

# infusing culture in career counseling

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This article introduces the culture-infused career counselling (CICC) model. Six principles are foundational to a tripartite model emphasizing cultural self-awareness, awareness of client cultural identities, and development of a culturally sensitive working alliance. The core competencies ensure the cultural validity and relevance of career counseling practices for all clients and shift the focus of career practice to support social justice action.



Culture-infused career counselling (CICC; Arthur & Collins, 2010a) is premised on the belief that cultural influences are inextricably woven into people's career development (Arthur, 2008; Leong, 2010). The conceptual foundation of CICC (Arthur & Collins, 2010b; Collins & Arthur, 2010a, 2010b) evolved from frameworks of multicultural counseling (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1998). As we have adapted the model for career counseling, the CICC emphasizes reflective practice in three domains: counselor self-awareness, awareness of the cultures of other people, and awareness of the influences of culture on the working alliance. Intervention planning beyond individual counseling incorporates advocacy and social justice.

## FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF CICC

CICC is premised on six guiding assumptions. First, culture is relevant for career practices with all clients. Clients have unique experiences that influence both career-related issues and available resources. Some individuals are positioned as outsiders, or others, in the social construction of culture, on the basis of their ethnicity, gender, religion, ability, sexual orientation, age, and/or social class. The salience of culture for career issues shifts over time and context. Clients with multiple nondominant identities may be further challenged in navigating community, organization, or other social systems (Collins, 2010).

Second, culture is relevant for all career counselors. Personal and professional socialization shape approaches to career counseling. This includes internalized notions of *work* and *career*, *on-track* and *off-track* career development, as well as how counselors define career problems, interventions, and actions.

Third, views of career and career issues are culturally defined. The terms *career* and *career development* are constructed terms with multiple meanings defined by cultural assumptions and interpretations. These terms may have little relevance for people whose lives are preoccupied by seeking work as a means of survival (Blustein, 2006). Career counselors must assess the meanings of work in people's lives to ensure culturally relevant interventions.

Fourth, theories of career development and models of career counseling contain cultural assumptions. The cultural validity of theories and models based on Western values and tenets, such as individualism and autonomy, the centrality of the work role, affluence, and the linearity



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or progressive nature of career development, may have limited utility for clients whose worldview is more aligned with collectivistic values (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010).

Fifth, the goals and processes of career counseling need to be collaboratively defined. Clients' views of career counseling may be connected to cultural norms of help-seeking and work/career outcomes, or family and/or community expectations for their decision making (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010).

Sixth, CICC challenges counselors to incorporate multiple levels of intervention. Beyond individual counseling, career counselors may address systemic change or advocate for programs and services. Given the recent attention paid to social justice issues in people's career development (Arthur, 2008), career counselors are challenged to increase their advocacy competencies (Ratts, Torporek, & Lewis, 2010).

## **CORE COMPETENCY DOMAINS OF CICC**

These six principles undergird the CICC model's three core domains of culture-infused counseling competency. First, counselors must increase awareness of their own cultural identities. We encourage career counselors to reflect about how their personal culture influences their views of work, life roles, beliefs about success, and personal agency. Counselors are cultural beings, and their personal cultural identity shapes their worldview, perspectives on other people, and lenses through which they define client issues and interventions.

Second, the CICC model focuses on awareness of client cultural identities, including understanding the organizational, social, economic, and political contexts that affect presenting concerns; client career development behavior; and client perspectives on the meaning and relevance of career-related interventions. Client empowerment is incorporated into the CICC model, but counselors are also challenged to consider systemic and social influences on career concerns and to select interventions that go beyond helping clients cope and adapt to oppressive social conditions that contribute to work and career barriers in the first place (Arthur, 2008).

The final domain of the CICC model focuses on establishing an effective and culturally sensitive working alliance with clients. This working alliance is characterized by agreement on the goals and tasks involved in career counseling in the context of a collaborative, trusting, and respectful relationship. Forming an effective working alliance depends on counselor self-awareness and awareness of the client's culture. A mismatch in counselor–client perspectives on the goals and processes of career counseling may affect client motivation and result in withdrawal from services. Career counselors must consider the cultural validity of their approaches, particularly for working with clients from nondominant populations. We encourage career practitioners to collaborate with clients in selecting interventions while addressing the systemic and social power disparities that limit clients from reaching their full potential. Career counselors may also intervene through addressing organizational policies and practices, or mobilizing interprofessional collaboration (Arthur & Collins, 2010b).

## **APPLYING A SOCIAL JUSTICE LENS TO CAREER COUNSELING**

Career counselors who embrace social justice as a core value acquire knowledge about the social, economic, and political forces that shape career development, including opportunities and barriers for education and employment. Career issues are viewed with a broader lens to assess individual and broader environmental influences on career concerns. The CICC emphasis on social justice challenges current practices that focus primarily on remedial-type interventions and also incorporates education and prevention

(Arthur, Collins, McMahon, & Marshall, 2009). As guidelines and standards for career development practitioners are developed and revised, they need to reflect more than sensitivity about diversity and social justice and strengthen competencies that support active practices (Arthur, 2008).

## CULTURAL AUDITING FOR REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

To support application of CICC principles and reflective practice, we developed a cultural auditing guide for case planning, service delivery, and evaluation (Collins, Arthur, & Wong-Wylie, 2010). Reflective questions and probes in a 13-step process help counselors negotiate effective counseling processes and outcome goals with clients. This tool can be used for personal reflection in supervision sessions, for case conferences, and to identify learning goals for future professional development.

In summary, career practitioners are encouraged to strengthen reflective practice, particularly their awareness of personal culture, cultural influences on clients' career-related needs, and the relevance of culture for developing an effective working alliance to foster collaborative goals and processes for career counseling. This means embracing social justice action through expanding the roles of career counseling from remedial services to advocating for services that are proactive and preventative and directed at health promotion.

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