

Title/Topic:

Using My Career Chapter in Career Counselling

Aims/Learning Objectives:

My Career Chapter (MCC; McIlveen, 2006) enables a client to write (by typing) a brief story about his/her life in relation to career. The process of MCC is such that the client develops a meta-awareness of his/her career story by speaking this story aloud to himself/herself and by hearing the career practitioner speak it aloud too. The story and themes within it can be used for further narrative work in counselling.

Client group with whom you use it:

MCC is ideal for adults, 18 years and older. As a career practitioner, you must make a judgement as to whether your client will benefit from this insight-oriented procedure that entails considerable personal exploration of self.

Work setting recommendations:

MCC can be used in career counselling as a take home activity that is returned for interpretation in the next session. MCC can be used for career education as a homework activity and returned for further work in the next class, but career counselling is the focus here.

Recommended time:

Writing MCC can take up to 2 hours. Also, be sure to include the time taken in a session to conduct an initial interview or assessment prior to administration, and a session for interpretation of the story.

Materials/equipment needed:

1. **Interview:** MCC should not be administered without first conducting some kind of preliminary assessment (e.g., an intake interview). The Career Systems Interview (CSI; McIlveen, 2003) is an ideal semi-structured interview schedule because, just like MCC, it is based on the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006).
2. **A print copy and an electronic copy of MCC:** The print copy is used when explaining the instructions to the client. The electronic copy is emailed to the client for completion and return to the next session. You may choose to supply the client with a print version to be completed in handwriting. Note that clients will type more text in an electronic version because it is relatively less labour intensive. MCC includes its own clearly marked instructions and steps for clients to follow.
3. **Highlighting pen:** A coloured highlighter to mark text on the manuscript that is important for interpretation.
4. Electronic copies of CSI and MCC are available from Peter McIlveen. Email: peter.mcilveen@usq.edu.au

Step by step outline of the process:

1. **Working Alliance:** After you have developed a strong working alliance with your client, then you may judge whether he/she will benefit from using MCC. Introduce your client to the idea of writing a short story about himself/herself. You might choose to say something like the following:

McIlveen, P. (2015). Using My Career Chapter in career counselling. In M. McMahon & W. Patton (Eds.), *Ideas for career practitioners* (2nd ed., pp. 188-190). Samford Valley, Australia: Australian Academic Press.

“I’m about to show you a tool that will help you write a short story about yourself. By writing this mini-autobiography, you and I will be able to further explore any themes that seem important to your career. Knowing these themes will help us to decide what next steps to take in your career assessment. Are you ok with the idea of writing about yourself?”

Be sure to use inclusive, collaborative talk with words such as “we” and “us”, to emphasise that the process is one of co-construction (cf. Savickas, 2012).

2. **Tangible Orientation:** Casually flick through the pages of MCC and say: “I will be sending you an electronic copy of this document, My Career Chapter. Well, actually, it’s *your* career chapter. This is where you write your manuscript. After you’ve written it, please email it back to me so that I can read it in our next session. [Pointing at the empty lines] See, in the electronic version, you type into these empty spaces and progressively the manuscript develops. Some spaces you will fill quite easily with lots of text because you will have a lot to say, others will be short and sweet, and some you may write little at all. That’s ok. When you and I work through it together we can talk about the story as a whole.”

3. **Process Orientation:** Now, work through each step in the manuscript proforma explaining to the client what needs to be done:

“The manuscript follows a series of steps. See here [pointing to the instructions for Step 1], each step has instructions at the top of the page. For Step 1, you do some very simple warm up questions. These are just to orient your mind to the task.”

“Now, for Step 2. Look at this diagram [pointing to the STF diagram]. When we think about career we think about all of the influences that go to make up the amazing systems that create your career. Here in the middle is you. We’ve talked about your interests and values and what you’re good at. But, have a look here [pointing to the interpersonal]. We know that your career involves other people, and we know it involves other groups. All of those are shown here. Now, look here [point to the societal and environmental]. You might think that some of these things don’t have much to do with your career at the moment, but, in some indirect ways, they just might. All of these influences are part of your career story, part of your career autobiography. Writing about their potential influence is a good way to expand your mind and understand the big picture of your career.”

“Step 3 is a bit different; there is no writing. This matrix of influences [pointing at the matrix] relates to the diagram we just looked at. See the top line where we have some of those influences outside of you, and down the side we have some of those influences inside of you. In this task, you are to rate how each influence is compatible with one another. The instructions tell you how to rate them positively or negatively with one another.”

“Step 4 is the manuscript writing proper. You will see all of the influences that appeared in the diagram. See how each sentence has been started for you. Your job is to complete the sentence. Type as much as you like. There is a past, present, and future sentence for each influence. Also, there are two

sentences that require you to rate how you feel about an influence and how much impact it has on your career. [Point at the rating scale] You can either highlight the relevant rating or delete the irrelevant—up to you.”

“Now, Step 5. This is where you read the manuscript aloud to yourself. It sounds strange, but try to imagine reading what you’ve written to a younger you, five years younger. Then, in the second part of this step, you imagine that you are actually the younger you. It is the task of the younger you to write back to the current you, saying all what you can imagine if you were to ever hear the story of you from the future.”

“Finally, in Step 6, you carry on as before and complete the manuscript. After you’ve completed the manuscript, email it back to me.”

“Also, you may want to record some reflections in Step 7 prior to our next meeting. Do you have any questions?”

Reassure your client that the manuscript is for his/her self-exploration. It is not meant to be a masterpiece of English literature.

4. **Interpretation:** When the client returns for the next session you can engage in a process of interpreting what has been written. This process involves reading the manuscript aloud to the client and highlighting text that you deem important and worth talking about after the reading process. There are different approaches to interpreting MCC (McIlveen, 2011; McIlveen & du Preez, 2012). It is important to remember that MCC is based in social constructionist thinking and an approach that takes the dialogue between the practitioner and client to be the grist of counselling. Therefore, co-constructively, together interpret the text of the manuscript, and also the talk that emanates between you when discussing the manuscript.

Background reading:

MCC has been subject to research into its applicability for adults (McIlveen, Patton, & Hoare, 2008), adolescents (McIlveen, Patton, & Hoare, 2007), and as a tool for counsellors’ reflective practice (McIlveen & Patton, 2010). Other research has addressed approaches to its interpretation (McIlveen, 2011; McIlveen & du Preez, 2012). MCC fits nicely with the model for career construction developed by Savickas (2012).

Author:

Dr Peter McIlveen is an Associate Professor at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. His interests are career counselling, career development learning, and sense of professional identity. Peter is an International Fellow of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (UK), a member of the Australian Psychological Society and College of Counselling Psychologists, and the Career Development Association of Australia.

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