employment as quickly as possible). All career development professionals have a role in utilising their leadership skills to help address misconceptions and promote career services.

The forces that shape career development services are continually changing. As new political parties come into power, or a new university vice-chancellor or school head teacher is appointed, the priorities for career development services are likley to change. Developments in career theory and innovations in career practice can create an evidence base for supporting different forms of service organisation or delivery. As a career development professional, it is important to stay abreast of changing contexts and to be able to identify, promote and take forward potential service innovations.

**Resources**

There are lots of resources to help you improve the quality of what you provide, including the Quality in Careers Standard (https://www.qualityincareers.org.uk/), the matrix Standard (https://matrixstandard.com/) and Investors in People (https://www.investorsinpeople.com/). It is important for you to find out more about the infrastructure that exists for quality assurance in your country.

### Responding to technological innovations

A key source of innovation in recent years has been the advancement of technology. Developments in technology change the context for individuals' careers and the opportunities that exist for the provision of career support. In relation to service delivery, this can include initiatives such as the development of purpose-built national careers websites which support national career services and often include searchable databases of career information, as well as access to online self-guided tools and resources, and searchable course and job databases. Other innovations include Career Services Management Systems (CSMS) which can be purchased by organisations and used to manage career information, appointment bookings, job databases and events information. Other technological innovations which can be used include technologies that are not specific to career services, such as Customer Records Management (CRM) systems which help to securely store records relating to individual clients.

To date, a great deal of the technological innovations available have focused on providing access to information and databases (for clients) and managing service delivery and records (for services). However, increasingly, the

development of more advanced internet technologies, the generation of large data sets (often called 'big data'), the technological innovations to handle this, as well as the possibilities offered by artificial intelligence are changing the role that technology can play. It is increasingly possible for services to track the ways in which clients interact with services, and to use this to identify and target specific services at specific clients. The use of chat-bots and interactive tools is also likely to increase, allowing for a greater range of services, at a greater level of personalisation, to be provided to clients.

The technological innovations in career services offer certain possibilities and risks and are changing the nature of the role and role(s) services invest in. For example, the capacity to understand and interpret big data sets has become a skill set that many services have sought to secure. For career development staff, the ability to support clients in accessing and utilising technology has also become an important skill set.

**Resources**

Tristram Hooley and Tom Staunton's chapter 'The Role of Digital Technology in Career Development' sets out a framework for thinking about how new developments in technology might impact career development practice.

Fiona Cobb's article 'There's No Going Back' offers some insights into the ways that higher education career services are transforming their delivery through the use of big data and in response to a changing political landscape.

### Considering innovation in service design

Alongside technological innovation, services are also often interested in practice innovations that might lead to more efficient or effective services. This is where career theory and practice come into play and where practitioners often have a key role in supporting service improvement. The newsletters and websites of professional associations and bodies are full of examples of practice innovations that have been led by careers professionals, including things like:

- the development and/or introduction of a new tool or resource for working with particular client groups;
- the development of new partnerships and co-delivery of career education interventions; and
- experimentation with different styles of interviewing or different models of interviewing.

Another type of innovation is in service design, with these innovations more often led by service managers. A good example of this is how within higher education there has been a great deal of interest in the most effective way to organise career development services. Some universities have pursued a central service that extends into academic contexts, whereas others have pursued a model whereby careers staff and the services they offer are embedded in departments across the institution. With all innovations, it is important that these are carefully planned, implemented and evaluated, something that requires strong leadership and management skills.

**Resources**

For insights into practice and service innovations, take a look at recent professional newsletters and publications. In the UK, the Career Development Institute's publication *Career Matters* or the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services' (AGCAS) publication *Phoenix* both regularly report on innovations.

Mike Grey's article 'How to Cope with the Complexity of Career Service Leadership' also reflects on the mix of external pressures and internal design decisions that higher education career services make.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management can be understood as distinct, but linked, concepts. Leaders motivate people to work towards a vision for your service, and managers allocate resources and put things in place to make that vision a reality in practice. A vision and goals for your organisation won't necessarily make anything happen, but equally, it is hard to implement anything without a clearly communicated view of the purpose of the activity and why it is important.

### Management

Services need managing – from initial design (such as determining how to allocate resources for one-to-one work as we discussed in Chapter 7 or considering how to embed careers education from Chapter 8) through to the continuous operation of an effective offer. Those resource allocation decisions need to be evaluated, feeding into a cycle of continuous improvement.

Management is often thought about in terms of people, projects and resources (Figure 11.1).


**Figure 11.1.** Domains of management

*Managing people* might involve being their line manager, with formal responsibility for agreeing on work objectives and being the formal interface between an employee and employer. Even if you do not have formal management responsibility, you are likely to be reliant on others for your ability to achieve your own goals at work and get done what you have agreed to do. Your communication and influencing skills with colleagues who might have more, or less, power than you in the workplace come into play here. Management is rarely about just telling people what to do and is more likely to be about discussing, consulting, negotiating and persuading. Sometimes, especially when you are in a line manager role, this can involve having difficult conversations. The skills you use in your one-to-one work are of course useful here: careful listening, clear explanation, effective challenge and agreeing actions are all in your toolkit.

From the outset of your work as a career development professional, you are likely to be *managing projects*: an event, a particular opportunity for clients or a new way of offering a service, for example. Simple project management tools can help you with this: being clear about objectives and success criteria, breaking tasks down into sequence and working out timelines, pinch points and key risks. Keeping things on track using timelines and documented workflows helps in monitoring progress and is especially useful if you are working in a team, as it helps motivate people towards shared goals and highlights your interdependence and accountabilities. At the end of the project, those success criteria can be carried forwards into evaluation and refinement in an 'action research' cycle.

There are many tools available for project management online which allow for varying degrees of complexity, but you can create a basic project plan effectively using a tool like Excel or free software such as Trello. Listing tasks on the left and a horizontal timeline allows for the plotting of project

components and responsibilities, colour-coded for different actors or live status.

Finally, *managing resources* is worth highlighting as a particular aspect of people and projects. The primary resource at your disposal is your own time and energy, so finding ways of working that help you maintain focus and productivity to meet your goals and commitments is a key part of this. That said, remember that none of us are machines, and being a professional requires you to monitor your own well-being too and take care of yourself as well as your commitments to your employer or other stakeholders. Clear time management protocols can also help when you need to demonstrate if expectations have crept up beyond what is reasonable.

## CASE STUDY

As part of her role as a career development professional in an English secondary school, Claire was asked by the senior management team to do something that demonstrated very clearly that sixth form wasn't the only option for year 11 students so that they could consider vocational options such as apprenticeships. She decided to create an 'Apprenticeship Week' to profile opportunities and get students and parents thinking.

Her Apprenticeship Week project plan included a timetable for communication to teaching staff to get their buy-in and ensure they promoted the event in classes and tutor groups. She negotiated class and assembly time throughout the week to convey key messages and organised an early evening event for parents and students. She secured an agreement that school administrative and technical staff would help with aspects of this event, liaising with employers and apprentices who would attend and ensuring it was recorded for those who couldn't attend. She even asked student leaders to meet and escort visiting speakers.

Her project plan was available on a shared drive so that even when her admin colleague was sick the week before the event, the office manager could clearly see what had been committed to and ensure the tasks were reallocated. After the event, her clear criteria enabled her to plan a light-touch evaluation using feedback from everyone involved to decide how effectively she had met the brief she had been given and plan improvements for future events.

## Leadership

Leaders in our organisations and sector can be critical to inspiring our work, articulating and communicating a vision of what we are trying to achieve and maintaining our momentum towards it. Leaders do not necessarily have to have a formal position at the top of an organisational hierarchy, although this is often the case. People can lead by the brilliance of their ideas and their capacity to inform and inspire, as well as by their logistical competence and capacity to organise people and get things done. Leadership in organisations is often dispersed among a range of different people.

There are different understandings of leadership. Some contend that great leaders are born, not made, whereas others focus on how leaders can learn the traits or behaviours of a good leader and focus on defining what these technical, people and conceptual skills are. The recognition of leadership and management as an area of competence in its own right raises the possibility of being led by those who may have skills as managers but do not have training as career development professionals.

In addition to questions about what skills you might need as a leader or manager, it is also possible to recognise a range of different leadership styles. There are lots of different models of leadership, but perhaps the most famous is Lewin's and colleagues' model, which distinguishes between the following approaches.

- **Authoritarian leaders** provide clear direction and expectations but offer little opportunity for team members to input their ideas into the direction.
- **Democratic leaders** engage with their team and develop a common vision and approach. This is often viewed as the most effective approach to leadership (in most, but not all, situations), but it is also the most difficult to pull off.
- **Delegative leaders** let their teams do what they want and offer little direction. This can be effective when working with highly skilled and motivated teams, but it can also result in people losing focus and motivation.

Other approaches to leadership and management focus on dilemmas like whether to focus on the team or the task, what level of innovation, creativity and risk to encourage, how to manage uncertainty, stress and failure and how to balance short-term performance with long-term sustainability.

It is useful to reflect on your leadership style and to think about how you might need to flex this style as you work with different kinds of teams and address different tasks. The ability to adapt your approach to leadership to different team needs, contexts and tasks is often called situational leadership.

In situational leadership, you adapt your style to what people need in relation to balance between direction and support. Hersey and Blanchard, who developed situational leadership, suggest four main approaches to management, which managers and leaders should be able to switch between depending on the situation.

- **Telling** is focused on the task and giving instructions to ensure that the task is done.
- **Selling** is about engaging team members in the team and the task.
- **Participating** is about working with team members to develop a shared understanding of tasks and build an effective way of working across the team.
- **Delegating** is about giving up power and control to team members who are competent and engaged.

Some inexperienced or less engaged colleagues may need more of a focus on motivating or instructing, which could in turn be seen as unnecessary and intrusive by very skilled and committed colleagues. On the other hand, in leadership and management, a consistency of approach is needed for fairness, so there are some tensions to hold in balance here.

A more contemporary emphasis has been on leadership as a process, with all of us all playing varying times in the role of leader and follower, which we will look at in the next section.

### Resources

Lewin and colleagues' article 'Patterns of Aggressive Behavior in Experimentally Created "Social Climates"' sets out the basis of their theory. Ken Blanchard and Paul Hersey explore situational leadership in *Management of Organizational Behavior*.

As you move more into leadership and management, it is worth thinking more about these issues. Jon Bright's *Modern Management and Leadership* might be a good place to start. More specific books like Anthony Kelly's *Dynamic Management and Leadership in Education* or David Andrew and Tristram Hooley's *The Careers Leader Handbook* might also be useful.

## Managing up and effective followership

Not all leadership and management in organisations are top down. People can exert forms of leadership from all sorts of places within an organisation. Technical expertise or being good at your job gives you some authority, and

you can potentially use this to influence others and even the direction of the organisation itself.

Another source of power is your understanding of the organisational purpose, culture and politics. If you understand what the purpose of the organisation is, how leadership and management are structured within the organisation and who has responsibility for and authority over different areas, you are likely to be able to navigate your organisation more effectively and potentially influence things. Many of these processes build on the concepts we discussed in Chapter 10, such as undertaking organisational work within career development (e.g. engaging other staff in careers or integrating careers into the organisational vision) and shade into forms of leadership and management.

Barbara Kellerman argues that these forms of leadership from below are very important in understanding the success or otherwise of different organisations. She suggests that we have focused too much on the role of top-down leaders and neglected the obvious truth that there can be no leaders without followers. She refocuses the discussion on the role of followers, noting that how they behave in response to leaders makes all the difference. She argues that there are five different types of followers.

- **Isolates** try and do their job with as little interaction with their leaders, colleagues and the organisation as possible.
- **Bystanders** pay attention to what is going on in the organisation but try not to get involved in anything outside of their core jobs.
- **Participants** engage with the organisational mission and respond to their leaders and managers.
- **Activists** feel strongly about their work and their organisation and try and influence the direction, even if this means challenging their leaders.
- **Diehards** are committed to their cause or to their leaders and are willing to pursue this aim even if it creates problems and challenges for them and those around them.

### Reflection

What type or types of follower have you been in the past?

What have been the advantages and disadvantages of the different positions that you have adopted?

How will this influence how you follow up in the future?

How would you deal with these different kinds of followers as a leader or manager?

It is also worth thinking about the strategies and approaches that are available to you when you are trying to influence things from below. These range from non-compliance, procrastination and active resistance to flattery, offering creative alternatives, enthusiastically supporting leaders that you agree with and asserting forms of individual and collective power. This might include refusing to do things because you believe that they are unethical or confronting your manager collectively, perhaps with the support of a trade union.

The process of trying to influence your manager in a variety of ways is often called 'managing up'. While it might sound like this is a hostile act, many organisations actively look for people who have the capability to manage their managers. Very few organisations want to put all their faith in top managers and just leave everyone else to act as drones. Organisations where there is a strong understanding of the organisation's purpose at all levels, and a willingness to speak up and challenge bad ideas, are usually stronger for it. So, it is important to think about what your manager is doing, why they are doing it and how you want to engage with it.

Managing up is a very subtle process where you have to think carefully about the best approach. Sometimes the right thing to do is to challenge a manager in a team meeting and set out a criticism or alternative approach. But usually, it is important to remember that you are not just discussing issues or processes, but also engaging as colleagues who both have feelings. Thinking about how to raise concerns in ways that are seen as supportive and productive is important. A little flattery will get you a long way, as will a willingness to take on tasks and develop leaders' ideas. You often have a lot of capacity to bend initially bad or poorly thought-out ideas into something more useful if you can do some of the development.

Ultimately, the key thing to remember here is that even if you have no formal leadership role, your decisions and actions matter, and so it is important to think about leadership even when it is not part of your job.

### Resources

Barbara Kellerman's book *Followership* is an essential reading for both leaders and followers.

For ideas about how to manage up effectively, the Harvard Business Review's book *Managing Up* provides a concise and useful introduction.

### Moving into leadership positions

When you move into a leadership or management position for the first time, it can be exciting and daunting in equal measure. In many cases you will have been picked for management at least partially because you are good at your current job, and so you are now being asked to manage other people who do that job. Your technical knowledge as a careers professional will be invaluable to you as you take up a management role, but remember that there are often lots of ways to do the same job, and just because your new team does not practise in the same way as you would, it doesn't necessarily mean that there is a problem.

If you are managing a career development team, you have an enormous head-start on becoming a good manager. Not only do you understand the job, but you also have a lot of experience in how you have been managed in this role. Given this, a good starting point is to reflect on what has worked well and not so well in managing you and your colleagues. This will probably give you some good ideas about what to do and what not to do.

The next step is to clarify your understanding of the organisational objectives and the scope of your role. If this is the first time you have taken up a management position, you are unlikely to find that you have unlimited power. Generally, you will be asked to manage within a specific framework. Start by meeting with your manager and ask them to talk you through what they think this role needs to do, what the key issues are and what success would look like. Managing up is a very important part of all management roles.

If you build on your existing expertise, reflect on your experience of being managed, and gain a clear understanding of the parameters of your role, you will have a good chance of making a successful move into management. Beyond this, we would offer the following five tips to help you get started.

- **Spend time listening and thinking before you act.** When you come into a team as a new manager, it is tempting to think that you have the answers. These will often be based on your previous experience and may not always fit the current situation. Give yourself time to listen to the expertise in your new team and think about how to approach any challenges. You will then know whether you need to make changes and be more confident that they are the right ones.
- **Focus on developing your staff.** It is much easier to manage competent, confident and engaged staff. In many cases, staff will be the main resource that you have to deliver your vision. So, spend time with staff, think about what their strengths and weaknesses are and how they can best be developed and deployed. Providing training, mentoring and directing are some of the most powerful tools that you have.

- **Trust people.** When you first become a manager, you may feel that you need to demonstrate your authority and prove that you are good enough. But, micromanaging and doing everything yourself is almost always a bad strategy. Trust your staff, delegate to them and be magnanimous in your praise of their contributions.
- **Give feedback and deal with problems.** Some members of your team will have weaknesses; others will make mistakes or perform badly. It is important that you set out the standards of performance you want and let people know when they are not being met. Setting aside time to give feedback and deal with various problems and issues is central. These conversations aren't always easy, but they are important.
- **Ask for feedback.** This is a new role for you; it is going to be a learning experience. Ask for feedback from your manager and from your staff. Try and find ways that both of these groups can give you positive and developmental feedback that you can act on. Find time to reflect on your own performance and try and find a mentor or a buddy to talk these things over with in a confidential fashion.

### Resources

There are lots of books that discuss management and becoming a manager. Try Kate Minchin's *Always Time for Coffee: A Down-to-Earth Guide for Frontline Managers, Team Leaders and Supervisors* and Linda Hill's *Becoming a Manager*.

## Effective planning

The first step in delivering quality services is to know what you want to achieve and how you want to achieve it. If you are delivering a career education programme, this is where you might want to think about learning outcomes (see Chapter 8). For other activities, you might develop different kinds of aims and objectives. Typically, a large project or programme might have quite a broad aim, for example, to improve transition rates of young people, reduce unemployment, or improve graduate outcomes. But to effectively address such a broad aim, it is important to break it down into a series of more specific objectives or steps towards achieving this aim. An objective articulates a concrete goal for a project or programme and offers more detail about how the aim is achieved.

Once you have identified your aims and objectives, you will need to develop a project plan. For simple projects or activities, this might be simply a case of listing the steps you will take and in what order. For a career education intervention, for example, your project plan would be your lesson plan. More

complex projects are likely to involve a greater degree of planning. You might need to take some time to split your project into different workstreams or activities, and identify key milestones and indicators for each workstream. You might also plan how these will take place across a certain time period, making sure that the tasks are sequenced correctly. When you are undertaking this kind of project planning, using a tool like a Gantt chart or an online project planning tool can be helpful.

As part of your planning, it is also important to identify any resources you need and how you can secure these. When planning a lesson, it is good practice to make a note of the resources you will need for each part of your lesson plan, like handouts, post-it notes or pens and paper. The same is true for more complex projects, except here you might be thinking about resources such as which staff members might take on different tasks or workstreams, and what budget you might need for different activities. For complex projects, developing a separate budget plan might be necessary.

Whether you are planning a lesson, a project, or making an annual service plan, it is important to be realistic. It is a common problem that plans are too ambitious. If you are new to planning, then a good approach is to learn from a more experienced mentor – sharing a lesson plan, project plan or service plan with a trusted colleague will help you get feedback about whether your plan is realistic. It is also a good idea to draw up a basic risk assessment by trying to anticipate any potential risks to the achievement of your project goals and spending some time thinking about potential mitigation measures. Depending on the nature of your project, you may also want to engage in further planning processes; these can include things like stakeholder engagement plans and marketing plans.

## Monitoring and evaluation

A good project plan makes the 'doing' of a project a great deal easier. With a good plan, you can ensure that projects are appropriately resourced and timed, and you can anticipate any major challenges and identify mitigation measures. However, for any kind of project, you may encounter unanticipated challenges. It is also possible that some of your activities may not have exactly the outcomes you anticipate, and this can then impact your planned subsequent activities. It is therefore important that you engage in ongoing monitoring of your project. If you are delivering a career education lesson or holding a one-to-one appointment, it is good practice to regularly reflect on how the session is going and whether you need to make any adaptations. In a larger project, monitoring includes regularly collecting data from different workstreams and activities, to check ongoing progress and to make adjustments where necessary.

At the end of a project or an activity, it is useful to engage in a wider review or evaluation of your activity. Project evaluation typically focuses on whether you achieved what you set out to achieve, and evaluation activities often form the basis of project or annual reports. The data that you have collected through monitoring your activities will provide you with some evidence about the effectiveness of the project, but it is also likely that you will want to collect additional data. For example, if you have been running a career education programme at your school, you might have gathered feedback forms from participants after each career education session, but at the end of the programme, you may also want to run a survey or focus group with participants to find out what they thought about the programme as a whole, and what the impact of the programme has been.

Effective monitoring and evaluation therefore means collecting multiple forms of data at different times. Carefully planning what kinds of data you will gather, when, and how right from the beginning of a project is useful, and you may do this through a monitoring and evaluation plan. Having a plan means that you avoid the traps of not having enough data, having too much data or not having the right data when it comes to completing project evaluations or final reports.

### Theory-led evaluation

A particular kind of evaluation that is of growing popularity is theory-led evaluation. This approach seeks to understand not just whether or not an intervention or project 'worked' but asks how it works, in what circumstances, for which clients and to what extent?[1] This approach is therefore well suited to working with complex social interventions such as career development, and especially for facilitating ongoing exploration of how and why different forms of intervention might be valuable in different circumstances and for different client groups. Rather than concluding, for example, that 86% of people saw an improvement in their career management skills as a result of engaging in a programme, theory-led evaluations would be interested in how and why this group of 86% saw an improvement and also why the other 14% did not. It also helps to identify unintended outcomes of programmes or interventions.

The first step in theory-led evaluations is to develop a 'theory of change' for the project or programme you are working on. This involves starting from the overall programme or project aim and working backwards to articulate what needs to happen in order for this aim to be met. So, for example, if a service is aiming to improve employment rates of graduates, then it would be important to break down what might need to happen in order to address this aim. This means doing some thinking and background work to identify what is already known about the problem you are seeking to address: do you have data to suggest that particular graduates are more likely to be unemployed?

Do you know what the barriers might be to increasing employment rates? What does the evidence suggest might support employment rates? You then break down the steps that are necessary for achieving your overall aim, trying to identify all the conditions that have to be in place, how these relate to each other, and how they will be met in an overall model.

An example of this, relating to graduate employment, might present the theory of change as the following steps: graduates need to hold relevant skills for the workplace; then they need to have awareness of potential jobs; and then they need to have the confidence and skills to apply for these jobs. Once you have listed these conditions, you can design interventions to meet them. A theory of change also typically outlines the contextual factors and assumptions in a model. For example, graduate employment is going to be influenced by the contextual factor of the economy, and an assumption might be that all graduates want to work or are able to work. Normally, a theory of change is presented as a visual graphic that can be used with stakeholders. It can be a very good way of outlining the rationale behind a programme and raising awareness of the complexities at play. Evaluation activities can then be planned around a theory of change, with the purpose of testing and elaborating the theory and its assumptions.

### Gathering data

What do we mean by the term 'data' and what kinds of data might we collect? Data here just means evidence about a project or an activity. Documentary evidence such as lesson plans and meeting minutes counts as data, as do records of how many clients have been engaged, or how many sessions have been run. But for career services, some of the most useful data is data that relates to outcomes for clients.

A useful model for thinking about the different kinds of data evaluating client outcomes is Kirkpatrick's four-level training evaluation model. This is a model widely used in education, but it can easily be applied to career learning. Kirkpatrick proposes that there are four levels of evaluation and that it is valuable to start with the first but build up through the other three should time and resources allow.

- **Level 1 Reaction:** this level focuses on the perspectives of participants who have been engaged in a project. Did they enjoy the activity? Did they find it useful? This kind of data can often be gathered through a feedback form at the end of an intervention (a careers appointment, or a careers lesson for example), or can be gathered through interactive polls or other activities. This provides useful information about participants' experiences, although it doesn't necessarily provide evidence of the effectiveness of an intervention – learning is probably more likely to have happened if someone has enjoyed a session, but if someone has

enjoyed a session it does not necessarily follow that they will have learnt anything.

- **Level 2 Learning:** evaluation at this level is about identifying what participants have learnt from an activity. This might involve things like setting and assessing learning outcomes, or even pre- and post-testing, which is where you assess someone's knowledge or skills before undertaking an activity and then make the same assessment at the end to identify any changes.
- **Level 3 Behaviour:** the focus of evaluation at this level is on how far someone's behaviour changes as a result of undertaking an activity. After a job-searching workshop, for example, it might be interesting to explore whether participants actually apply for more jobs after taking part. This might be assessed through a follow-up survey with participants sometime after they have engaged in the activity, to find out what happened next. Alternatively, services might track the engagement of individual clients with different aspects of service delivery and be able to track changes in patterns of engagement after attending an activity, so perhaps after attending a careers workshop, people are more likely to log into the career service website.
- **Level 4 Results:** this level focuses on the overall success of a programme in achieving its aims. This is often at quite a high level and can involve tracking changes in the overall statistical outcomes of certain client groups, such as improved employment rates or improved retention rates.

Different kinds of data collection activities can be planned to gather this data, with activities like feedback forms, polls, surveys, focus groups and sometimes interviews as common means of collecting data.

### Understanding data

Engaging in planning and monitoring and evaluation will help you to engage in continuous service improvement. However, it is important to take a judicious approach to data collection, taking care not to collect too much, too little, or the wrong kinds of data. A good guide is that the data you collect should be closely linked to your objectives. If you have run a careers lesson where you have aimed to improve young people's skills and confidence in applying for work, then you should think about how you can measure skills and confidence. You should also take care to think about whether your measures are exactly the right ones, so a good example of this is measuring a person's 'confidence' before and after a careers session might not always be a good measure on its own, as individuals can sometimes be quite confident about topics that they know relatively little about, and the process of learning more about them can result in a reduction of confidence – but we would argue this is not necessarily a bad thing if it means they access the support they

need. It is also useful to keep a critical perspective on whether the measures you use are explainable solely by the services you have provided or if there are alternative explanations. A classic example of this is that measuring the effectiveness of careers provision through employment figures is not always a good indicator, as employment levels are impacted heavily by factors outside of the control of career services or individuals, most notably the state of the economy.

A key means through which you can strengthen the quality of the data you collect and the interpretations you make of it is to collect a range of different forms of data from different sources. Comparing different data sets helps you to check your understandings and assumptions and prevents you from coming to incorrect conclusions. This is sometimes called data 'triangulation'. Examples include when you are designing a survey, you might collect numeric data (quantitative) and data in the form of written feedback (qualitative), and here the written comments can offer additional insights or context to help you interpret the numeric data. You might also collect data from different sources; for instance, when delivering a careers education programme, you might collect data from the students in a school class or year group and also the teachers, which might give you different perspectives on how and what students have learnt or how their behaviour has changed after a careers intervention. You might collect data not just on your own graduates' employment figures each year but also on general graduate employment figures and on local employment figures to check what wider contextual influences might be impacting your client outcomes.

### Resources

The Better Evaluation website offers some insights into different evaluation approaches and methods at www.betterevaluation.org. Pawson and Tilley's book *Realistic Evaluation* offers a comprehensive overview of conducting realist evaluations, which is a popular form of theory-led evaluation.

Pete Robertson's chapter 'Evidence-Based Practice for Career Development' explores the importance of evidence in delivering effective career services and identifies some of the challenges and opportunities for collecting and making sense of this evidence.

## In a nutshell

In this chapter, we have looked at how career services are led and managed and considered the way in which you can participate in that, both as an ordinary team member and as a leader or manager. It has covered:

- how services respond to and evolve with their context and the various drivers that they face;
- how services can be effectively led and managed;
- how you can engage with leadership and management and potentially move into a leadership and management position; and
- how you can monitor and evaluate your service, including how you can gather and make effective use of data.

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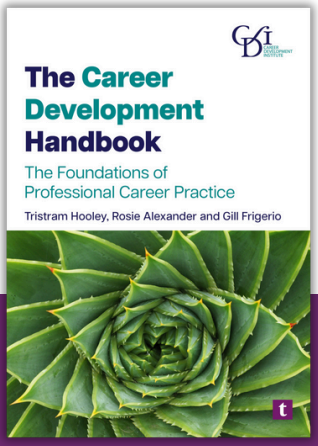


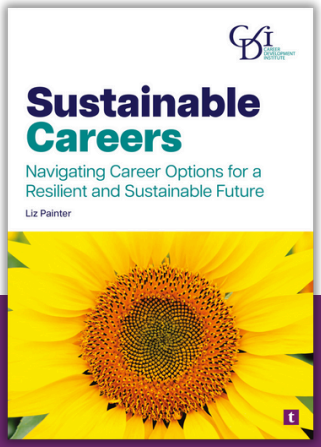


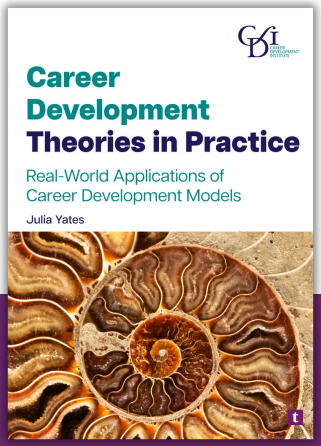


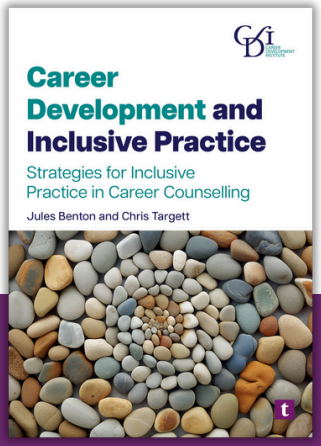


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