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THE RELEVANCE OF CAREER COUNSELLORS IN THE SELECTION AND MAINTENANCE OF CAREER IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The high rate of unemployment in Nigeria has been attributed to two major underlying causative factor: the inability to choose a befitting career/vocation and failure to maintain it. These two factors are sustained by the refusal of job-seekers and non-job-seekers to explore the services of the career counsellors. This paper therefore discusses the professional competence of career counsellor in ensuring that job-seekers not only select appropriate job but also maintain same thorough vocational adjustment strategies. It is recommended, that government and non-government organizations should employ more counsellors to cater for the vocational needs of the citizens of the country.

Introduction

One of the indices used to determine the developmental pace of any given country is the rate at which the citizens are employed. When citizens are gainfully employed, they are strategically positioned to make meaningful contributions to the development of the country and thereby making the national objectives

realizable. Conversely, an unemployed or under-employed citizens would hardly make any useful contribution to national development. Unfortunately, there is no country without unemployed citizens in the world over. The degree or the length of time at which the unemployed citizens remain unemployed is the distinguishing factor. While most citizens in the developed nations enjoy befitting employment, the same could not be said of people from underdeveloped or developing nations. In Nigeria, for instance, the unemployment rate according to C.I.A. World Factbook (2007) cited in Index Mundi (2007) was put at 28% in 2003, 2.90% in 2006 and 5.80% in 2007.

Generally, there are four major types of unemployment. There are frictional, structural, cyclical, and seasonal unemployment. Frictional unemployment otherwise known as search unemployment, occurs when job-seekers are unable to get jobs as when needed or immediately. Structural unemployment occurs when employers of labour are unable to get the required or desired type of workers because of imbalances or inadequacies resident in the job seekers. Cyclical unemployment also known as demand deficient unemployment arises from general lack of demand for job seekers by the employers of labour. Seasonal unemployment, however, occurs when an individual employment is only limited to a particular season or weather type related jobs such as selling of corn during raining season or working for a construction company during the construction of a particular road. A critical comparison of these typologies of unemployment within the context of Nigeria nation, however, reveal that the four

types of unemployment are resident in Nigeria with demand deficient unemployment at the topmost position..

The inability to be gainfully employed in Nigeria is caused by a number of factors. (Anomo, 2005; Aighokhan, 1988). One of the problems of job seekers, in the submission of Okoye, Adejumo and Achebe (1990) is the making of hasty and irrational decision in respect of vocational choice. These scholars observed that when decision on choice of vocation is made under uncontrollable emotion, irrational choices are inevitable. Irrational choices, they conclude, would eventually metamorphose into job maladjustment and dissatisfaction. Faulty choice of vocation has also been found to have adverse effects on physical health; leads to continuous job insecurity or unemployment and may mar happiness for life (Gesinde, 1984).

The above and many unmentioned dangers inherent in wrong selection of career suggest that all hands must be on deck to assist job-seekers put the problem of unemployment at bay. Solutions to unemployment problems cannot be the prerogative of the government alone. Professional bodies and non-governmental agencies have immeasurable roles to play. Consequently, this paper intends to highlight the relevance of career counselors in the selection and maintenance of career in Nigeria.

Concept definition and duties of Career Counselling

The term 'Career' is synonymously interpreted in this paper to signify job, vocation, work and occupation. It is generally acknowledged to be the totality of work one experiences in a developmental life span.

Career counselling has been briefly and broadly defined by counselling psychologists. One of such broad definitions was propounded by Kerford (2003) thus:

an interpersonal process focused on facilitating career development that involves choosing, entering, adjustment to, and advancing a career and integrating the work role with other life roles. The process seeks to enhance personnel development, as well as facilitate personal awareness about occupations, life career decision-making, career planning, career patching, or other career development related issues (p2).

A career counsellor is expected to perform certain roles and functions. These vary from country to another. Generally, however, Kerford (2003) observes the following as expected professional duties of career counsellors: (a) Teaching skills to use when searching for job (b) Writing resumes (c) Managing careers (d) Transiting from one career to another (e) Navigating interpersonal issues (f) Inform clients about various labour market trends and influences; and (g) Assist in defining skills, beliefs, values, work habits, interests and personalities.

In the Nigeria context, a career counsellor working in institution of learning is expected to perform the following duties in the submissions of Adegoke (2004):

- Provides students with occupational information.
- Administers vocational tests, scores, and interpretes them and uses them in counselling students and parents on

vocational choice and combination of subjects.

- Guides and counsells students, and parents, on vocational choice, combination of subjects.
- Fosters vocational development in students: arranges career talks, vocational visits to professional and vocational centres, promotes vocational clubs, organize vocational experiences – attachment, pilot schemes.

Career Counsellors Duties and Vocational Needs

From the foregoing it is crystal clear that career counselling directly meets the needs of non-job seekers as well as job-seekers. One fundamental misconception about seeking for job is to hold the belief that an individual has to graduate from tertiary institution before he/she can be fit to search for job. The act of getting befitting job is a long term process which involves systematic career planning from childhood period.

Ginzberg, et al (1951) as cited in Salami (2002) maintain that the process of selecting a befitting career passes through three stages. These are fantasy period (6 – 11 years); tentative period (11-17 years) and realistic period (19-22 years). When the child is at the fantasy stage, he/she lacks rational and realistic orientation on choice of occupation. Consequently, his/her choices are idealized, drawn from the direct influence of his/her environment. At the tentative stage, however, the pre-adolescents make choice on the basis of interests, intrinsic enjoyment and abilities in vocational area of interest.

The period of realistic stage, which is sub-divided into three phases, make adolescents to examine several career options at his/her disposal through the collection of information from diverse sources (exploration phase); become more focused in their preference due to their assessment of the subjective and external factors affecting the choice of occupation (crystallization phase); make a choice of career either by joining an existing organization/company or enroll for training or get admission in an academic institution (realistic phase).

A broad based decision on the type of career to select by an individual involves the need to provide answers to the following questions:

- (a) What job to do in the future?
- (b) How to get the job and what to do to get the job?
- (c) How to cope with the job after getting it?
- (d) How will the job not affect other areas of life negatively?

Solutions to these problems without resort to professional help of career counsellors would prevent an individual from getting to the Promised Land. This is simply because these questions require making the most important decisions in life and obtaining precise information. Decision making on which job to engage in nowadays goes beyond what an individual could handle for many reasons. One of such is the fact that there are several types of occupations from which an individual is expected to pick from. This is unlike in the past when an individual engaged in parent's occupation dogmatically. Another reason is that decision on which type of career to engage in, in this modern time, requires the scientific assessment of the interests, abilities, skills, values,

strengths and weaknesses of the individual concerned on one part and the demands of the job on the other hand. Ironically, most people lack the required self-knowledge that would give room for self exploration. The knowledge of self held by some is either faulty or inadequate. Okoye, Adejumo and Achebe (1990) confirm this when they observe that:

Some people cannot really make a reliable and accurate evaluation of their abilities and capabilities and some many develop job aspirational level much higher than they can grapple with. Others may so underrate their potentialities as to develop a very low level job aspiration. In both cases, the individual worker will find it very difficult to adjust to their job situation with obvious vocation problems which will adversely affect both the employee and employer.

The inability of some people to have unbiased self-assessment has solution in counselling practice. This is because quite a number of validated psychological tests have been developed by experts which are capable of detecting what an individual is made of in terms of innate abilities, interests, values, and so on. These tests are used with a view to match such qualities with the intended job to be engaged in. The assumption is that there must congruence between the job and the personality make-up of the individual if he/she is to perform maximally. Examples of these tests include Bakare's (1977) Vocational Inventory (VI) and Holland's Self- Directed Search (Holland, 1985). Career counsellors have been trained to develop, administer, score, and interpret these tests in away that appropriate evaluation of the client could be attained.

Similarly, an individual who intends to choose a career or change his/her career need to obtain accurate information about the job. As rightly point out by Hoppock as cited in Kochhar (1999):

choice always involves knowledge; one cannot choose what one does not know..... one many stumble into an appropriate occupation by sheer luck, but the wise choice of an occupation requires accurate information about what occupations are available what they require and what they offer (p. 83).

The act of selecting a right choice of career is not synonymous to maintenance of the career. The failure of most employed individuals to maintain their job is one major underlying factor responsible for loss of job. Maintenance of career or job, as used in this context, means the ability of an employed individual to adjust to whatever demands made by the job in such a way that he/she will continually be relevant in the work place and other social settings. As rightly observe by Kochhar (1999):

Vocational adjustment cannot be judged merely by satisfaction and facility in work. Such criteria of adjustment tend to be narrow and neglect the "global" aspect of adjustment. Vocational adjustment means adjustment not only to work involved in the occupation but to all social, economic, and physical situations connected with the occupation. An

occupation brings with it many social relationships with colleagues, superiors, subordinates and the public

There is also the need to be vocationally adjusted primarily because we are living in a world where technological advancement can make one to be irrelevant in a particular work place, which eventually will metamorphose into loss of job or change of job. Mitchell and Cubson (1986) succinctly state that:

From a career stand point we are now living in an age in which the rapidity of technological development can affect what we do and how we do it almost literally overnight. Counsellors are being more frequently reminded that such changes can result in increasing number of adults who, either by choice or necessity, be making mid-life career decisions (p 283).

On the bases of the above, a gainfully employed individual require up-to-date occupational information from career counsellors so as to adjust to his/her job or change the job for a more rewarding one. In the light of the above occupational information obtainable from the career counsellor according to Kochhar (1999) can be grouped into the following: (a) Information on job opportunities. (b) Information on educational/ training facilities. (c) Information on apprenticeships and on-the-job training facilities. (d) Information on scholarship and fellowships. (e) Information on trends, patterns and growth of educational, training and employment opportunities.

The methods of providing information could be through the organization of career talks, bulletin boards,

excursion to companies, career clubs in schools, and so on. It is hoped that current information so provided would go a long way in the selection and maintenance of career.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Career counsellors from the above discussion have a greater role to play in the reduction of vocational related problems. However, there is the need to make them more relevant in meeting the vocational needs of the citizens. This could be achieved if more counsellors are employed by government and non-government organizations. Those employed should also be adequately equipped to provide career services to their clients.

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