

COGNITIVE-BEHAVIOURAL COACHING: REPORT OF A BRIEF CAREER INTERVENTION IN UNIVERSITY-WORK TRANSITION

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ABSTRACT. Upon graduation, university students often have doubts about which way to go. This period is characterized by the university-work transition, stage in which career counseling programs are indicated to facilitate decision making. The Cognitive-Behavioural Coaching (CBC) aims to modify beliefs, map resources, evaluate possibilities, favor the decision making and design a plan of action. In order to promote the career planning with undergraduate university students, an intervention was applied to 61 university students of a private university in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The purpose of this study was to detail the protocol of six sessions developed for this context through an intervention report. The experience report will facilitate the replication of this program, favoring other university students.

Keywords: Cognitive behavioral therapy; psychoeducational intervention; professional development.

COACHING COGNITIVO-COMPORTAMENTAL: RELATO DE UMA INTERVENÇÃO BREVE DE CARREIRA NA TRANSIÇÃO UNIVERSIDADE-TRABALHO

RESUMO. Ao finalizar a graduação, os universitários costumam ter dúvidas sobre qual caminho seguir. Este período é caracterizado pela transição universidade-trabalho, fase em que são indicados programas de aconselhamento de carreira para facilitar a tomada de decisão. O Coaching Cognitivo-Comportamental (CCC) visa modificar crenças, mapear recursos, avaliar possibilidades, favorecendo a tomada de decisão e elaboração de um plano de ação. Baseando-se nos pressupostos do CCC, com o objetivo de promover o planejamento de carreira de universitários no processo de transição universidade-trabalho, estruturou-se uma intervenção que foi aplicada a 61 universitários concluintes de uma universidade privada do Rio Grande do Sul. O intuito deste artigo foi detalhar o protocolo das seis sessões desenvolvidas por meio de um relato da intervenção. O relato de experiência facilitará a replicação deste programa, favorecendo outros universitários.

Palavras-chave: Cognitivo-comportamental; intervenção psicoeducativa; desenvolvimento profissional.

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COACHING COGNITIVO-COMPORTAMENTAL: RELATO DE UNA INTERVENCIÓN BREVE DE CARRERA EN LA TRANSICIÓN UNIVERSIDAD-TRABAJO

RESUMEN. Al finalizar la graduación, los universitarios suelen tener dudas sobre qué camino seguir. Este período se caracteriza por la transición universidad-trabajo, fase en la que se indican programas de asesoramiento de carrera para facilitar la toma de decisiones. El Coaching Cognitivo-Comportamental (CCC) pretende modificar creencias, mapear recursos, evaluar posibilidades, favoreciendo la toma de decisión y elaboración de un plan de acción. Con el objetivo de promover la planificación de carrera de universitarios concluyentes, se estructuró una intervención con 61 universitarios concluyentes de una universidad privada de Rio Grande do Sul. La intención de este artículo fue detallar el protocolo de seis sesiones desarrollado para este contexto a través de un contexto Relato de la intervención. El relato de experiencia facilitará la replicación de este programa, favoreciendo a otros universitarios.

Palabras clave: Terapia cognitiva-conductista; intervención psicoeducativa; desarrollo profesional.

Introduction

Currently, the importance is given to career counseling throughout life (Bardagi & Albanaes, 2015), both in terms of early career decisions, university-work transition and other diverse and unpredictable situations with which citizens can come across during the stages of vocational development (Fiorini, Bardagi & Silva, 2016). Among the groups that most lack career guidance are the university undergraduates who experience the university-work transition, representing about one million people, according to the latest census (Sindicato das Mantenedoras de Ensino Superior, 2015).

The university-work transition is a complex psychosocial phenomenon that represents one of the first adaptation movements of the student to work, a significant and difficult moment to be lived (Lima-Dias & Soares, 2012; Oliveira, 2014). Newly undergraduates often feel lost, confused, fearful and insecure, not knowing what they will find in the future (Lima-Dias & Soares, 2012; Oliveira, 2014). It is up to the Brazilian universities to promote programs that consider the mental health of the university student (Lima-Dias & Soares, 2012). It is suggested that such programs address the personal and contextual aspects of this phase: self-efficacy, feelings of pressure, definition of professional goals, career planning, vocational exploration, psychological resources, identity with the role of worker and preparation for the job market (Cava, 2012; Lima-Dias & Soares, 2012; Oliveira, 2014). The implementation of programs of this nature may promote greater clarity of the preferential directions for life, favoring autonomous, conscious decision making and generating employability (Cava, 2012).

The career theories and techniques of the twentieth century have contributed to the understanding of the phenomena related to the career topic, but with contemporary career configurations, experts in the field suggest the need for empirically tested new models of career intervention (Duarte et al., 2010). In this perspective, the Cognitive-Behavioural Coaching approach (CBC) is a recommended intervention to manage crisis situations, reducing anxiety, stress, depression (Neenan & Palmer, 2012; Palmer & Szymanska, 2008). This approach has developed since the early 1990s, combining the use of cognitive

techniques and strategies, solution focus, goal setting theory, and social cognitive theory (Palmer & Szymanska, 2008). Studies also point to positive effects of intervention on the control locus (Dias & Fortes, 2015), decision making and resolution of career indecision (Palmer & Szymanska, 2008), overcoming procrastination and lack of assertiveness (Dias & Fortes, 2015; Palmer & Szymanska, 2008).

Considering the relevance of career planning programs and the scarcity of articles that present the structure of interventions in the context of the university-work transition, this study proposes, through an experience report, to detail the protocol of an intervention of Cognitive-Behavioural Coaching (CBC) for undergraduates.

Method

Participants

The study included 61 undergraduates from a private university in southern Brazil, aged between 21 and 63, mostly women (77%) and unmarried (67%). Most were working (79%) and never underwent psychological/psychiatric treatment (61%). The students studied: Architecture and Urbanism (47.5%), Psychology (27.9%) and Business Administration (24.6%). The majority of participants (88.5%) attended at least 80% of the meetings.

Instruments

The questionnaire developed by the research group 'Cognitive-Behavioural Interventions: Study and Research (ICCep)' was used to evaluate sociodemographic data. Initially, authors approved to use the Cognitive-Behavioural Coaching methodology. For the intervention design, the Australian program Coach Yourself (Grant & Greene, 2004) was used as a model. The purpose of the Coach Yourself program are to change from simple actions, focusing on the solution, through performing written exercises on the thoughts, feelings, dreams and plans. The original program gives an indication of 8 to 12 one-hour sessions, where the following aspects are worked out: 1) Identifying irritations, assessing dissatisfaction with the present, and making life uncomfortable; 2) Selecting an area of life to work (current job, career, family life, emotional life, physical health, finances, personal life, social life); 3) Discovering in what stage of change each one was (pre-contemplation, preparation, contemplation, action, maintenance, relapse); 4) Creating dreams and think about the future; 5) Identifying need and values, motivating factors to achieve goals; 6) Maximizing motivation by setting clear goals; 7) Turning focus into solution and building change; 8) Gathering resources and naming the project; 9) Development of a plan of action; 10) Sharing the plan with another person; 11) Celebrating success, recording and monitoring positive outcomes; 12) Developing a detailed action plan for the next four weeks. The program developed in this study had a total of six sessions of two hours each, covering the same workload as the original program. Five sessions were performed at intervals of one week, but between the fifth and sixth sessions there was an interval of two months. In order to increase the possibilities of participating in the program, we decided for an adaptation of the original program with distribution of the workload in two hours per session. Thus, students with difficulty of displacement and student workers would have to organize only for six moments instead of twelve. The aspects worked on the intervention were carried out in the same order as the original program, but with some adjustments for the particularity of

this group of participants. As it was a group of undergraduate students, the focus to be explored was career, thus not opening the possibility of working on another theme.

Procedures

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of UNISINOS, based on opinion 15/252, in compliance with Resolution 466/12 of the National Health Council, which regulates human research in Brazil (Brasil, 2012). The Higher Education Institution (HSI) was chosen for convenience, located in the metropolitan region of the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Entries were made by e-mail in response to the invitation e-mail. The university students who attended the first session got to know the program and decided on the participation, when they signed the Informed Consent Form. Soon after, the sociodemographic questionnaire was applied (approximately 10 minutes). The sessions were held in classrooms with tables and chairs arranged in a circle. Screen projections were used with instructions for the proposed activities. Participants received weekly e-mail inviting them to the next session, with summary of the previous session, files with the forms used in the session and topics of the next session. In all phases of the research, the person responsible for conducting the intervention was supervised by a Cognitive-Behavioral Psychologist. During the sessions, two psychology students developed the role of observers, recording speeches, feedbacks and behaviors of participants.

Results

The career intervention program with CBC to prepare for the university-work transition was constituted from the Australian program Coach Yourself (Grant & Greene, 2004). The original program indicates 8 to 12 sessions of one hour each, but in its adaptation, it was chosen to divide the twelve hours of workload in a different distribution. Six sessions lasted approximately two hours each, with weekly frequency, totaling 12 hours of intervention. Each session had themes and techniques to be developed (Table 1). Each session followed the premises of the CBC model, divided into six stages: 1) Verification of the participant's current affective state with reports of the week's progress - from the second session the coach starts asking the coachees about the actions performed between sessions, how they felt in accomplishing them; 2) Negotiation of the agenda of the session - the coach presents to the coachees the scheduled agenda for the date; 3) Exercise review between sessions - coach and coachees make considerations about exercise between sessions; 4) Approach of the agenda items - the coach approaches the theme and conducts the session techniques; 5) Exercise negotiation between sessions - coach presents exercise to be performed between sessions and asks 'what other action can the coachees do between the two sessions to advance?'; and 6) Session feedback - coach questions coachees 'what lessons learned in the session?'.

Table 1 - Themes and main techniques used in each session

Session	Themes	Techniques
1	Knowing the program and setting goals	Video testimonial and Behavioral contract Letter to the future
2	Self-awareness and awareness of self-limiting patterns	List of Cognitive Errors and Antidotes, ABCDEF Model, Mapping Resources, Needs and Values and Search for Opportunities
3	Career Exploration and Action Plan	Positive and Negative Effects, SMART Methodology and Action Plan
4	Procrastination and labor market	FACES Model, Overcoming Procrastination Patterns and Tips for Curriculum Elaboration
5	Building a plan focused on the solution	Route of action, Visualization technique and My contract for change
6	Verification of results achieved	Synthesis of the material and Letter to the future

Note. Detail of the sessions developed in the intervention.
Source: The authors.

First session - knowing the program and setting goals

Present and sensitize the participants to the program proposal and to define the objectives of the program. Techniques: video with professional testimony that went through university-work transition and behavioral contract in CBC (Grant & Greene, 2004). Task between sessions: letter to the future (Grant & Greene, 2004). The behavioral contract in CBC aimed at setting goals for the program. The following questions were used: 'What are the objectives with participation in the program?', 'What concrete evidence do you want at the end of the program?'. Task between sessions: Letter to the future - telling what each wants to happen in the next three months, imagining themselves three months after the current date.

Second session - Self-knowledge and modification of self-limiting patterns

Promote self-knowledge through reflections on different self-limiting thinking patterns, strategies for changing beliefs about the career, and identifying strengths and weaknesses. Techniques: List of cognitive errors and antidotes (Neenan & Dryden, 2002), ABCDEF Model and resource mapping (Grant & Greene, 2004). The list of cognitive errors (Magnification/catastrophization, Minimization, Lettering, etc.) was widely discussed. We used the ABCDEF model: A - activating event, B - belief, C - emotional and behavioral consequences, D - beliefs challenge, E - new effective approach, F - focus on the future. Such activities were developed to raise awareness of the impact of automatic thinking on the career. The resource mapping technique was performed in pairs, identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Participants were surprised by the cognitive errors and the possibility of neutralizing them. They reported more difficulties in identifying positive rather than negative aspects in the resource mapping technique. They realized the relevance of writing during the sessions to organize thoughts. Task between sessions:

Needs and values (Grant & Greene, 2004) and research of opportunities, developed by the researchers.

Third session - career exploration and action plan

The favorable and unfavorable factors of each opportunity were explored, facilitating decision making and goal setting. Techniques: positive and negative effects (Grant & Greene, 2004), SMART methodology - Specific, Measurable, Attractive, Realistic, Time-framed (Grant & Greene, 2004). Participants performed the exercise by listing 'positive and negative effects' in pairs. Thus, they assessed each alternative more clearly. The SMART methodology was used for the coachees to construct realistic goals. Example: S – formalizing an individual company to meet prefectures; M - make contact with accountant; A - personal fulfillment, income increase; R - I can make the first contact this week; T - until April 30th. Most participants were able to lean more towards one of the options evaluated.

Fourth session - procrastination and labor market

Reflect on cognitive errors/ distortions associated with procrastination, to promote self-awareness and self-management, and to instruct to facilitate employability. Techniques: a) FACES Model - Physiology, Actions, Cognitions, Emotions and Situation (Dias & Fortes, 2015), adapted from the SPACE model, b) form for overcoming patterns of procrastination (Grant & Greene, 2004) and c) tips for curriculum writing. Task between sessions: Elaboration of the curriculum and other actions already established, based on the SMART goal technique carried out in the previous session. Example of the application of the FACES model: a) situations: making corrections in the graduation work; b) cognitions: I still have time; c) emotions: insecurity, fear; d) physiological aspects: hunger, sleep; e) actions: postponement/procrastination. Complementing the FACES model, it was used the technique 'overcoming patterns of procrastination' to distinguish the characteristics of the propellant and hindering thoughts. Strategies have been discussed to get out of the procrastination situation in addition to aspects to keep the change and benefits from breaking the habits of procrastination. At the end of the session, the participants were instructed on how to elaborate a curriculum.

Fifth session - building a plan focused on the solution

Establish a step-by-step action plan, through the mental construction of the desired reality and to discuss the importance of the commitment to the career and the self-monitoring. Techniques: a) route of action (developed by the first author of the article), b) image/visualization technique (Dias & Fortes, 2015), c) form called my contract for change (Grant & Greene, 2004) and d) psychoeducation. At the beginning of the session, the coachees were instructed to perform the route of action technique. One participant volunteered to go to the front of the room and the other classmates helped set up his/her route of action. The steps and dates were described. Each participant then drew their route on an A3 sheet. A visualization was also carried out, whose objective was to help the coachees to mentally construct the desired reality, and to remember other times in which they had conquests. The form 'my contract for change' was filled in for greater commitment to the stated goals, ways were discussed to monitor their progress and to celebrate the goals achieved.

Sixth session - Follow-up

Two months after the end of the sessions, a follow-up meeting was held with the students to evaluate the process. The two-month interval was aimed at verifying that the expected results in the first session were achieved in that period. At the time the completed forms were delivered during the sessions and the students were invited to read their letters to the future.

Discussion

The career intervention program presented sought to collaborate in the development of an exploratory behavior of university undergraduate students, a behavior characterized by the constant search for information about the individual and about the career (Borges, 2014). Another goal was to influence the increase in self-efficacy (Verbruggen & Sels, 2010), understood as the individual's belief in his/her ability to successfully perform activities related to the profession (Teixeira, 2010). The intervention encouraged the reflection and discussion among students to facilitate the moment of university-work transition.

Because of the series of challenges in the world of work and new social demands, the worker is expected to take a more active posture in order to build his career trajectory (Ambiel, 2014). This posture is associated with the responsibility that the individual assigns to him/herself for the accomplishment of the professional goals (Teixeira, 2010). The focus of the intervention were the psychological resources, preparing the students to have the personal agency about their career and their decision making (Oliveira, 2014). The participants of the program were stimulated to explore the career, with the objective of gathering information about themselves, identifying skills, vocational interests, professional possibilities, market information and goal setting (Teixeira, 2010).

It is understood that some elements of the protocol presented advance in relation to the existing career planning programs. The structure of the sessions focused on the solution, based on cognitive (thinking) aspects and behavioral aspects (practical actions), so the CBC intervention model focused on cognitive-behavioural aspects.

The techniques of the ABCDEF model and resource mapping (Grant & Greene, 2004), aimed at increasing the levels of self-efficacy. Such levels in career guidance programs can help participants find fewer external barriers, progressing toward their career goals, so that they are more satisfied with it and, consequently, more satisfied with life itself (Verbruggen & Sels, 2010).

In the fourth session 'procrastination and labor market', activities were carried out in order to give the participant the responsibility for his/her career, also called the professional control locus: FACES model (Dias & Fortes, 2015) and surpassing patterns of procrastination (Grant & Greene, 2004). Tasks between sessions encouraged participants to take small, gradual actions to increase self-efficacy and professional locus of control.

It is imagined that the elements present during the process and the brevity of the number of sessions could have contributed to the retention of participants in the CBC approach compared to other approaches to career counseling. The preparation of the participants to be their own coaches in future moments of career transition was also one of the differential elements of this intervention.

Final considerations

The university planning program for university-work transition presented in this study was an adaptation of the Australian Program Coach Yourself, which uses the Cognitive-Behavioural Coaching (CBC) approach. Such an approach focuses on the solution and goal setting, aims to facilitate the management of crisis situations, reducing anxiety, stress, depression and favoring assertiveness and decision making.

In order to contribute to the university-work transition, such a program was applied to the career planning situation. Meeting career specialists who suggest new intervention models for contemporary career settings, this model has been adopted with some differences compared to other models of career interventions. The main focus of the intervention of this study was the cognitive-behavioral aspects, seeking solutions for this phase and stimulating the participants for the career planning actions organized during the intervention sessions. Another focus and differential of this model was also to prepare the participants to use the tools learned in addition to the intervention, both in the current moment of transition and in future moments of the career.

As Brazil is lacking in studies with the detailing of the protocol of career interventions, this study had the objective of detailing each session of the protocol developed, making possible its replication for other samples. Thus, this becomes a support material for college career counselors. There is still much to be done in relation to the detailing of interventions in the various areas and it is up to the researchers to make such records, making possible the replication of the models.

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