

Designing Career Development Strategies for Older Adults From Diverse Racial and Ethnic Backgrounds

V. SCOTT SOLBERG AND JUDITH ETTINGER

This chapter focuses on how to design effective career development strategies for older adults from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds who do not have the option of retiring but instead need to continue working to provide for basic needs. The counseling literature has addressed issues related to supporting the retirement process (Richardson, 2003; Sterns & Subich, 2005; Tinsley & Bigler, 2002) and making effective later life transitions (Gibson & Brown, 1992; Schlossberg, 2004). However, as a direct result of unequal distributions in wealth and retirement assets, many older adults from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds will need to keep working and will be unable to pursue leisure and other avocational activities often associated with retirement. A study by the U.S. Federal Reserve clearly describes the inequality in wealth distributions in the United States (Aizcorbe, Kennickell, & Moore, 2003). They found that the median net worth

among White Americans grew over \$30,000 from \$86,200 in 1992 to \$120,900 in 2001 (see Figure 57.1). During this same period, non-White Americans' median net worth grew less than \$3,000 from \$14,800 to \$17,100. This reflects a median difference in wealth of over \$100,000. Comparison of wealth by type of median assets also shows a stark contrast between White and non-White Americans (see Figure 57.2; Aizcorbe et al., 2003). Most notable differences in median assets were found for the comparative value of bonds, mutual funds, and retirement accounts. The median value for bond assets among adults from White racial and ethnic groups was \$50,000 compared to \$7,600 for adults from nonwhite racial ethnic groups. The differences among these groups were \$22,500 for median value of mutual funds and \$25,000 for median value of retirement accounts. By using the "median" as the estimator, it is understood that half of the sample is above and

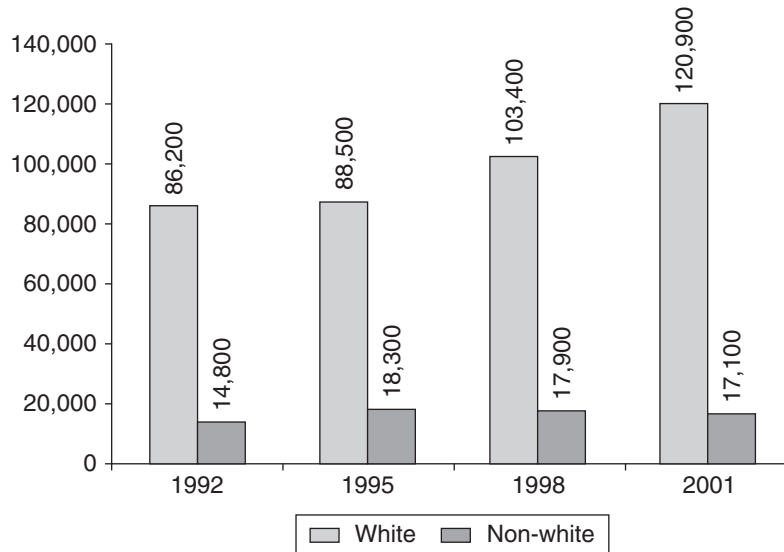


Figure 57.1 Median Net Wealth

Source: Aizcorbe, Kennickell, and Moore (2003).

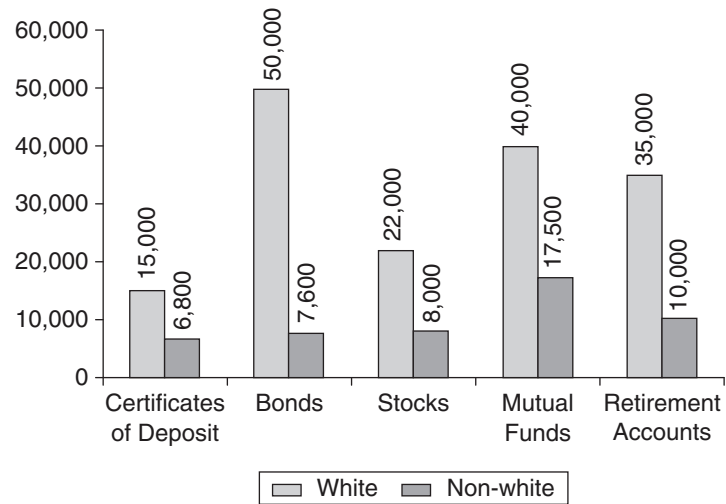


Figure 57.2 2001 Median Value of Assets

Source: Aizcorbe, Kennickell, and Moore (2003).

half below. Therefore, it can be assumed that a number of older adults from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds have accumulated wealth and assets to support themselves in retirement. What can be inferred from the U.S. Federal Reserve study is that in order for a large number of older adults from racial and ethnic backgrounds to make effective later life transitions, they cannot choose to retire but must continue working to provide for basic housing, healthcare, and food needs.

Social Justice Perspective. The chapter incorporates a social justice perspective described in Prilleltensky's (1997) seminal work on describing an emancipatory communitarianism approach to service delivery that was later expanded in the context of career development by Blustein, McWhirter, and Perry (2005). Traditional career development strategies focus on helping the individual gain self-awareness of interests, skills, and values and then engage in effective decision-making strategies related to the range of specific careers and occupations to pursue that are consistent with the pattern of interests, skills, and values. These strategies often assume that the challenges associated with making later life career transitions are due in large part to the individual not possessing enough self-awareness and/or not engaging in effective career decision making. Alternatively, emancipatory communitarianism reconstructs the challenges a person experiences in making effective career and occupational transitions as a relational problem and places equal responsibility for making effective transitions on the individual and the societal context. Baltes (1997) argues, for example, that optimal development among older adults is seriously diminished when society fails to provide optimal developmental opportunities to help older adults continue developing the skills needed to actualize their goals. One central tenet from emancipatory communitarianism (see also developmental contextualism [Lerner, 2002] and the ecological model [Bronfenbrenner, 1979]) is that the challenges experienced by individuals, including older adults from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, are not a product of causes located within the individual (e.g., personality traits) but result from interacting in contexts that fail to support his or her optimal development. The primary thesis of this

chapter is that in order for older adults from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds to make effective later life transitions, they must be linked to new career development opportunities that support their optimal personal, occupational, and career development (Solberg, Soresi, Nota, Howard, & Ferrari, 2007).

Integration of Development and Person-Environment Fit Theories. This chapter prescribes a career development strategy that integrates two often opposing traditions of career theory: life span, life-space (Super, 1990), and person-environment fit models (Dawis, 2005; Spokane & Cruza-Guet, 2005). Drawing from Super's (1990) life span, life-space theory, we argue that career service delivery methods for older adults must facilitate and emphasize self-exploration and career exploration. While job placement will be a critical need for many older adults, engaging in self and career exploration is expected to generate avenues for continued development. Drawing from the theory of work adjustment (TWA; Dawis, 1995), it is expected that self and career exploration for older adults should evaluate qualities of the work environment as much as the content of the work being conducted. Drawing from Holland's RIASEC model (Spokane & Cruza-Guet, 2005), we propose that self and career exploration can be facilitated using assessment strategies that allow the individual to learn about the range of current and emerging occupational opportunities. From a developmental perspective, the intent of the assessment strategies is to facilitate deeper exploration, not simply to match the individual to "suitable" occupations.

Cultural Awareness of the Helping Professional. Prior to working with older adults from diverse backgrounds, it is imperative that the helping professional has established a level of personal awareness and understanding of how the social context affects development, especially context factors related to oppression (Freire, 1970) and White privilege (Hays & Chang, 2003). For individuals from White racial-ethnic backgrounds, it is assumed that the helping professional has achieved what Helms (1995) refers to as the pseudo-independence worldview and immersion/emersion worldview orientation. For readers who themselves are from diverse

racial-ethnic backgrounds, it is assumed that the helping professional has entered what Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1998) refer to as the dissonance and appreciation worldview. From these two respective worldviews, individuals are ready to actively question majority-held views on rugged individualism and theoretical models that inherently blame the victim for their own oppression. Most notably, the helping professional is assumed to have achieved a level of “critical consciousness” (Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003) whereby he or she has begun to become aware of the unconscious and internalized assumptions one holds that legitimize oppression and the differential outcomes often experienced between individuals from White racial and ethnic backgrounds as compared to individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Applied to the context of career development, these perspectives share a common understanding that (a) economic sufficiency is an issue of personal and community power, (b) empowerment begins with creating a counseling context that allows the individual to define the range of challenges he or she experiences, and (c) growth occurs throughout the life span and occurs within learning contexts that provide culturally responsive support and opportunities for developing self-determined skills.

Case Examples. Three case examples will be used to explore ways to design effective career development strategies to support older adults from racial and ethnic backgrounds. The purpose of these brief case examples is to identify examples of how one might design culturally responsive career development strategies.

Donald is a 62-year-old African American and a salesman who has worked at a furniture store for the past 15 years. Before that, he worked as a cashier at the local department store that closed. He will be able to collect Social Security in a few years but realizes that his Social Security check will barely cover his rent. The store owners have been very generous in providing health insurance to their employees and a matched contribution savings program. Once Donald leaves the store, those benefits will end. He feels as though he has worked hard all his life, but in the end, he doesn't have much to show for it. The store owners have told the employees that with the new mall opening across town, they are planning to close the business.

Thomas is a 59-year-old Native American who fought in Vietnam. Since leaving the military, he has lived in many different communities. Many would probably think of him as homeless and unemployed, but he always seems to survive by staying with family members, friends, and sometimes living on the street. He left the military over 30 years ago and since then has worked mostly with temporary agencies working on construction sites, worked at a security agency, helped some friends who owned an auto repair shop, and was a roofer in a number of cities. He never stayed in one place very long, though, and has minimal financial support from the military. He has worn out his welcome with relatives and friends, so his future looks precarious. He is a wanderer in terms of his living circumstances, relationships, and a career. He does take a course now and again at the community college and frequents the career center to help him find employment.

Alicia is a 60-year-old Latina. She was married for 26 years when her husband died unexpectedly. Up until then, she ran a small daycare business out of her house and was very involved in volunteer work at the local high school. While she was volunteering, she discovered that she really liked helping the students work on their college applications, helping them to get organized and finding a school that was right for them. She thought she might become certified as a college counselor, but her husband's death put an end to those plans. She realizes she only has a small pension from her husband and his Social Security payment to live on. She knows that the pension isn't enough but can't figure out how to manage her finances in a way to make ends meet. A year ago, she injured her back, and the chronic pain has forced her to end her daycare business.

SELF AND CAREER EXPLORATION STRATEGIES

Van Esbroeck and his colleagues (Van Esbroeck, Tibos, & Zaman, 2005) outline a number of interrelated “activities” that facilitate the self and career exploration processes needed to help older adults make informed career-related choices. These activities include sensitization, self-exploration, environment exploration, exploration between self and environment, specification, and decision. It is assumed that these activities

influence one another and are continually engaged in throughout the life span.

Sensitization

Sensitization involves awareness that a problematic situation exists in which decisions need to be made. For older adults, the problem could be one of needing additional income to support growing medical costs or property tax payments, needing income for basic needs, wanting to remain connected to others in the community, or needing to use one's skills in a meaningful way. Sensitization involves becoming aware of the career development activities that the individual should consider, challenges associated with those activities, and the consequences of making choices (or of not making a choice). Important challenges that are likely to surface include development of work-readiness skills, job search skills, and access to occupations that offer livable wages and health insurance. For both Donald and Alicia, the problematic situation is income related. Both will be relying on Social Security and are concerned they will not have access to quality health care. For Donald and Alicia, the sensitization process can begin with helping to identify the range of transferable skills they have accumulated. For Donald, sales should involve a number of interpersonal skills, and if part of his salary was based on commissions, then he is familiar with more entrepreneurial-based skills. An owner of her own day care facility, it can be assumed that Alicia possesses a number of transferable skills that could support her future career development. Certainly, her aspirations of being a helping professional could be discussed in more detail.

For a helping professional, the case of Thomas may seem the most critical because he has not maintained steady employment, may not have a stable living situation, and it is not clear whether he perceives a problem. Until recently, he has been able to find employment and housing, but it is possible that other cultural, mental health, and/or interpersonal issues could be contributing to the employment history. As a Native American and war veteran, cultural identity could be quite complex. For example, in addition to fighting a war for a country that destroyed his culture, many Vietnam veterans were not well received or supported upon

their return. Moreover, the concept of "work" for many Native Americans is a method of providing a tax base to maintain a country that is the source of their oppression.

Self-Exploration

Self-exploration activities relate to collecting and examining information about one's skills, interests, values, and aspirations. We strongly encourage beginning the self-exploration process using career development strategies, such as the ones described below, that allow the help provider to connect to the history and cultural background of the individual.

Career Style Interview. The narrative interview approach described by Savickas (2005) is a central tool in his career construction theory. Traditional person-environment fit models often provide a nomothetic approach to measuring the person's personality traits and matching those traits to occupations (Chartrand, Strong, & Weitzman, 1995). Alternatively, career construction theory provides an idiographic analysis of the individual's vocational self-concept and focuses on discovering how the self-concept is being expressed in one's personal and work roles. Using a narrative interview strategy enables the individual to maintain a degree of power by constructing a meaningful story about work and life from his or her own history and experience. "In chronicling the recursive interplay between self and society, career stories explain why individuals make the choices that they do and the private meaning that guides these choices" (Savickas, 2005, p. 58). Many older adults from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds experienced tremendous societal change across their lifetime. In addition to changes in technology, many were victims of racial segregation, witnessed volatile uprisings during the civil rights movement, and were left jobless beginning in the 1970s when the manufacturing industry began its move to overseas locations. Using a narrative approach allows the helping professional to create the opportunity for the individual to express a life theme that encompasses the types of "preoccupations" that are worked on by the individual through chosen occupations.

Savickas's (2005) Career Style Interview consists of six questions. According to Hartung and Taber (2008),

the description of what one admires in one's role models when growing up is felt to relate to the central life theme or problem. Preferred magazines, books, or television shows are felt to relate to the preferred environments, while the major characters point to challenges to which individuals may identify. Leisure activities are felt to relate to how individuals express themselves and their interests. Favorite sayings or mottos are felt to encapsulate a possible title for their life story. School or academic subjects are felt to indicate the types of work environments they may enjoy. And earliest memories are felt to point to a central problem they may spend their lifetime attempting to overcome.

From a social justice perspective, the Career Style Interview can be expected to solicit culturally rich information from which to construct a career story and identify meaningful themes. As with any technique, being responsive to culturally rich information demands that the helping professional accurately "hear" and interpret the relevant information. For the case of Thomas, the narrative interview strategy would allow him to identify themes and meaning about his life that are likely to explain his way of being in the world. The helping professional cannot know the particular experiences Thomas has had in relation to being Native American and a war veteran. Growing up on a reservation is quite different than growing up in an urban environment because Native Americans on reservations are able to connect to rituals and rights of passage that many urban Natives are unable to experience. It is not possible to make assumptions about serving in Vietnam because not all war veteran experiences were the same. According to Savickas (2005), by "telling career stories about their work experiences, individuals selectively highlight particular experiences to produce a narrative truth by which they live" (p. 43). For Thomas, the narrative interview allows him a degree of self-determination in the interview process by deciding what information is shared. However, one key factor is the degree to which the helping professional is culturally aware to effectively work with Thomas in constructing a meaningful story that represents Thomas's perspective and is not skewed by the helping professional's stereotypes or personal experiences.

In working with older adults, it would also be helpful to expand the interview process to incorporate the

individual's vocational and avocational history more directly. While Savickas's (2005) narrative interview asks about school and academic subjects, for older adults, an alternative may be to add a question about their favorite work and out-of-work experiences. Drawing from the TWA (Dawis, 2005), the essential ideas regarding satisfaction and satisfactoriness can serve as an important avenue of inquiry with older workers. According to TWA, individuals are satisfied when they receive feedback and support from the work context that they value as important. Alternatively, satisfactoriness emerges when the work context is satisfied with the skills and performance of the individual in relation to the occupational skill requirements. Asking about the individual's favorite work and out-of-work experiences can provide insight into the types of feedback and support the individual may desire as well as the salience of job skill performance as a condition for selecting an occupation. Anecdotal evidence invokes a strong sense that the affective qualities associated with the work environment—meeting the social and growth needs of individuals—creates a context for increased satisfaction to emerge, which can then lead to improved work performance (Yokoyama & Michelli, 2004). And for some individuals, being valued for a specific skill set may serve as the primary motivation for working; rewards could range from appreciation to financial incentives. The narrative inquiry method allows individuals to describe the quality work environment in ways that ensure that sociocultural and historical events that may have affected their career development become apparent. By incorporating these themes into the career story, the goal is for self-awareness as well as awareness about the types of work and work environment individuals may be interested in pursuing in this next phase of their lives.

For Alicia, her self-employment as a day care provider may reflect a number of satisfying qualities that would help her think about future job possibilities and may help her become aware of reasons for wanting to become a college counselor. For Donald, the narrative process may allow him to become aware of the satisfactoriness of the occupation—what it was about the reward structure and how the environment responded to him that kept him working in sales. Certainly, it is possible that the job was the only one available at the time and

that it was neither satisfying nor rewarding. In such a case, exploring Donald's avocational experiences—leisure activities—may provide better information about what he may enjoy in an occupation and what need he has with regard to the work environment.

Use of Verb Descriptions. Another self-exploration strategy is to provide the individual with a list of verbs (J. Ettinger, personal communication, April 2008). Verbs can be gathered by the helping professional and presented in a list format. Sample verbs include *achieved, awarded, coached, designed, encouraged, estimated, improved, investigated, revised, solved, succeeded, translated, and upgraded*. The activity involves having the individual select the five that are deemed most meaningful to him or her. Then, from the five, the individual selects three. The individual is then prompted to share the nature of the three verbs and experiences that make the verbs meaningful to him or her. This strategy provides another way of constructing a narrative about the individual's life and career in a manner that provides him or her with the power to determine what is shared and at what level of depth the sharing occurs.

Incorporating Genograms. Ponterotto, Rivera, and Sueyoshi (2000) have also introduced a "career-in-culture" semistructured interview to incorporate more directly culturally relevant information. In addition to adding direct questions about one's cultural and ethnic background, they suggest using a genogram to generate a narrative history of the individual and identify recurring family themes. Genograms offer an opportunity for the helping professional to gain a deep understanding of family themes and cultural beliefs that may be passed on for generations (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1995; Howe, 1990). In working with older adults from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, using a genogram strategy could provide a richer context for understanding entry into the United States. While some may have ancestors who entered the country by choice, others may have entered as slaves or refugees or were colonized. These different entry points may affect one's orientation to work. While jobs offering livable wages may provide work motivation for some, for others, working for a "White" boss may invoke more negative feelings and attitudes. In all three cases, a genogram can help identify

patterns of issues and challenges that families have re-created across generations. Particularly important is the experience of race and racism in the individual's history. While factory jobs were associated with many African Americans moving to the northern cities, many also may have fled to avoid the dangers and overt segregation occurring in the South. Exploring the genogram can also facilitate exploration of the individual's current racial identity by exploring what is similar in beliefs passed through the generations.

Environment Exploration

Environment exploration activities involve surveying career, occupation, and educational options that are available; collecting information about these options; and assessing this information in ways that allow the individual to critically examine the options. Traditionally, career and occupational options are generated as a result of completing a career interests-type instrument. Holland's (1997) RIASEC model has served as the standard from which to organize careers and occupations. "R" refers to Realistic dispositions, which often involve working outdoors, with one's hands, and adventure. "I" refers to Investigative dispositions, which involve finding out the answers to questions, scientific inquiry, and use of logical analysis. "A" refers to Artistic dispositions, which involve creativity and self-expression. "S" refers to Social dispositions, which involve helping others and interpersonal-related work activities. "E" refers to Enterprising dispositions, which involve sales and marketing ideas and products. "C" refers to Conventional dispositions, which involve working within set procedures and rules. Once an individual completes an interest inventory, careers and occupations are provided for the individual to explore and learn more about. According to Solberg et al. (2007), these traditional methods assume that individual differences and occupations are relatively stable. This was true during the Industrial Revolution era in which the older adults grew up, but the current era is better conceived as one of "high modernity" (Giddens, 1991). The characteristic quality of a high-modernity era is the level of technology being used and the amount and speed of information. The result is a rapidly changing world of work.

According to Solberg et al. (2007), career exploration “should focus on helping individuals catalogue the degree to which they possess a range of skills and interests and help them in mapping out the occupational opportunities that will allow them to continue their personal, vocational, and avocational development” (p. 11). Moreover, they argue that

rather than using assessment as a method for cataloguing personality, the goal should be to provide information to an individual in ways that lead to self-discovery. Rather than providing an “answer” with regard to a personality profile or likely occupational fit, assessment should result in the individual asking “questions.” In response to the age of high modernity and our new understanding regarding plasticity in human development, we believe assessment would more effectively serve youth and adults when it actively creates thought-provoking questions that lead to self-reflection and awareness. (p. 15)

From this perspective, career development strategies become “fit for modern times” when they support exploration as a process of self-discovery rather than attempting to match person-type patterns to career and occupational options.

A number of online career information systems provide ways for career assessment strategies to facilitate career exploration (e.g., O*NET, WISCareers). The Center on Education and Work, for example, offers an online system called WISCareers (cew.wisc.edu) that provides access to career assessments, résumé and cover letter writing tools, transferable skills, and job search engines to locate employment. These systems support the helping professional by offering access to a range of career resources that are organized and stored for the older adult in an electronic portfolio. The Wisconsin Careers online system offers career interests, skills, and values inventories. Once completed, the career interests and skills inventories immediately provide a report with links to occupations that are consistent with the pattern of results. Once the individual selects an occupation, the system automatically connects the individual to tremendous amounts of information about the occupation, including access to learning about training and education opportunities, job openings, and contact information. Rather than focusing on matching

interests and skills to occupations, the online system uses this information to promote deeper exploration and discovery. From a social justice perspective, using online career information systems expands the range of potential career opportunities rather than providing a fixed amount or number. Online systems such as the ones offered through Wisconsin Careers operate as a learning context that encourages an active engagement in the career exploration process by providing a number of career options and immediate links to any information or questions an individual may have about the occupation such as educational requirements, local job opportunities, entry level skills, and so on.

For Donald and Alicia, using online career information systems will allow them to assess their respective transferable skills and identify a range of occupations they can explore that use those skills. Given their respective job histories, there is likely to be a profile of interests and transferable skills that relate to a wide range of occupations that they have not considered. By using the online information system to explore those occupations, they can learn more about the occupation, entry skills, educational opportunities, and potential jobs in their area. For Thomas, it is difficult to know what the interest assessment will uncover. To the extent that this pattern reflects no interest in work, a career assessment is likely to generate a flat profile.

Exploration Between Self and Environment

Once career opportunities have been identified, it is important for the helping professional to explore the degree to which the individual possesses the skills and knowledge needed to enter a desirable occupation, learning opportunities that are available to develop those skills and knowledge, and what it is about the occupations that are found to be interesting. It is important for the individual to determine how much education and training he or she would like to pursue. For Alicia, her desire to be a college counselor will demand going back to school. Permission and encouragement from a helping professional may be all that is needed to help her make a decision to apply to college. If the college environment is what Alicia is most attracted to, then a 2-year college degree or a certificate

program offered in a 4-year college/university could allow her to work in a college environment and provide livable wages and health benefits but without the debt that is likely to be incurred in seeking a professional degree.

Continuing to Develop 21st Century Work Skills. Entering today's world of work and obtaining jobs with livable wages demands at least a high school diploma and 2 years of postsecondary training. During the 1950s and 1960s, the plethora of manufacturing occupations allowed one to drop out of high school, gain an entry position, and increase one's income based on increased skill acquisition. Today's world of work demands higher literacy, technology, and interpersonal skills. Gewertz (2007) argues that soft skills are more in demand than ever before. The 21st Century Skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2007) initiative focuses on identifying the range of skills needed to remain an active and competitive employee. These skill areas include lifelong learning and self-direction, critical thinking and problem solving, computer and technology skills, reading and writing skills, and teamwork and collaboration skills. There are a number of avenues for older adults to develop these skills. Two-year technical colleges provide a range of options from adult high schools to technical degrees that lead directly to occupation opportunities. Online courses and training that are designed to teach specific skills are available as well. High schools often provide evening courses on special topics and community organizations often provide specific vocational development opportunities as well. The helping professional can facilitate this process by helping older adults identify the skill areas that they need and start by linking them to professional development and training opportunities. For older adults who are looking for part-time employment, the helping professional may want to encourage volunteer work opportunities that maximize the use of current skills and offer opportunities to apply those skills in different ways.

For Donald and Alicia, it is important to evaluate the range of 21st-century skills they may possess. Unless they developed the skills outside work, it is not likely that they have kept pace with the technology developments. Using word processing, data management,

spreadsheets, and multimedia applications is desirable across the occupational spectrum. Access to technology and high-speed Internet access is a consideration in this regard as well. And access to training and technology is generally available through one's community in community college settings, nonprofit community organizations focused on workforce development, and evening classes through community recreation organizations. For Thomas, his many "short-term" and "entry-level" jobs indicate that he may need to address a range of 21st-century skill areas. He does appear to possess good survival skills, but surviving is not the same as flourishing.

Lifelong learning and continuous professional development involve an entrepreneurial attitude. In the past, it was assumed that the employer would provide a job with security and offer training needed to perform the duties effectively. Currently, employees need to evaluate jobs as opportunities to develop new skills and expand their résumé. Expanding one's skills provides for the ability of the older adult to adapt to changing work conditions as well as be able to take advantage of new job opportunities.

Incorporating the Support of Federally Supported One-Stop Job Centers. The U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration provides funding for one-stop career centers around the country. The centers offer a comprehensive range of services designed to help individuals find employment (Career One Stop, www.careeronestop.org or servicelocator.org). By bringing together the training and employment resources into one location, individuals have access to both career development and job placement support. Job centers provide in-person and online access to services. For individuals in rural communities especially, linking online to a job center can provide the range of support services they may need to locate employment in their region or other parts of the country. Donald and Alicia could both benefit from one-stop career center resources. In addition to offering personal career counseling and access to career assessments, the resources include any number of job-seeking support services, including finding employment opportunities, preparing résumés and cover letters, and practicing for job interviews. For ideas regarding additional online

career resources for working with older adults, see Kirk and Belovics (2005).

Specification

Framing the Career Development Process as a Career Transition. Specification refers to the ability to analyze information about self and one's career, occupational, and educational selections to begin narrowing down one's options. Baltes (1997) has found in longitudinal studies that transitions for older adults are more effective (e.g., health and well-being) when the adults are actively engaged in setting goals, optimizing opportunities to actualize those goals, and compensate by engaging in backup plans when faced with challenging circumstances. Drawing from Schlossberg's (1989) transition theory, individuals with a high SOC (for Selection, Optimization, Compensation) profile would be expected to make better life transitions because they have a history of being engaged in addressing difficult life changes, optimizing opportunities for support and development, and being actively engaged in strategizing to maximize positive outcomes by successfully achieving an initial or backup goal.

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) also has important applications to understanding how to support individuals in making effective career transitions (Howard, Solberg, Kantamneni, & Smothers, 2008; Solberg, Howard, Blustein, & Close, 2002). From self-determination theory, individuals become engaged in performing career search activities or work activities because they are perceived as enjoyable and meaningful when the activities occur within a relational environment in which individuals feel connected and a sense of belonging.

The ability to manage life transitions is also due in part to how adaptable one is to change. Individuals who feel confidence in performing career search activities, for example, report engaging in more career search activity, have a clearer idea of what they wish to pursue, and report needing less additional information to make a career decision (Solberg, Good, Fischer, Brown, & Nord, 1995). Resilience (Masten, 2001) refers to individuals who feel able to manage their behavior when faced with challenging circumstances, such as a career transition. In addition to career search

self-efficacy (Solberg, 1998), other resilience characteristics that can be learned within effective career development strategies include social support, availability of resources and support, and stress and health management skills (Solberg et al., 1998).

Donald and Alicia could be expected to experience the career process as a major life transition. Both need to change occupations that they both have been relatively stable in for a number of years. It would be important to help each of them identify goals and to identify culturally responsive learning environments that will help them develop the skills needed to optimize the likelihood of achieving those goals. Depending on Donald's academic background, linking him to 2-year technical college settings could provide opportunities for developing skills and opportunities for finding both formal and informal sources of support. For Alicia, higher education could provide her with the training degree needed to pursue a college personnel degree, and with the addition of updating her computer skills, she may already possess a number of skills that could make her marketable within a high school or a number of business settings. Resilience related to self-efficacy is expected to increase in response to the helping professional's use of encouragement and support and the mastery and vicarious experiences he or she will receive as the result of engaging in new learning opportunities.

Framing the Career Development Process as Improving Level of Functioning. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF; World Health Organization [WHO], 2001) also serves as an important strategy for helping professionals to organize the range of services needed to support older adults in making career transitions (Soresi, Nota, Ferrari, & Solberg, 2008). According to the ICF, career development for older adults is predicated upon the individual's functioning characteristics and the resources available to support the individual. The ICF emphasizes three assessment areas: (a) level of functioning with regard to an individual's physical functioning, the types of activities he or she is involved with, and how much an individual participates in various activities; (b) identification of any disability or limitations that affect the individual's ability to participate in specific

activities; and (c) other indicators of health and well-being, educational attainment, and work history. What makes the ICF valuable is its salient message that positive transitions, including career transitions, occur as a shared responsibility of the individual possessing the skills, interests, and abilities as well as the environment offering developmental opportunities and resources to support accessibility. In working with older adults to make effective career transitions, the ICF can serve as an important assessment tool for broadening the intake interview to include health status and access to health care, as well as expand a range of issues that fall under the category of “loss of functioning.” The ICF not only helps to assess for these areas but also encourages the helping professional to link the individuals to the support systems needed to facilitate continued development and manage loss of functioning in a manner that provides the older adult with expanded choice and opportunity.

From a social justice perspective, specification processes are optimal when the helping professional supports the individual to engage in self-determined goals and aspirations, receive the resources needed to continue developing requisite skills, and help identify backup plans to manage loss or other experiences that may block him or her from achieving the initial goals. The transitions theory and ICF further prescribe the helping professional to link the older adult to multiple resources within the local or virtual community such as online career information systems and/or one-stop career centers. For older adults from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, it is also important for the helping professional to explore available resources to determine the cultural responsiveness of the offerings and services provided. In some communities, there may be a need to work with the available resources in encouraging and/or offering professional development to improve the level of cultural awareness. Links to culturally responsive online resources will also facilitate the older adults’ ability to access quality information if culturally responsive direct service delivery is not available.

Alicia and Thomas would both benefit by the inclusion of the ICF to help design an optimal career development strategy. For Alicia, her chronic pain needs to be incorporated into thinking about what accommodations she needs within a training and/or work environment. For Thomas, the issues appear more complex,

and a more thorough ICF evaluation may provide a wider range of understanding regarding health, mental health, and other aspects of functioning that may contribute to his moving from job to job and his housing instability. Furthermore, as specific issues become apparent, the helping professional should consider incorporating support services from the Veterans Administration for further assessment and treatment planning.

Decision

Decision refers to establishing priorities, ranking preferences, developing decision-making skills, and establishing plans for pursuing one’s preferred career, occupational, and educational options. This process involves movement and change and can be facilitated by the creation of a formal action plan that describes (a) occupational goals and aspirations, (b) skills needed to perform the occupation, (c) resources to develop the necessary skills, (d) job search strategies to be used, and (e) likely challenges to be experienced. In setting occupational goals, at least three should be considered, but more than five may be too many to focus the career planning process. The reason for at least three is that the individual should have backup plans if one occupation is not available or if employment is needed immediately and it will take longer to secure the most desirable occupation. The action plan should identify the skills needed to successfully enter the identified occupation(s). While the individual may possess some skills, in all likelihood, additional skills will be needed. The action plan should identify the resources needed to achieve those goals. Resources include identifying live and online education and training opportunities, connecting with one-stop job center programs, and/or using online career information systems. The plan should describe the purpose of each resource as well as contact information. The plan should outline the job search strategies that will be employed. Informational interviews are one powerful tool for engaging in the job search process, but the individual also needs to develop cover letters, résumés, and connect to job listings. Many online career information systems (e.g., WISCareers) provide features that help the individual design cover letters and résumés with little need for knowledge or skills in information processing. As well, these systems

link the individual directly to employers to whom the cover letter and résumé can be e-mailed. The plan should also address challenges the client may face. These challenges may be due to working with individuals who are not sensitive to cultural differences or due to the individual's functioning or past history that may need to be disclosed in job interview situations. For individuals with disabilities, the helping professional can provide opportunities to practice how to address accessibility needs and to disclose the disability in appropriate ways (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, 2005; U.S. Department of Labor, 2005).

Since 1 in 26 Latino men and 1 in 15 Black men are estimated to be in prison (PEW Center on the States, 2008), it is likely that helping professionals working with older male adults from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds will encounter a number of adults who have been incarcerated. In working with adults who have significant gaps in work history, the helping professional should encourage the use of functional and/or a combination of functional and chronological résumé styles. Helping professionals should also role-play ways to discuss an individual's past in interview settings and seek out resources and employers who are more disposed to hiring individuals who may have a criminal background (Ettinger, 2007).

Summary

We believe that to design optimal career development strategies for older adults from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, culturally aware helping professionals must incorporate a social justice perspective. As culturally aware helping professionals, we believe that three important awareness indicators include an understanding that economic sufficiency is an issue of personal and community power, empowerment for an individual is predicated on or by his or her ability to define the range of challenges he or she experiences, and career and personal development occurs throughout the life span when culturally responsive learning opportunities are provided. With regard to Sensitivity activities, we argued that gaining access to occupations that offer livable wages and access to health insurance is often determined by the degree to which an individual possesses a range of work-readiness and job search

skills. With regard to Self-Exploration, we argued for using narrative, genogram, and verb preferences strategies because each of them allows the individual to construct a career story in his or her own words. These strategies allow the individual to maintain control and power over the discourse, and with the support of a culturally aware helping professional, it is possible to construct a career and personal story that addresses the themes that are generated. For Exploration between Self and Environment, we argued that optimal career development strategies need to incorporate learning opportunities that facilitate acquisition of the 21st-century skills and provide access to one-stop job centers. For Specification, we argued for framing the experience as a career transition and encourage the use of the ICF as a tool for targeting which levels of functioning may need support and attention. For Decision, we discussed the importance of linking the individual to culturally responsive resources that will support him or her in the job search process.

We also believe that helping professionals should prescribe to a career theory framework that incorporates developmental and person-environment fit strategies. For Self-Exploration, we discussed how the narrative approach can integrate developmental and TWA frameworks by asking more specifically about the qualities of the individual's past vocational and avocational environments. For Environment Exploration, we argued that using Holland's (1997) RIASEC model serves as a starting point but that it is more optimal when used as a starting point for continued self and occupational exploration as opposed to using the RIASEC profile as a prescription that links personality traits to congruent occupations.

PRACTICE STRATEGIES

The remainder of the chapter addresses four strategies that we believe will support the helping professional optimize career development strategies for older adults from diverse racial-ethnic backgrounds.

Incorporating Career Development Facilitators

Many helping professionals have focused on mental health areas because fee-for-service demands a DSM

code, and many originally chose to become a helping professional to focus specifically on providing mental health–related services. Mental health and career counseling, while separate domains, do overlap such that operating in one area does have implications for the other (Krumboltz, 1993). For example, depression is estimated to cost over \$40 billion per year as a result of loss of workplace productivity (Greenberg, Leong, Birnbaum, & Robinson, 2003). And losing one’s job can also create significant mental health challenges depending on the manner in which the individual defines the job loss experience and frames his or her ability to manage the loss (Moore, Grunberg, Greenberg, & Sikora, 2007). Supporting older adults in making career transitions, however, demands a level of expertise that traditional mental health providers may not possess. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that when creating a professional practice that caters to older adults, the helping professional should either gain certification to be a career development facilitator (CDF) or employ a certified CDF as part of his or her practice. The CDF training is sponsored by the National Career Development Association and involves 120 hours of training. The CDF training program (Harris-Bowlsbey, Suddarth, & Reile, 2005) addresses a range of topics that include cultural sensitivity, career assessment, information gathering for career planning, use of computer systems in career work, and job-seeking and employability skills. CDF individuals may or may not possess a professional counseling degree but do have the skills needed to supplement one’s practice. As a helping professional, becoming certified as a CDF will allow for direct integration of career development resources into the counseling context.

Infusing Effective Curriculum Ingredients Into Career Development Strategies

Howard et al. (2008) identified nine curriculum ingredients that increase the effectiveness of career development strategies. The ingredients were drawn from three sources: meta-analysis of career interventions conducted by Brown and Ryan Krane (2000), as well as empirically supported ingredients identified in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Together,

these ingredients include use of written exercises, individualized interpretations and feedback, world of work information, modeling experiences, building support networks, mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, anxiety management, and creating stronger relational bonds between the individual, authority figures, and work-peers. Career development strategies that incorporate these ingredients are expected to increase career search self-efficacy (Solberg, 1998) and more effectively support the individual in becoming more engaged in the career search process and in developing new skills.

Using Psychoeducational Groups

Traditionally, mental health practice professionals can often rely on third-party payments to maintain a viable practice. Although many mental health conditions affect or are affected by career-related concerns, a number of individuals are likely to be seeking career counseling support, not mental health counseling. We encourage the establishment of psychoeducational groups as a preferred method of service delivery because it not only provides for a financially viable practice, but the support element is likely to prove more efficacious than offering individual support alone. Certainly, elements of the group program may incorporate individual work when conducting, for example, the narrative intake interview and providing individualized interpretations of career instruments. However, a large amount of the information can be conducted by designing a step-by-step process that allows the group members to learn about effective career exploration and job search strategies.

Community Outreach

Another consideration is the location of conducting the career practice. Often, helping professionals may not have access to large numbers of older adults from diverse racial-ethnic backgrounds or may not have space to conduct group sessions. Many communities offer adult recreation programs and use local high schools or community centers to conduct the activities. Connecting with these groups provides marketing exposure and accessible facilities. Local community groups may also be able to find funding to support the career development efforts. By working with the organizations, the

helping professional can support efforts to solicit local foundations or other available funding sources. Often these funds are only available to nonprofit organizations, which then would hire or retain the services of the helping professional.

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