

Editorial

Fostering Evidence-based Practice and Applied Research in Career Development

The field of career development in Australia is populated by practitioners and theorists representative of different professions and academic disciplines: teachers, instructors, and guidance officers from education; employment and recruitment officers from human resources and management; organisational, counselling, and educational psychologists from psychology; and others from rehabilitation, social work, elite performance and sport, and public policy. The diversity of professions and disciplines is, without doubt, a virtue. In one way, this diversity manifests in the array of disciplinary perspectives published in the AJCD—truly it is the core strength of the journal that its remit is so broad and inclusive. The multidisciplinary reach of the journal similarly reflects the diverse composition of the peak body in the field in this country: the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA). Whilst the journal will always retain its intellectual independence—as a scholarly source of ideas and a platform for sharing evidence and practice—it may well prove strategic to align the journal with the CICA’s objectives and instruments of professionalisation, such as the *Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners* (CICA, 2006). In considering the dimensions of such a strategic alignment, here I briefly address two of the fundamental planks of the many disciplines and professions that make up the field of career development: evidence-based practice and applied research and development.

The Professional Standards require career development practitioners to engage in. Evidence-based practice has a firm position in other human services professions (e.g., medicine, clinical psychology). Whilst this term is not explicitly stated and defined in the Professional Standards, various sections and clauses are indicative of such an approach to practice under exhortations to use, develop, and evaluate theoretically-informed practices in a quality framework. The core competency *6.3.1 Career Development Theory*, for example, has a number of sub-competencies constitutive of evidence-based practice: *6.3.1.b Apply Career Development Theories to Practice* requires the integration of theory and research into practice; competency *6.3.1.i Program Development* requires the incorporation of evaluation process; and competency *6.3.1.j Specialisation – Assessment* requires the critical review and evaluation of general and specific approaches to assessment, in addition to the nomothetic review and evaluation of assessment results with individual clients. Additionally, the competency *6.7.3.b Evaluate the Service Provided to Clients* under the broad core competency *6.3.7 Professional Practice*, calls for practitioners to improve practice and accountability, measure and improve satisfaction, and provide evidence to further service promotion and enhancement. All of the aforementioned competency statements constitute dimensions of evidence-based practice, and there are others in the Professional Standards which are equally relevant, but not mentioned here.

With an apparent thread of evidence-based practice running through the sections, clauses and the wording of the Professional Standards, one would expect that Australian career development practitioners are engaging in programs of applied research and development leading to publications in journals which accept articles reporting rigorous evaluations entailing practitioner-friendly research methods, such as case studies or quasi-experimental designs. For it is certain that from an international perspective Australian career development research is high quality and replete with fascinating innovations and

nuanced applications in local settings (see Prideaux & Creed, 2002). Yet, I suspect that much of the good work indicative of evidence-based practice and applied research occurring in various workplaces goes unpublished. If indeed there is an unfortunate ratio between innovation and publication, then why is it so? Is it that practitioners believe that it is not their responsibility to engage in applied research and development? Is it that they believe they are unable to do so because of workplace restrictions? Is it that they do not feel sufficiently confident to evaluate their work using formal applied research designs and methods? Is it that they lack the confidence to publish their findings in an acceptable format for journals? Is it that the universities at which they studied career development have not sufficiently prepared them to engage in evidence-based practice or applied research? Perhaps they see a divide between theory and practice, and do not see the nexus of theory, applied research, and practice. Who really knows?

We all are responsible for ensuring the progress of the field of career development, the profession, and our respective base disciplines. Members of the field should give some consideration as to how evidence-based practice can be enhanced along with the conduct and publication of applied research and development. As the peak representative body and guardian of the Professional Standards, CICA must take a leading role in this agenda. Of course, infrastructure projects such as the establishment of a national research centre for career development would be important for such an endeavour. Collaboration between university departments, practitioner associations, and the organisations which deliver career development services could likewise produce significant benefits and progress toward the development of a culture of evidence-based practice and applied research and development. Ultimately, there must be support given to practitioners to better enable them to engage in applied research and development in their local circumstances and, *quid pro quo*, practitioners must reflect upon their personalisation of the Professional Standards and fully grasp their responsibility to engage in evidence-based practice.

For its part, the AJCD welcomes practice-based manuscripts for its double-blind, peer-review process. Whether the papers be submitted as case studies explicating a career development service or product in such considerable depth so as to facilitate the reader understanding the content and process of the delivery of the service or product; or whether the papers report upon naturalistic, qualitative studies or quasi-experiments comparing and contrasting the experience or outcomes of one service with another; such applied research and development is essential for the progression of the field of career development and the profession of career development practitioner. It is also vital for the analysis of theories—however ostensibly removed from the actual work conducted in the field they may seem to the practitioner at the coal face. Academics in the field of career development appreciate the grounded authenticity of practice-based research and do not necessarily privilege abstract research over applied. Indeed, it is exciting to see a theory being put to work in the field because doing so contributes to theoreticians' evaluations and modifications of the theory. When possible the peer-review process includes a member of the journal's editorial board and a practitioner with relevant expertise in terms of the content and research methods reported in a manuscript. This approach to peer-review ensures a balance of perspectives.

The field should continue to foster a strong professional and intellectual culture of evidence-based practice, applied research and development, and, moreover, an enthusiasm for sharing with the field via publication of journal articles. The AJCD is the only scholarly journal specialising in career development in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region, and stands ready to showcase the excellent work occurring in the field.

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References

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