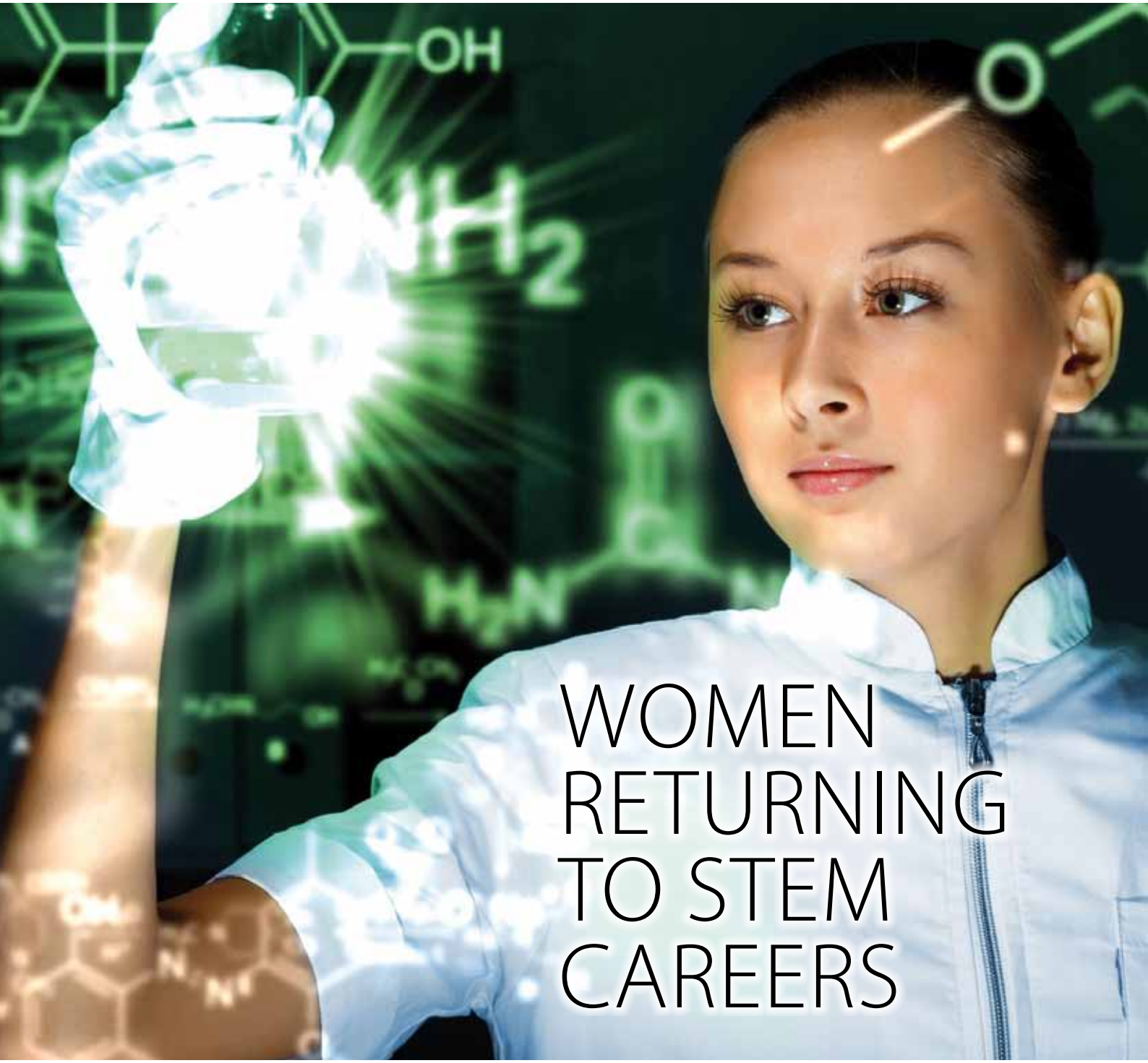
Issue 1.2 / October 2013 / www.thecdi.net / £4.99

CDI CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

CareerMatters

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT SECTOR



WOMEN RETURNING TO STEM CAREERS

CDI CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

> As practitioners we are diverse, using many different approaches.

MEANING AND PURPOSE

CHRIS TARGETT EXPLORES HOW AS CAREERS ADVISERS WE INTERPRET OUR DUTIES AND, HOW THESE INTERPRETATIONS MAY RESULT IN DIFFERENT OUTCOMES FOR OUR CLIENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS

A time of change

We are facing a contextual change; much of what once underpinned what we do has given way. Socialist models of delivery such as the idea of the universal service as generated through *Every Child Matters,* have been replaced with capitalist drivers; economic reasons for the existence of 'career development professionals' now set our relevance. Yet I wonder if we are at the point of a potential polarisation or diversification of our profession?

As practitioners we are diverse, using many different approaches. Some good examples can be found in the Bill Law article, *Philosophies for careers work – what do we mean by 'careers work? and, anyway, who are 'we'?*

Each approach has an impact on the benefits sought by stakeholders and each client's individual need; yet I wonder if there is a disparity between this implicit knowledge and the understanding (or even an awareness of the potential impact) of this difference, by stakeholders?

How we interpret our duties varies, resulting in different outcomes for clients. What follows is a reflection, on just how different these outcomes can be and the impact this may have for our profession.

Interpretations

Constructivism, an example of one approach, argues that meaning is made by each individual, so as advisers we participate in helping clients to find or create this meaning, as part of a 'making meaning' process, regardless of what approach we take. Once we acknowledge this, we are left with trying to be as useful as we can for our clients; but 'useful' according to whose agenda or definition? Being 'useful' can be interpreted in different ways; if we look to our professional ethics the phrase of working in 'the best interest of the client' gives us a strong starting point.

Scenario 1

We can help clients find meaning (which may be one of many possible constructed meanings to be had) for themselves, by offering 'challenge' to expand their thinking, according to each adviser's professional

assessment of the client's needs. At the same time they openly disclose that which may bias the client's interpretation of meaning; so the client owns these factors and is aware of them when making a decision.

Through this process the client finds what is meaningful for them. We could argue this as a client-centred approach routed in Rogerian ethics (with which many advisers will be familiar); as the challenges provided are framed around where the client is and where they wish to progress to or, what they wish to use the session for (they decide how they decide). For example by the end of the session, they may not have a definite course outcome or progression (to directly meet a broader government, institutional or even parent/carer need) but, they know what they need to do to resolve their issue(s) and move forward.

Our second scenario is informed by a different motivation (for the adviser):

Scenario 2
As in the first scenario, the adviser offers 'challenge' but the professional assessment is based on the needs of the customer, employer, institution or government and not the client; for example meeting the government NEET agenda. Bias and/or compromised nature of the different methods applied may be hidden by omission, for example using 'selected' Labour Market Information to prove a certain point, without providing an awareness of the possible invalid nature of the data; or disclosing other possible interpretations of the data. Further caution on using selected narratives and data, to make a point or provide a particular view can be read in Bill Law's *Three Scene Storyboarding, 2012.*

Neither of the above examples are overtly biased; just providing a 'challenge' from different perspectives. It could be argued that it is in the 'best interest of the client' to meet the needs desired for them by the customer, employer, institution or government; as they may then integrate more harmoniously into society but, this is perhaps a highly tenuous interpretation of the CDI ethics.

Outcomes achieved through the methodology within scenario 1 may meet the agenda of the customer, employer, institution or government but, this is a by-product of meeting the client's needs and not the main driver or motivation (as in scenario 2).

Both scenarios look the same from the outside, both provide elements of 'challenge' to the client but the intention of the adviser, in each case is very different; therefore the constructed meanings, actions and outcomes maybe very different.

I reflected on what this might mean for my practice and came up with an imaginary case study:

Jon was in Year 12 and had realised that he was on the wrong course at 6th form; he wanted to train to be a mechanic (after work experience at a local garage). He went to see his careers adviser for help.

His adviser (using methodology in scenario 1) helped Jon to explore the implications of his options, challenging him on the implications of leaving 6th form now or later. Jon could see the financial benefits of leaving now, as it meant that he wouldn't have to pay fees for his level 3 course when he turned 19. If he stayed and then went to college there would be fees to pay if he wanted to study to level 3; whereas if he went, he could complete his level 2 Diploma then level 3 with no fees incurred. After looking at other factors, this seemed to be the best decision decided Jon; he felt motivated to apply to college and move on with his plans.

If the methodology in scenario 2 had been applied the following may have happened:

The adviser helped Jon to explore the outcomes of his options, challenging him on the implications of leaving 6th form now or later. The adviser knowing that the 6th form would be monitored on its retention and NEET figures, challenged Jon to really consider the benefits his sports studies course would have in keeping his options open if he changed his mind about being a mechanic. When Jon asked about the financial implications, his adviser said that there are always ways round things and not to worry. Perhaps, as he would be older when leaving 6th form he would be more mature and work ready; so finding an Apprenticeship (despite the funding) would be easier. Jon decided to stay at 6th form, as his worries had been resolved.

"There is room for more than one style, approach , vision and agenda…."

> Financial implications mean that more focus is being placed on outcomes.

So what do we think? Both may look 'impartial' to the client but this is debatable as both hide and camouflage their agendas (or motivations and reasons for challenging); their hidden partiality. In a complex world of 'career workers and career development professionals' we need to ask ourselves, do we act in the interest of the wider society (and institutional needs) or in the interest of the individual client? I would argue that our individual position affects the type of challenge we offer to clients and thereby the meanings we help to construct with our clients.

Each of us approach client interactions from a different set of ethics and philosophical positions; meaning that each of us can meet different needs yet, there is a potential for dissatisfaction and expectations (whether the client's or stakeholder's) not being met.

So what is to be done? We will each feel differently about the scenarios offered; some may feel that one focuses on the needs of the stakeholder and another soothes our conscience. Personally I feel that there is a very grey area around what we term impartiality; even amongst ourselves as practitioners. Does it come down (once again) to a question of honesty and transparency as to what we do, why and for whom?

Honesty and transparency

The need for honesty and transparency raises the need to educate stakeholders in the variety of ways in which we work, so they know what they are buying and the impact it will have on them. Some stakeholders may desire practitioners to take a particular approach depending on their own educational ethics and others may give free rein, or not be bothered by the implications; unless concerns are expressed. For some practitioners they will be happy to change their approach according to the needs of the stakeholder; for others, they will find the very idea of this abhorrent.

Financial implications mean that more focus is being placed on outcomes. If we fail to discuss these expectations, we are at risk of dissatisfaction from our clients and customers. Worse, we give the best impression of being transparent, with declarations of honesty and trust but then secretly hide the factors which allude to our hidden agendas.

One way in which we could address this is for us as an institute, to follow the path taken by the counselling profession. Currently counsellors state their allegiance to a particular approach so clients know what they are getting; could the same solution be a way forward for us?

We are already a step away from this; we operate under the title of 'career development professionals' encompassing all types of practitioner from career coaches and career advisers, to careers mentors and careers teachers. It could be helpful for all involved, to identify those professionals who put the institutional agenda before the client's and, those who follow other agendas, whether they are routed in equal opportunities or raising participation in higher education.

Our risk of not declaring the agendas which drive us is to cloud expectations, hindering the professions progress as a relevant professional body for the 21st century. Only us, as practitioners can decide, how we wish our practice and profession to evolve and the role we each wish to play. There is room for more than one style, approach, vision and agenda; as long as we are clear on what each means and that those who purchase our services know what they are buying.

Chris Targett is a careers adviser working in Kent, in a variety of secondary schools as well as project work in the community. He has been working in the education sector for nearly ten years and is passionate about helping young people to achieve their potential.

References:

Every Child Matters DCSF (2010) *Connexions* http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100202120707/dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/youth/youthmatters/connexions/connexions/

Philosophies for careers work – what do we mean by 'careers work'? and, anyway, who are 'we'? Law, B. (2011) www.canterbury.ac.uk/education/career-and-personal-development/docs/Law-OccPaper2011Vocation.pdf

Three Scene Storyboarding *Law, B. (2012)* www.hihohiho.com/storyboarding/sbL4L.pdf

Code of Ethics *Career Development Institute (2013)* www.thecdi.net/write/CDI/CDI_Code_of_Ethics_(2).pdf

What is therapy? *British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (2013)* www.bacp.co.uk and www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk/what-is-therapy/cost

Ideas and concepts expressed in this article, do not represent the views of his employer or based on any individual interactions with customers or clients.