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GUIDE
Online Career Counselling

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The Online Career Counselling Guide is one of the intellectual outputs of the Prometheus project, 2014-1-BG01- KA204-001560, funded with the support of the European Commission and is jointly developed by the partners from different European countries. Its main purpose is to provide additional resources, which will help career advisors enhance the quality of their services offered to clients.

The Prometheus team includes 6 partner organisations from 6 European countries:

Business Foundation for Education, Bulgaria (www.fbo.bg)

Centro Italiano per l'Apprendimento Permanente, Italy (www.ciape.it)

BEST Institut für berufsbezogene Weiterbildung und Personaltraining GmbH, Austria

(www.best.at)

Institute of Entrepreneurship Development, Greece (http://entre.gr)

Aspire-igen, Great Britain (www.aspire-i.com)

Cork Institute of Technology, Ireland (www.cit.ie)

Business Foundation for Education

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FOREWORD

PROMETHEUS is the Greek god that gave fire to the people. His name in Greek means forethought. He stands as a symbol of the human progress and the gift of fire and hope. Hope helps human beings to struggle to improve their lives whilst fire, as the source of technology, makes success in that struggle possible. What better metaphor is there for career counsellors and guidance practitioners today? Their expertise and experience means that they give hope to people through professional and personal development. The rapid growth of technology has changed the nature of careers guidance and counselling, and so online platforms are the next logical step. The PROMETHEUS project aims to facilitate quality online career guidance and counselling making the guidance process more relevant and suitable for the new virtual generation's needs.

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- Institute of Entrepreneurship Development, Greece (http://entre.gr)

- Aspire-igen, Great Britain (www.aspire-i.com)

- Cork Institute of Technology, Ireland (www.cit.ie)

The main project output – the website www.prometheus-eu.net is a One Stop Virtual Space for Career Counselling and Guidance Services. It is an innovative platform offering careers professionals a space to learn, discover, network and share information. It will gather a range of resources – state of the art reports, educational videos, a virtual library of over 100 best practices, toolkit with instruments for traditional and online career counselling, links to useful resources, etc. The platform will contribute to the continued professional development of careers advisers and provide a space to share information and extend their professional networks.

This Online Career Counselling Guide is an introduction to the concept of online counselling. The Guide focuses on the details of online counselling, the main requirements for career counsellors, online good practice, advice and tips, working with different target groups, and the main challenges of delivering online guidance (such as establishing trust between the counsellor and the client remotely).

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The Prometheus project has been funded with the support from the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Programme. More information is available online:

- on the project online platform: http://prometheus-eu.net/
- on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/prometheuseu
- on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=6936869

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introduction

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INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCEPT OF ONLINE CAREER COUNSELLING

The changing paradigm of guidance

Career guidance in the 21st century has undergone a significant shift[1] due to:

• labour market and demographic changes

• the continual emergence of new technologies and careers

• social challenges

• globalisation and increased mobility

• an increasing amount of information available

• the rise of lifelong learning

Consequently, the services supporting people to achieve professional fulfillment have also undergone significant change and development. The internet and online technologies have become a major communication channel and so online career guidance naturally followed.

As searching for jobs via the internet has "taken over" from traditional channels, the supporting services that help answer career related questions have also moved online. There has been an extensive growth in web-based guidance and counselling services in most European countries, this includes thematic mailing lists, customised mailboxes, reserved web areas (e.g. social media platforms), databases and audio-visual tools (instant messaging, video-conferencing)[2].

The internet environment offers a large variety of online career information, guidance and support, available to different target groups and offered by many actors. There are Public Employment services, career centers, community and youth organisations, trade unions, NGOs and public institutions offering, job-search portals, recruitment companies and training providers.

Several approaches have been undertaken to coordinate the variety of professional activities related to career guidance and counselling.

1. The Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe (NICE) - a consortium of 45 European institutions of higher education in the field of career counselling - has agreed on a **system of 5 professional roles for guidance counsellors**[3]:

Career Educator	Supports people in developing their own career management competences.
Career Information and Assessment Expert	Supports people in assessing their personal characteristics and needs, then connecting them with the labour market and education systems.

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1 Cedefop; Sultana, R.G, 2008. From policy to practice: a systemic change to lifelong guidance in Europe.
2 CEDEFOP, 2011. Lifelong guidance across Europe: reviewing policy progress and future prospects.
3 Core Competences for Career Guidance and Counselling Professionals". NICE Handbook for the Academic Training of Career Guidance and Counselling Professionals, 2012.

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Career Counsellor	Supports individuals in understanding their situations, so as to work through issues towards solutions.
Programme and Service Manager	Ensures the quality and delivery of career guidance and counselling organisations' services.
Social Systems Intervener and Developer	Supports clients (even) in crisis and works to change systems for the better.

Each of these five roles is seen as an important facet of the careers guidance and counselling profession. Careers practitioners performing in any of these roles are expected to behave professionally, e.g. by following ethical standards in their practice.

2. According to the type of support they offer, the existing European ICT-based resources in the field of careers information and guidance has been classified by Offer[4] in relation to the type DOTS[5] model developed by Law & Watts (1977):

Decision learning	Resources concerned with **decision learning** include matching systems which enable users to relate their personal profiles to relevant learning or work opportunities. The outcome is a list of the opportunities which match the profile most closely. Also included here are content-free decision-making resources designed to help users to explore options in a systematic way, balancing the desirability of particular options against the perceived probability of achieving them.
Opportunity awareness	Resources concerned with **opportunity awareness** include databases of learning and/or work opportunities, with a menu of search criteria which enable users to find data relevant to their needs. The databases may cover: education/training institutions or courses; occupations, employers, or job vacancies; voluntary-work opportunities; and information on how to become self-employed. Some include relevant labour market information on supply and demand. There are also some examples of work simulations which enable users to explore particular occupational areas in an experiential way.

4 Offer, M., 1997, A Review of the Use of Computer-Assisted Guidance and the Internet in Europe, National Centre for Guidance in Education, Dublin.
5 OECD, Watts, A.G, 2001. The Role Of Information And Communication Technologies In An Integrated Career Information And Guidance System

Self-awareness	Resources concerned with **self-awareness** are designed to help users to assess themselves and to develop a profile which can be matched to eligible learning and work opportunities. These resources range from simple self-assessment questionnaires to psychometric tests; they also include more open-ended "brainstorming" approaches.
Transition learning	Finally, resources concerned **with transition learning** help users to implement their decisions. These may include support in developing action plans, preparing curricula vitae, completing application forms, and preparing for selection interviews; it may also include help in securing funding for learning opportunities or for becoming self-employed.

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3. The ARIADNE project has identified **5 types of web-delivered guidance services**[6]:

Information delivery	A service supplying information both of a wide interest and also addressed to specific target users: • training and job opportunities available at a local, national and international level; • information about education and courses; • types of contracts, financing/incentives/special terms, local and national working standards and access to training opportunities; • job-market, productive sectors, occupations; • local centers for information, education/training and advice (addresses, opening hours, access and contact modes). Such information is selected and presented on the basis of: • needs analysis, based on the most frequently asked questions from specific target-groups (e.g. young people, adults, women, disabled people); • the duty of service provision; • the results consist of a preliminary dataset, with some degree of detail, offered to an unspecified number of people.
Information advice	This service supplies more detailed and customised information on the basis of specific requests, from either a single user or by a limited and well defined user group.
Guidance training	This service offers support for users to develop career management competencies, including research, decision making and job hunting techniques. This service can be set for a general supply of self-guidance by using guides, interactive online resource like forum topics, time planners, job-seeker calendars, decision making tools, instruments for measuring and improving self-efficiency, etc. Career training can also be customised for the specific needs of a limited and well defined group of users. In this case, autonomous guidance materials (i.e. self-assessment questionnaires, simulations) are integrated with other tools which require closer interaction between guidance practitioners and users. Iindividualised support (online job coaching) for addressing specific skills can be offered by video conference, for example in a job interview with a client.

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6 Ariadne project - http://www.ariadneproject.org/index.php?id=64

Self-assessment questionnaires	This service offers evaluation and/or self-evaluation tools for attitudes, skills and knowledge relating to specific training/educational pathways, professional profiles and domains, vocational guidance skills and professional expertise. The use of such tools can include the interaction between the user and the practitioner (e.g. the user completes a questionnaire, the guidance practitioner evaluates it, and the user receives feedback). If the tool has been designed for self-assessment, no such interaction is needed. Self-assessment can also be enhanced with simple, non-formal methods like interviews, or structured lists which clients can be encouraged to fill in. This does not require any specific preparation from the career counsellor with the exception of knowing what kind of information she/he needs to help the clients achieve their goals.
Career counselling/ guidance	A customised service for users, involving the development of the user's action planning.

4. Depending on the communication technology used, career services can be divided into asynchronous and synchronous[7].

Type of technology	Asynchronous
Communication between client and counsellor	non-simultaneous
Examples	**emails, discussion forums, request forms, blogs, websites, podcasts**
Type of career services and support the technology is suitable for	This type of communication is most suitable for situations which require minimum support and feedback from the counsellors and provide enough time for the clients to research new information, for exploration and self-directed preparation. **Providing information and guidance on specific questions** – such as useful tips, feedback and recommendations, links to useful resources and materials. **Self-assessment** - applying instruments, reflecting on ones' interests, strengths, preferences, values, etc.

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Type of career services and support the technology is suitable for	**Vocational orientation** – exploring various occupations and job profiles, labour market trends and related information. **Job searching and application** – looking for and researching job offers, preparation of CVs and portfolios, preparing for interviews, etc.
Specifics and recommendations for application	• **Discussion forums** offer the opportunity to post questions and comments to a group of people or just one person. These discussions are typically organised by topic area and can be added to at any time. • **Request forms** on websites offer an opportunity to ask for customised information or consultation, based on the unique interests and needs of each user. Questions and relevant answers can be published online, allowing other visitors to take advantage of the same information or individual private responses can be sent to the users. To assure service transparency and reliablity, it is recommended that the experts who handle the questions make their names and qualifications known. If the service includes the publication of all answers online, it is recommended that these are presented as a service providing information on themes of general interest with personal aspects excluded. Furthermore, it is likely that limited space will rule out lengthy answers. Such a service can integrate the information already offered on the website. A positive aspect of the online publication of questions/answers is that the information provided to individual users can also be useful to other users with similar needs. For this reason, online questions and answers can be used to design special areas on the website named FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions). • **Reserved web areas:** Customised services can be offered in reserved areas that only a limited group of users can access, through reserved logins and passwords. This permits a close and customised relation between users and guidance practitioners. For instance, even the information pages can be tailored to the users, according to their geographic and social-economic background, as well as to their specific requirements. Reserved areas also support the use of interactive systems such as forums, chat-rooms and mailing lists, for more specific service customisation. • **Videos and podcasts:** There are numerous videos available across the internet that address specific career development topics and issues, such as career choice, CV writing, changing job, life – career balance, etc. Podcasts, in the form of compressed audio/video recordings, can be downloaded on smart phones, and portable music and video players. The popular website www.ted.com launched in April 2007 shares hundreds of video talks from the world's most inspiring thinkers and professionals. On http://careertv.com/ people can find useful videos on job-searching, company profiles, and other related materials. Another immense source of inspiration and information is www.YouTube.com, where various educational channels share videos in different languages.

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| Specifics and recommendations for application | Due to the immense number of videos available, career counsellors should carefully select the videos which they recommend to their clients.

• **Websites and blogs:** Whether used to post static information or offer more interactive formats such as wikis and blogs, websites and web pages are used by many careers centres to market their services and provide information. These sites can also be used to provide self-serve materials (similar to traditionally printed handouts and brochures), or more in-depth presentations, through the addition of interactive multimedia. However websites can quickly become outdated. Information and links posted to a website should be reviewed and updated regularly. |
|---|---|
| Advantages | • more time for a thoughtful response and evaluation;

• forces both the client and the counsellor to express themselves in a simple, concise and understandable way;

• low level of anxiety for boththe client and the counsellor;

• affordable and accessible, does not require any specific equipment, except for a computer and the internet |
| Disadvantages and limitations | • does not allow for immediate impressions to be drawn, which can impede the counsellor's judgement of clients' traits, needs and situation as a whole;

• sense of uncertainty and lower level of trust and commitment in the client;

• these types of services require a higer level of autonomy and the client is more responsible for finding information and self-preparation;

• delays in communication may cause anxiety |

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Type of technology	Synchronous
Communication between client and counsellor	Simultaneous
Examples	Skype, chats, video messaging, phone calls
Type of career services and support the technology is suitable for	Career counselling
Specifics and recommendations for application	**Synchronous technologies** allow people to communicate simultaneously, in real time, which is to say that responses to questions are immediate. Telephone conversations are a basic example of synchronous communication. (see the example of Learndirect in UK) **Virtual classrooms.** These offices and classrooms offer meeting space online where students and counsellors can communicate and present information to each other in real time. **Chat-lines** allow a highly customised relationship between the guidance practitioner and the user. With this tool, both partners communicate directly onscreen one to one in real time, by using the keyboard. Web technologies also offer audio and video communication and can be used in addition to written communication. **Instant messages.** The use of instant messaging applications, such as Skype and MSN. These synchronous text chat sessions are scheduled in advance, and the time varies to meet students' school and work schedules. **Video conferencing** permits long-distance communication and maintains some of the characteristics of direct (face-to-face) interactions: speakers can see one another and talk to one another in real time. These two factors are important, because they provide conversation which involves the verbal and non-verbal aspects minimised or excluded by ICT communication i.e. conference calls, the Internet, email, and web chat. **Internet-delivered career guidance and information systems.** These incorporate computer-assisted career guidance systems. Such platforms contain tools that encourage and guide individuals in activities, including career exploration, education and training options, job search, skills assessment, and resume writing. These systems can also offer a personalised approach based on user characteristics. As the capabilities of technology change, these systems or portals increasingly bridge the gap between asynchronous and synchronous, making real-time interaction with counsellors and/or peers possible.

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Advantages	Advantages of synchronous career services:
	• access to counselling any time;
	• wider geographical scope (ability to work with clients from other cities, countries);
	• allows access for clients who are physically isolated or disadvantaged;
	• confidentiality;
	• urgency;
	• a more adequate way of working with adolescents for whom face-to-face contact with the counsellor can sometimes be associated with additional problems, while for many of them the internet is a familiar environment;
	• the non-verbal communication develops a more immediate impressions of each other and creates a higher level of trust and commitment for both the client and the counsellor.
Disadvantages and limitations	• external environment may cause noise and distraction, so (as in traditional counselling) a quite place is needed;
	• video conferencing requires some technical systems and specific equipment, such as headsets, which may be hard for some clients (older, low educated, etc.) to deal with;
	• at first it may cause a higher level of anxiety for the clients, especially those who are not used to this type of communication.

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THE PROCESS OF ONLINE COUNSELLING

Career counselling can be described as a two-way, impartial and flexible process. It responds to the client's needs, as well as their desire to change their situation, by supporting them in decision-making and encouraging them to be proactive. All this is also true for online guidance, as it fulfills all these conditions.

The only difference is the way the service is delivered: traditional guidance is done through face-to-face communication, in a spacey designed for this purpose, and where the client has to come every time. Online career guidance can be done from anywhere, no matter where in the world the client or the counsellor might be located – it can be done from home, from work or anywhere that provides access to the Internet.

The different ways in which career guidance is provided as a service, determines the subsequent differences between the two types of counselling. If someone lives in a small town the probability of a trained career counsellor being in the vicinity will be low, or, when availalble, this service is likely to be limited. On the internet there are no boundaries and therefore absolutely everyone who needs and wants to use this type of service has access to online career guidance. Online guidance is available for people who find it difficult to use the services of traditional guidance due to physical reasons (e.g. disability), for those who do not have enough time to visit the counsellor's office, who live abroad but want to speak to the career counsellor in their native language, or do not have a suitable counsellor in their hometown.

Furthermore, the internet allows the potential client to choose their counsellor in advance, to become "familiar" with the counsellor through the way he/she has presented himself/herself, any publications that might be found on the internet, any posts about his/her style of work, etc. This approach is generally not possible "offline". Without using the internet, feedback or references for a career counsellor can only be made by friends or acquaintances.

One of the main differences between the two types of services is that online guidance is usually cheaper than traditional guidance. In countries with lower income per capita, often people cannot afford the advisor's fee or consider it an unjustified waste of resources. Sometimes the financial factor is the most important reason for choosing this type of support.

A difference between the two types of guidance which is important to note is the aspect of "anonymity". Although there are certain disadvantages with anonymity, online communication makes career guidance attractive for people who feel insecure or ashamed to use this kind of support, who have a problem communicating directly with people, or just want to remain anonymous as they need to have guaranteed confidentiality. All these people would be unlikely to use the services that the offline career guidance can offer and this once again shows that online guidance may serve different types of people in comparison to traditional guidance.

Web-based guidance acts as a gateway to careers, learning and employment information and advice. These services are available to the general public and customised to individual users and/or specific groups. As a rule, general services are more informative and are designed for self-directed use. Therefore they do not require any specific interaction between the user and

the guidance practitioner. On the other hand, customised services are likely to involve lengthy interactions between the user and the guidance professional (which also raises issues surrounding confidentiality and data protection). As a result, more individualised online services require the counsellors providing the service to have a higher knowledge and skill level.

In order to properly manage their services, counsellors should take into consideration the readiness of the client for career counselling services, which according to Sampson[8], range from low to high. Councellors can tailor services according to these readiness levels:

Clients with a **high level** of readiness	Referred to self-help services - career resource and websites designed to assist them in selecting, locating, sequencing and using needed resources with little or no staff assistance.
Clients with **moderate level** of readiness	Referred to brief staff-assisted services - practitioner-guided use of resources, supplemented by group sessions.
Clients with a **low level** of readiness	Referred to individual case-managed services: individual counselling and longer-term group counselling.

In order to follow all the differences between online and offline career guidance, it is important to look at the overall councelling process.

There are several stages to the counselling process. Before the "real part" there is a preliminary support stage, during which the counsellor presents himself/ herself and their work, specifies whether his/her skills match the needs of the client (or if the client needs another type of specialised service). This stage in traditional counselling can be conducted through a face-to-face communication or by phone. Therefore, the outcomes from this preliminary stage are not impacted if support is given online instead of face to face.

- The first stage in counselling is **building the relationship**. This stage is crucial for the overall counselling process, as it builds the relationship between the client and the counsellor. Here the main tasks of the counsellor are: to develop trust and mutual respect, to maintain the confidentiality of the discussion, to set rules and boundaries, to outline the level of mutual responsibility involved in the process, to encourage the client's active participation in the

8 Sampson, J. P., Jr., Peterson, G. W., Reardon, R. C., & Lenz, J. G. (2000). Using readiness assessment to improve career services: A cognitive information processing approach. The Career Development Quarterly, National Career Development Association.

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process, to awaken the client's interest in the counselling process, to demonstrate that the counsellor is an informal adviser, to analyse the reasons behind the client needing support, to improve the clients confidence in regards to their career choices

Of particular importance for the successful conduct of the career guidance process is the building of trust and sincerity. From the very beginning, the counsellor's efforts should be directed towards developing a relationship in which the client feels free to share anything that concerns the process of finding a more suitable job, even if this information is personal and sensitive. The building of trust between the counsellor and the client involves the exclusion of critical assessment and requires, within the legal framework, the confidentiality of the information that the client has shared to be protected. In this phase the counsellor mostly listens, asks a few questions and summarises the discussion. The basic skills necessary here for the successful implementation of the first stage of counselling are non-verbal skills (listening, eye contact, posture, voice, pauses, gestures, facial expression) and verbal skills (questioning, paraphrasing, reflecting feelings, etc.).

The other stages may begin and end, but the attention of the career advisor will be constantly focussed on building and maintaining a good relationship. Obviously, career guidance cannot happen, no matter in what manner it is being conducted, if a good relationship between the client and the counsellor does not exist. This also happens in online counselling.

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Building trust and honesty can be made easier in online career counselling, because for many people talking through the computer is much easier - it allows them to let go of certain defenses, concerns and prejudices and therefore the freedom to share is much greater for many people.

However, during the building of trust, counsellors working online can be hindered by the fact they are unable to observe their client's non-verbal communication. Building the client - counsellor relationship continues until the completion of counselling. Although, no stage is more important than another, it is clear that winning the full trust of the client is key to achieving satisfactory results.

One of the main phases in the counselling process is **assessment**. It is done through formal and informal methods which are used to collect and analyse additional information about the client and properly define the need of counselling. These methods can be standardised tests and questionnaires, informal methods of collecting and analysing information and, of course, an interview.

The online environment provides a large number of web-based tools which aim to improve the client's self-awareness and facilitate the career guidance process, such as: interest inventories, motivation and value-orientation questionnaires, work preference and values surveys, abilities and skills assessment instruments, competence inventories, mobility surveys, work experience and working modes questionnaires, surveys on individual (transferable) skills – learning, entrepreneurship, employability, etc.

Both in traditional and in online counselling these instruments can be sent via email, completed by the client at home and returned to the career counsellor. The important thing at this stage, however, is the assessment procedure, which may have a positive or negative effect on the client. Therefore, the counsellor must be very considerate. If the assessment is done well, the client will feel understood, will experience relief, will be filled with hope, would willingly approach the next steps in the process and will be motivated. Therefore, in online counselling it is important that this part of the stage is done with even greater attention, allowing time to discuss the results with the client.

The next phase in the process is **goal setting** and preparation of an **action plan**. Here, the objectives that the client needs to achieve in order to develop professionally are discussed, with answers provided on how to achieve these objectives. Well-defined career goals lead to the planning of particular actions and steps, and ultimately to the implementation of the action plan. In fact, the best action plan is a well-shaped map of the road that has to be traveled in order to reach the goal. Again, there are no significant differences between online and offline counselling. In both cases, the counsellor has a supporting role and helps the client to establish realistic goals and an action plan.

During the **intervention** the career counsellor takes various steps, using different techniques and methods, to support the client to overcome their emotional, cognitive or behavior barriers towards their career goals. It is most important that the counsellor is willing and flexible to explore new techniques, try new instruments and create new tools, in order to take advantage of the online counselling process.

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The counsellors may encourage their clients to focus on their feelings, helping them find their inner motivation and resources to get through the current situation. In such a case, the counsellor usually uses empathic listening, reflection, open questions and discussion. Due to limited human interaction, this approach may be not very effective in an online counselling process. However, the counsellor may encounrage clients to reflect on their feelings and reveal them in a written assignment – such as writing a letter to themselves in the future.

Focussing on the cognitive level helps the clients to reflect and analyse the situation, the possible solutions and the necessary steps to make the desired change. The behaviour approach aims to help the client replace non-productive behaviour with a more desirable one. To achieve this, the counsellors may use role playing and exercises such as techniques for self-reflection, self-rewarding and making a contract with oneself. Other strategies may include developing new skills and qualities and practicing positive thinking and assertive beahviour (for example in job interviews etc).

In this phase the counsellor may assist clients in decision making. This can include helping them to analyse the reasons why they struggle during the decision making process, or to realise, through questioning, what their career goals actually are. Decision making is a complex process, as it takes into consideration the values, interests, beliefs and aptitudes of the client. Decisions are taken on the basis of exploring various opportunities in order to reach the most satisfactory results.

The last stage is **finalisation**. Depending on the client's needs, counselling can be completed with the preparation of an action plan or can be continued with the implementation of the specific goals that have been set - again something that is also possible for online counselling.

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As can be seen, the processes associated with online and offline counselling are identical. Both types pass through the same stages and can include the same objectives. Counselling can happen in one meeting or a series of meetings and professionals need to possess a certain set of characteristics and qualities, no matter if they are practicing online or traditional counselling.

The counsellor should summarise the overall career counselling process and get clients' feedback on what has been successfully achieved and learnt, as well as what could be improved. After the finalisation of the process, a follow-up may be arranged, in order to see if the action plan has been implemented and to check on the progress of the client. The follow-up may be done by email or phone.

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MAIN REQUIREMENTS FOR CAREER COUNSELLORS PROVIDING ONLINE SERVICES

The Prometheus partnership conducted interviews with career counsellors across Europe to identify how the changing pattern of career guidance has affected the requirements of counsellors' competences. These are:

- **Communication and counselling skills**

- **Analytical skills**

- **Digital literacy and technical skills (knowing how to apply ICTs in counselling and how to take advantage of social networks, LinkedIn, Skype, new platforms for e-portfolios, etc);**

- **Sound knowledge of the labour market**

- **Willingness to learn and improve; being aware of one's professional and personal limitations, especially in online environment, seek for supervision; etc.**

"The most important competence is related to the digital literacy of career counsellors. The specifics of online counselling call for going beyond standard use of digital technologies and creating a tailor-made set of tools to enhance the counselling process. The counsellors would need to have an in-depth understanding of digital environment, so as to easily adapt it to the needs of the respective client." (Lachezar Afrikanov, Bulgaria)

"The most important skills and competences necessary for providing high quality career counselling are communication skills and the ability to select the most significant information among the information flow nowadays. For career counsellors it is also very important to be supportive but not pressing." (Atanas Dimitrov, Bulgaria)

"I would list as essential qualities for this kind of activity: curiosity, a strong drive to help others (with no judgement), intellectual honesty that allows you to determine if you are actually in a position to provide support to the person who turns to you – trust is a major issue." (Francesco Longo, Italy)

"The most important skills and qualities of the career counsellor include skills for effective communication, short period for establishing trust, prompt reactions, good knowledge of the labour market trends, prompt feedback providing skills. What will be mostly missed in the online career counselling is non-verbal communication. Thus emphasis on content and on oral and written expression will gain more significance. There is also another new challenge that we as career counsellors should take into account – our online reputation." (Galina Petrova, Bulgaria)

"In order to be a good careers advisor you must have up to date research and information which is relevant to your client. You also need good questioning skills in order to get the right information as well as a wide breadth of knowledge. Lastly, you also need to be able to fine-tune as to what type of advice your client is asking for." (Nyree Cluderay, UK)

"The career counsellor has to be communicative, flexible and emphatic. He/she has to be able to

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quickly establish contact and tune in with the client. Active listening is a key skill for this profession as well as the skill to set boundaries. The best teacher remains real practice." (Takuhi Ezegelyan, Bulgaria)

"Depending on what kind of online guidance, good qualities that a careers advisor should have differ. If this is a simple "email us a question and we'll email you a response", then firstly I'd question whether this is actually good guidance as opposed to good information giving. However if your online guidance is true guidance then technically it would require an interface that allowed for true human interaction. In this case a careers advisor would require all the traditional skills such as empathy, open-mindedness, use of open questions and good base knowledge of career opportunities." (Mick Carey, UK)

"Whether it comes to online counselling or the traditional face to face with customers, career counsellors must possess communication skills. It is important that the client is predisposed to share his/her story or issue. At the same time the consultant must be sufficiently informed on trends in the labour market, characteristics of professions and other procedures, provide examples and guidance to the clients for given professional sectors. Additionally analytical skills are needed in order to have a rapid and adequate assessment of abilities, willingness to take responsibility of their customers and knowledge about the demands of reality." (Tanya Terziyska-Kuneva, Bulgaria)

"Knowledge of specific tools and methods, knowledge of interview managing, personal competencies like interpersonal relation management and empathy as well as knowledge of the labour market and of the education system. Online career counselling requires more effort to stay focussed and to create a productive relation with the beneficiary. It is more difficult to gain beneficiary's trust." (Giusi Iaconniani, Italy)

"The quality of the career service will not depend on whether the service is provided online or face to face if the client has searched for it being aware of the need of external support. Today's mobile world leads to a preference for an online approach to providing of such services. Communication skills are the main skills the career counsellor should possess. They are very important also for overcoming the lack of face to face connection." (Elena Todorova, Bulgaria)

"The most needed skills as a whole are the same as those needed for the traditional career counselling. Communication skills will again be the most important ones but to a higher extent as some of the communication channels will not be functioning. Part of the communication will be directed to the social networks where young people share almost everything they are going through. Good analytical skills will help for a better identification of the client's needs, including providing on time support and assistance."
(Nina Dimitrova, Bulgaria)

"Career counselling is a two-way process that requires a proactive behaviour and attitude from both sides. The advantage of an online counselling platform is the possibility to provide information and guidance to more than one client at the same time. This requires very good technical skills in order for all the available resources (video connection, writing, editing of texts, presentations, files transfer and sharing, diagrams presentation, etc.) to be effectively implemented. Also communication skills are very important (clear and understandable oral and written expression, active listening),

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organisational skills, skills for monitoring the process, and a result oriented attitude. Prioritising aims is another important skill, as well as the skill to search, explore, analyse and synthesise a large amount of data." (Margarita Germanova, Bulgaria)

"Being a good career counsellor requires a constant upgrading of your skills and knowledge through courses, seminars, meetings, etc. Even more important is the experience gained. You have to be a good mentor as people, in particular younger ones, know unconsciously what they want but they need someone to help bring these ideas to the surface. Also significant is access to up-to-date information and the skill to use it in practice." (Olimpia Nikolova, Bulgaria)

"The most important skills and competencies needed in order to provide high quality online career counselling are the ability to work independently and take initiative. Of course they need IT knowledge, besides office packages, they need to handle various applications and social media. It is important that they have experience of working with digital tools. These competences can be acquired through networking between guidance counsellors, transnational exchanges and also competence development of guiding conversation, digital guidance." (Ingmarie Rohdin, Sweden)

"I am convinced that the most relevant skill for a career counsellor is a very good knowledge of the actual labour market. This needs to be combined with finding out what are my client's strengths and potential. My personal approach is to "enforce strengths" to empower my clients. I am also always interested in finding out about the current status of my clients, what situation he/she is actually in." (Sabine Bittmann, Austria)

"Reflection and giving meaning to life or career experiences is not possible without dialogue with someone else, whether a career counsellor or any other person. This is not as obvious as it seems. On the one hand often (online) tests are used for identifying a person's competences. Without this dialogue or without a meaningful dialogue from my perspective this does not work." (Peter van Deursen, Netherlands)

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ADVANTAGES AND BENEFITS OF ONLINE CAREER COUNSELLING

Advantages of online services for the clients:

- Improve the access to career information, services and support of wide range of citizens, including the hard to reach - people with physical disibilities, who feel some inconvenience or don't have career services nearby;

- Convenience and anonymity of the clients

- Information is available 24/7

- Allows for searching of large databases and linking resources

- Less time-consuming;

- Easy to locate services and resources

- Maximizes opportunities for learning

- Technology facilitates job exploration and information search activities;

- The variety of careers resources available online can complement face-to-face guidance and enrich the portfolio of services, empowering individuals with more autonomy– they can explore the resources in a self-directed way, with the assistance of a career counsellor, or in groups, depending on their learning preferences and capacity;

- Vocational orientation and training are much more attractive and transparent with the use of online media. People can see different occupations, find learning pathways and understand how to validate the results of their prior experience;

- Improved awareness on the labour market through links to current statistics, analysis, job trends and employment opportunities;

- Better match between individual talents and qualifications on the one hand and the skills and qualifications demanded by employers on the other.

- Helplines, web forums and other online media are especially useful for catering to young people – the so called virtual natives, who otherwise may be hard to reach within traditional guidance provision.

Advantages of online services for the counsellors:

- Online guidance multiplies the effect of career services for individuals. While traditional services, especially individual counselling, require a lot of time dedicated by one counsellor to only one client, online resources are available over time and can be accessed by large number of people. This way, for example, through forums, blogs, or online training, the information and advice offered by a professional can help many other people.

- Reduce significantly the cost of provision;

- Enabling targeted services and information addressing specific groups' needs;

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- Providing standard service to all users
- Enhances the administration and evaluation of assessments
- Easier monitoring of the progress of the user
- Delivering instruction
- Databases can be updated frequently

"Both the client and the counsellors are more focussed, more attentive and sensitive in online interactions/conversations. More often than in the face-to-face counselling feedback is sought in order to verify conclusions and thus avoid making wrong guesses. The convenience of being in a familiar environment (at home, in the office or at some other place) makes the client feel in a comfort zone." (Svetlana Mutafchieva, Bulgaria)

"Online career counselling can have certain advantages compared to the traditional counselling. We live in an increasingly busy world and online services can save time. Nowadays young people are a generation significantly different compared to the generation ten years ago. The internet and new technologies have a very important role in their lives and social networks are their main channel for communication and self-expression. The individual approach is getting more and more important when working with them. Well known group work techniques, such as presentations, seminars, etc. do not attract their interest and so do not lead to results. Thus if we strive for providing a quality, up-to-date service, it is very important to search for new, more adequate approaches and online career counselling is one of them." (Nina Dimitrova, Bulgaria)

"Younger people and Generation Y can be hardly motived through another type of communication. Specific problems in online communication in Bulgaria are the discipline in interaction – deadlines, exact expression, responsibility, etc. A career counsellor with longer experience in traditional career counselling will certainly miss the feedback gathered through direct contact. Inevitable technical problems in online communication should not be underestimated as well." (Hristo Stoianov, Bulgaria)

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CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF ONLINE CAREER COUNSELLING

- **Environment - lack of face-to-face contact and limited counsellor intervention**

- **Counsellor training - need to identify competencies and train for them**

- **Questionable quality of some career assessments and career information**

- **Clients – assess their cognitive, emotional and physical state and readiness and address them with adequate services;**

- **Supportive services and referral**

- **The Internet is not a secure environment. The counsellor has to protect confidentiality of client records**

- **Poor implementation of ICT applications - access and operation may be slow - use of audio and video may not be feasible because of bandwidth and other technical issues**

- **Reduced access for specific populations**

- **Some individuals do not suit using technology because of learning or personality style. For then a combination of technology and counsellor support is most effective**

Building trustworthy client – counsellor relationship

"The challenge in online career counselling is the absence of the full picture of senses which counsellors use for establishing trust with clients in face-to-face counselling." (Cveta Stoyanova, Bulgaria)

"The main challenge is related to the fact that online communication takes away the "magic" of face-to-face interaction, which will inevitably affect the overall quality of the career counselling service provided." (Lachezar Afrikanov, Bulgaria)

"Establishment of trust between the client and the counsellor is significant. The counsellor has to avoid using professional language and make sure that the client understands the counsellor is a normal human being." (Plamen Stoev, Bulgaria)

The so called "online barrier" is mentioned by all career practitioners as the main limitation in online counselling. The lack of human interaction, immediate contact and full range of communication is the biggest challenge in establishing a fruitful client – counsellor relationship, based on trust and understanding. The client-counsellor relationship is invisible, delicate but crucial, as it is the foundation for the whole process and could be easily broken.

Web-guidance is complicated by the fact that we do not meet the client in person. We do not know the users, their characseritics, their context, their world view or their socio-cultural background. Whilst it is true that using ICT diminishes the impact of face-to-face communication, ICT nevertheless permits a different relationship, one that is not necessarily reductive. The impact on the relationship

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between the user and the practitioner, as well as on that between the user and guidance services is clear.

In order to achieve the best results, the client should feel safe and supported by the counsellor. Some clients have difficulties in sharing what their problems are, or even in admitting them to themselves. Other don't like to follow instructions or to be advised. It is one of the tasks of the professional counsellor to assess the specifics of the client and to offer the most adequate support. However, this process includes all verbal and non-verbal communication "signals" which can be easily lost in online communication.

What is important in establishing this relationship and gaining the client's trust is that the counsellor can accept the client and provide respect, empathy and acceptance. This is difficult to achieve in a virtual session. Of course, the counsellor can be extremely good at asking questions, at interpreting the assessment results or submitting information and in providing support, but this could go unnoticed by the client.

This is why the counsellor needs face-to-face meetings in order to build the relationship. In personal contact the advisor draws information for analysis not only from the communication-information part of the meeting, but also from the non-verbal contact: glances, mimics, body language, breathing, gestures performed by the client, characteristics of the client's conduct.

Through live contact and non-verbal communication it is easier to read a person's emotions, resistance and changess. It is exactly this part of counselling that we call process and sometimes it carries more important information than the content itself. A client can say many things with words, but only one glance can give true information to the counsellor. Another point is that some individuals do not suit the use of technology because of learning or personality style.

Prometheus counsellors highly recommend that the first meeting and the in-take interview with the client are delivered face to face, in order to help both sides have immediate impressions, clarify the main steps in the process, the requirements and expectations of the two parties, to identify the actual needs and set goals. This will help both the counsellor and client gain the feeling of trust, a better understanding of each other and a level of commitment. Additionally, the counsellor will be able to have a more adequate perspective of the client's personality – traits, behavior, selfesteem, psychological, mental and cognitive state. Research also indicates that the most effective intervention is a combination of technology and counsellor support.

Limited public awareness of career counselling

A better promotion and public recognition of the career counselling profession are crucial for raising the popularity of the service - providing better information about the specifics of the process, as well as the individual benefits and public impact of career counselling. Career guidance services for adults and for employed people are not well-known in some countries. The counsellors have a task to clarify their role as professionals and the responsibilities of the client in the career counselling process. Additionally, for many clients, there is no clear difference between psychological, family and career counselling and therapy, so it is possible that some clients mask other problems under the rubric of career concerns.

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"For a large group of the people there is no difference between career and psychological counselling, and they come with needs targeted at related life issues, such as anxiety; depression, frustration, relationship issues." (Stefanka Tomcheva, Bulgaria)

"A career counsellor is not just somebody who can help you with your CV, but rather someone who is your partner on the job market and who you can talk to and discuss various options, positions, career paths, etc." (Kristian Libih, Bulgaria)

The "anonymous" client and invisible counsellor

"The main risk for online career counselling is its anonymity. Communication loses much of its immediacy and, as a result of this, its effectiveness. This type of interaction makes it easier for the client not to be honest and this changes the results of the counsellor's assessment. Eye contact and the personal assessment of the counsellor are the significant advantages of traditional career counselling." (Olimpia Nikolova, Bulgaria)

A major concern that gets in the way of the client - career counsellor relationship is if the clients keep their anonymity too much. On the Internet it is possible for a person to decide and present oneself in a completely different light and thus avoid confronting their own problems. In this sense, on the internet anybody can come up with anything that is beneficial for them, they can infinitely vary with the description of problems and present oneself in a better or worse light than what the actual reality really is.

In order to be able to overcome these limitations of online counselling, the only possible thing to be done is for the counsellor to be conscious and aware of these limitations and, of course, to warn the clients about this, so they can take responsibility for the presented information and be active in working on their career development.

With regards to the restrictions which online career counselling has on the process side, the only thing that can be done, if we find that the client wants more thorough guidance is to arrange an offline meeting (of course, if this is possible) and to establish the link between the client and the career counsellor.

Responsibilities of the client

The client-counsellor relationship could be jeopardized if the client does not want to take responsibility. A 100% commitment is needed, in order for a person to cope with a problem or achieve certain objectives. No matter how good the counsellor is, he/she cannot "do the job" in place of the client. The contact with a "real" counsellor makes one feel somewhat accountable for their actions – and by visiting the office the client confirms his/her willingness to work on their career development. While online a game of chance is possible – "Maybe I'll ask about some problem."

Online counselling can turn into a game in which the client states that they are committed to working on themselves and their career development but in reality s/he is not willing to change. The online

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client-counsellor relationship may result in a feeling of distance and lack of commitment to the process. In such cases it is very possible that the client blames the counsellor for his/her personal failure "I contacted an online counsellor, but it was of no use." Of course, all this will immediately destroy the connection between the client and the career counsellor: the client would assume that the counsellor is not good enough and the counsellor would lose faith that this client will make a step in their career development. That is why it is extremely important during the preliminary stage and the stages of building a relationship to make it exceptionally clear to the client that the success of this process depends entirely on them.
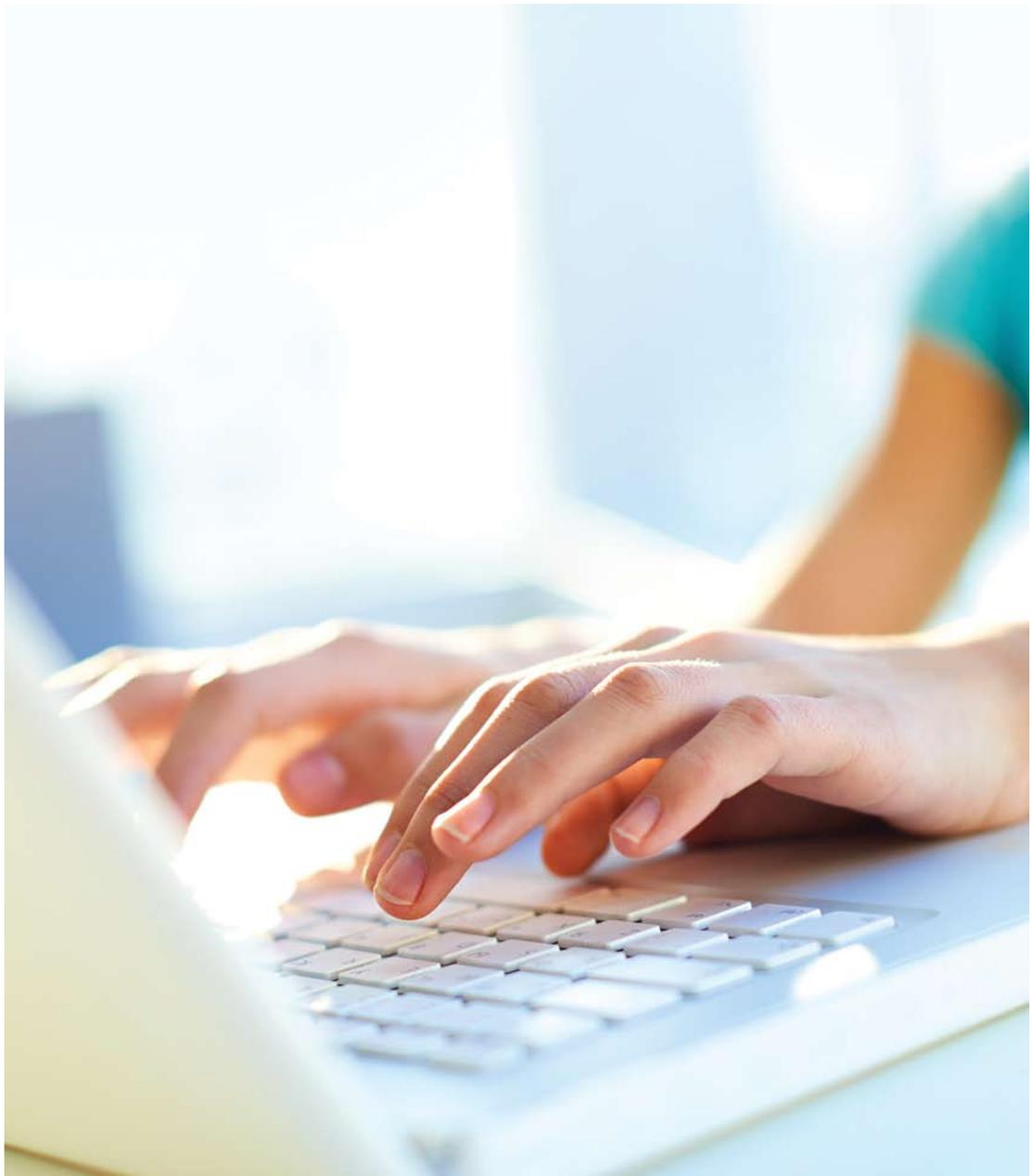
Guaranteeing the quality of the online career counselling process

Possessing the necessary qualities and experience to deliver good online career services should be strongly emphasised. It requires solid experience in counselling, initial training and practice in providing online counselling, ongoing supervision and peer support, and a constant updating of counsellors' competencies. The counsellors should know and stick to their professional limits and the ethical standards of the profession. Last but not least, digital literacy is crucial for good online career counselling. Practitioners should be technically equipped, know how to apply all the necessary programmes, tools and online instruments, be able to handle technical problems and to help clients feel at ease with the online service.

"For me as a university career counsellor maybe the biggest challenge nowadays is maintaining and enhancing my qualifications. A large number of career counsellors rely only on themselves, their own intuition and the experience they acquire through the try-mistake approach. Another problem I can point out is the lack of a working supervision system." (Nina Dimitrova, Bulgaria)

Reliability and credibility is a major issue in counselling

"There are hundreds of career guidance tests, but they are not officially evaluated for their validity and reliability. This leads to a distortion of career counselling. So, the main challenge we have to deal with is to convince the interested parties (students, parents, etc.) of the necessity of career counselling, as well as to prove to them that it is valid and reliable. This can be achieved only through the high quality of the career counselling services. Reliability of the online platform is also another issue, similar to the one with the reliability of the career guidance tests.." (Kassas Petros, Greece)

"One of the biggest challenges for online career counselling is identifying the most reliable platform. Another serious challenge is ensuring security of the data – how it will be guaranteed and will the clients feel secure in order to trust the career counsellor. In face-to-face situations the feeling of trust can be more easily established through creating a physical atmosphere of comfort and security which online counselling cannot provide." (Kamen Handjiev, Bulgaria)

Challenges on systemic level

"Many career counsellors from different countries share similar concerns that career counselling services are fragmented, without a systematic approach, and need greater coherence and integration, both on a territorial and cross-sectoral level with the systems for education and the labour market. A synergic action is necessary to face the challenges presented by complex societies." (Giusi Iaconniani, Italy)

Communication challenges

"The professional expertise is significant for both traditional and online career counselling. On one hand online services will make the services more accessible but on the other will require enhanced competences from the career counsellors.

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In face-to-face communication it is necessary to establish a contact with the person in front of you, to make him/her feel relaxed. Online counselling will require fulfilling these tasks in a different environment. You will not see the person and it is more difficult to assess his/her reactions. Thus communication competences will be the key ones here. What is more, every communicator knows that in face-to-face communication verbal, para verbal and non-verbal communications are distributed in certain correlation. In my opinion words and voice will be more important in online counselling and thus we are talking of a totally new type of communication.

Additionally both types of counselling require listening skills." (Albena Paralingova, Bulgaria)

"Verbal communication skills are very important for career counsellors. They have to explain things in a way that people of various educational levels can understand, but in online counselling reading and writing skills, as well as analytical, are even more impoortant. Online communication is not very structured, and sometimes it is full of emotions. Career counsellors will be in situations requiring active reading, analysing, synthesising and summarising what the client wants/says/thinks/assumes. These skills can be acquired through work, experience, and educational background." (Stefanka Tomcheva, Bulgaria)

"The most needed skills include communication and analytical ones. The internet stimulates non-formal communication and thus communication skills gain significant value for the career counsellors, including to maintain the dialogue and work within professional limits. The communication will not be very structured and this implies the need for skills to analyse non-structured information – the career counsellor will have to synthesise what the client says/wants/assumes. These skills are mainly acquired through real work, through gaining experience, through non-formal learning and upgrading previous academic background."(Kamen Handjiev, Bulgaria)

"In career counselling the client should be much more autonomous and walk a longer road to follow the process. The responsibility of the process, however, is the same and these are on the career counsellor. So he has to compensate the lack of visual contact with improved communication skills, skills for motivation and better managing the counselling process." (Svetlana Mutafchiyska, Bulgaria)

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"Getting attune, synchronising with the person on the other side of the screen, takes more time in online guidance. It also requires more attention and time to warm-up into the conversation, to create a working attitude in the client and to distract him/her from the reality around, so that he/she is able to focus on the topic. For this purpose it is important to remind them what has been done so far, set out an overview of what else has to be done and to formulate the purspose of the current session." (Svetlana Mutafchiyska, Bulgaria)

"Verbal and non-verbal communication in online counselling – managing the conversation in online session - is more difficult. The counsellors' attention is more focussed on active listening, and not blocking the client with an interruption. It is also a big challenge to perceive the clients' emotions as this can only be done on the internet by noticing a gesture, tone of voice, silence or the structure of the sentence. Non-verbal feedback in video conferences is based on very small signals, so the counsellor has to be very sensitive or experienced to find the clients' emotions and attitude in a specific situation. To confirm his / her hypothesis, the client has to ask more questions. It is arguable whether sharing one's fears, hesitations and resistance is easier and more comfortable for the client in face-to-face or in online counselling. Basically, the in-depth revealing of the client's desires and emotions requires more time and may take place at the end of the session or in a more advanced stage of the process." (Svetlana Mutafchiyska, Bulgaria)

Online image and social networks in online counselling

We only have one chance to make a good impression. This is true for online career counsellors as well. Having a website with a friendly vision, and well written, structured and up-to-date content is a must for those who want their services to be well used by prospective clients. Additionally they should consider better positioning themselves in search engines, and to take advantage of social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn – the largest professional network.

The new Web 2.0 technologies enable people with very little technological skills to access career information and different services. For younger people, as well as for elder generations, who recently found this whole new world, it is extremely important to know how to maintain their safety online, how to critically view information and take advantage of the available services.

Clients and job-seekers should manage their online accounts wisely, keeping in mind that everything they have written and posted on the internet can be seen, shared and used in some way. They can type their names into Google to check the results. Privacy options should be considered in order to

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share information and content only to individuals who are approved. But since the networks link people with many other people, one should not forget that his/ her activity is on display and can influence their career prospects.

Netiquette[9]

Information technologies introduced a new dimension to communication and a protocol of rules and tools, which can help people understand each other better. Most of these rules are valid for face-to-face communication as well: adding a personal introduction when contacting an unknown person, being polite; formulating your ideas in simple and clear messages; following grammar rules; respecting the time of the other person, etc. On the internet these rules are known as "Netiquette"and they present the standards for ethical and appropriate behaviour. For example – avoid writing in capital letters, which is equal to shouting in face-to-face communication; use smileys to indicate tone of voice, but use them sparingly; make things easy for the recipient. Never put anything in an email message which you would not put on a postcard. Handle requests in a timely fashion, etc. There are specific rules addressing the interaction in email communication, in skype, in blogs and forums. Clients should be helped to understand the importance of these rules for both their personal and career development and supported to master netiquette.

Practical and technology-related issues

"The career counsellor should possess vast knowledge of the labour market, the various professions, of significant traits for professional and career development, the job search and job application process, etc, which should be constantly updated. In online counselling the competence requirements are event higher, as in this type of communication with the client it is harder to obtain enough meaningful and reliable information, and to establish a productive relationship." (Krasimira Komneva, Bulgaria)

"Significant prior experience is very important for a career counsellor who offers online counselling. Also supervision would be of great importance for the development of online counselling skills. Of course a deep knowledge and understanding of the labour market of the region is a must. I guess every single step of online career counselling would be a challenge for specialists who are not familiar with this kind of counselling. Also the lack of suitable career instruments and the lack of qualified specialists and supervisors would be a challenge to career counselling development." (Nadezhda Angelova, Bulgaria)

"Disucssion and reviewing documents simultaneously (counsellor and the client) is not that easy online. This could be done by sharing the same screen through free online programs, or in a non-synchronised mode." (Svetlana Mutafchiyska, Bulgaria)

"Technical issues may crop up, so the counsellor has to check all the equipment, the programme, the internet connection. Such problems are very annoying and can interupt the process." (Svetlana Mutafchiyska, Bulgaria)

"Giving online advice can be more challenging than face to face meetings. Getting back to people

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9 Hambridge, s, 1995. Netiquette Guidelines

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with quality and accurate information is not an easy task to do quickly, meaning that the timing of my replies is relatively difficult to keep on top of. This problem is perhaps more notably felt by the client, as most people expect a reply with the correct information very quickly. However, online careers advice does mean that you can have repeated contact with a client 24/7; this makes it easier and more accessible for a wider range of people." (Nyree Cluderay, UK)

Digital divide

To the limitations of online career guidance we have to add one more fundamental limitation. It has been repeatedly stressed that in principle the internet enables a wide range of people to receive information and advice. However, online guidance may exclude some people. These are the illiterate, socially challenged, poor and elderly citizens, i.e. those groups who don't have access to a computer or the internet, or who do not posses enough computer literacy.

As shown by Eurostat data[10], around 120 million European citizens have never used the internet. In 2014 one in three people had never used the internet in Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. Similarly around 2/3 of Europeans aged 65-74 and about 1/2 of those aged 55-64 have never used the internet, mainly due to lack of interest. In stark contrast, for the population aged between 16 and 44 years the internet has become a daily tool, either for studies, work, leisure or social interactions. Only 4% of people aged 16 to 24 and just 15% of people aged between 25 and 54 declared that they have never used the internet.

Among 25-54 year olds, education continues to make a great difference with almost all highly educated people (96%) being regular users compared to 76% for medium education and 47% for low education. 80% of people use the internet for finding information, 53% use social networks such as Facebook or Twitter, 40% for finding information about education and training, 23% for job-searching or sending off applications, 10% have profiles on professional networks such as LinkeIn and 10% use the internet for online consultations.

The internet is transforming the way in which people communicate. The rapid rise of social networking, together with texting, has meant that traditional communication services such as voice telephony are shrinking. Meanwhile, internet telephony and video calls continue to grow quickly.

Taking into consideration the rapid entrance of technology into human life and the development of online services in general (not only career guidance) it is extremely important that the problem of digitisation and the digital divide becomes a focus of the efforts of all stakeholders - government, NGOs, and organisations working in education and high technology. Measures for improving access can include installing free public kiosks, or internet terminals and computer rooms at schools, youth centers, employment offices, information and service centers and other public places.

Disadvantaged clients – remaining issues

An over-reliance on techonolgy could exacerbate access problems for some groups in society that are already at risk of social exclusion. Without the assistance of the guidance practitioner, people with special needs (e.g. people with reading disabilities, limited verbal ability, limited confidence

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10 Eurostat - Internet usage by individuals in 2014

and motivation or with depression), may not make effective use of e-guidance. Some may be lacking the IT skills required to successfully access distance services. The different readiness levels of individuals also influence the modes of delivery used.[11]

"With certain target groups, such as low-skilled and unskilled people, seniors, Roma people, people from poor families, the difficulties may come from the lack of technical equipment and/or technical skills. People from these target groups seldom have access to technical equipment and will not easily establish trustful relationships without direct contact." (Plamen Stoev, Bulgaria)

"Some people do not believe things such as the internet." (Stefanka Tomcheva, Bulgaria)

To promote digital literacy[12] more free trainings can be organised in order to develop the computer skills of the elderly and computer illiterate - for example in public libraries. Specific attention should be paid so that people not only learn how to use computers and browse the internet, but also understand how to practically navigate and find useful information across the large variety of websites, forums and portals which offer support, and to differentiate quality services from the rest.

Ethical principles and the responsibilities of the career counsellors

- The career counsellors' responsibilities in traditional and online counselling do not differ. Career practitioners should comply with all applicable laws and governmental regulatiotions, professional regulations, standards and ethical procedures. Their main obligations are to help clients, not cause distress. They should promote their services and credentials accurately, recognize the limitations of their practice and qualifications, and provide services only when qualified.

- Counsellors are responsible for determining the limits of their competency based on education, knowledge, skills, practical experience, credentials and other relevant considerations.

- They have to protect the privacy of information obtained during the counselling process, including electronic files and communications. The limits of privacy and the cases when information should be disclosed due to legal requirements or client authorisation should be clearly identified before the start of the process.

- The counsellor has to make sure that the techniques used are consistent with the client's emotional, intellectual and physical needs and to appropriately inform clients of the purpose, application and results of techniques, assessments and strategies.

- Agreements shall include the rights, roles and responsibilities of the parties involved, as well as the manner in which private information will be protected.

- Seek supervision with qualified professionals when necessary, and provide appropriate referrals either when unable to provide appropriate assistance to a client or when terminating a service relationship. Ensure that clients understand the type of service and avoid providing therapy or

11 ELGPN, 2010. Lifelong Guidance Policies: Work in Progress
12 Tornero, J.M.P., 2004. Promoting Digital Literacy

other services that they are not authorised to offer. If necessary, the counsellor should refer the client to related specialists (such as psychotherapists, social workers, business consultants, lawyers, etc).

- Clients should also be informed about the potential hazards of unsecured communication on the internet and how to protect their data. The counsellors, in turn, should take precautions to ensure the confidentiality of all information transmitted through any medium, especially online.

Credibility of career guidance and career resources.

One major concern is the **credibility of resources** and the way assessment instruments are used. There are numerous online resources and websites providing career tests and advice. Career counsellors should only apply instruments they are familiar with and are able and authorised to use. Most of the popular psychometric instruments (Strong Interest Inventory, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, etc.) require specific training and accreditation to administer them. This is an important issue in career guidance, especially if provided online. Guidance practitioners should strictly observe their areas of competence and not provide services for which they are not trained and authorised. In case they need specific information about the client, which may be obtained only from psychometric questionnaires, they should refer to a professional who is skilled and has accreditation to use them.

A more experienced counsellor could gather the needed information about the client through an interview or informal instruments. However some clients insist on "taking tests". In such a case, the counsellor who is not authorised to use a specific test, should refer the client to a special agency or another licensed practitioner, who can administer the standardised instruments. The counsellors may feel that this might expose them as "badly prepared" or fear loosing the client. However, if they have established a good relationship with the client and if they have explained to them the specifics of the assessment procedure, they have nothing to worry about.

Monitoring and evaluation

"Online career counselling has more challenges than traditional career counselling because there isn't monitoring and evaluation to the same extent. Sometimes there is also a lack of cooperation with other colleagues which hinders the transfer of knowledge and experience." (Ingmarie Rohdin, Sweden)

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ADVICE AND TIPS FOR DELIVERING QUALITY ONLINE CAREER SERVICES

Golden rules for online career counsellors

"The allure of the job is that you face new challenges every day when you constantly meet new people." (Ingmarie Rohdin, Sweden)

"As a key point of career counselling, I think that a career counsellor should have the will to truly help his/her clients to succeed in their lives. This requires the career counsellor to realise the economic, social and physiological limits of the profession." (Kassas Petros, Greece)

"Job orientation can be done in many ways; each case is different, it's always a very enriching experience. The beauty of this activity is the continuous discovery of new 'worlds', a lifelong learning/ professional journey, the possibility to mix multiple skills (selection, marketing and communication, assessment) to work together with the client towards a shared goal. The rewards that come from being able to help a person to be more aware, more secure, to find or rediscover their talents and passions, to identify possible directions, to understand how to act effectively, overcome any difficulty." (Francesco Longo, Italy)

"Coaching, career advising, vocational orientation, mentorship are all techniques which can optimise our lives and the value we add to society. I recently found a quote from the famous Spanish painter Pablo Picasso which is very relevant to our careers-in-the-global-economy (Prometheus) topic: "The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away. People who went through this whole self-evaluation process become brands of their own professionalism." (Milka Semova, Bulgaria)

"The most important thing is to be a good counsellor. If you are a good counsellor offline, you will be a good one online. The only thing that changes is the method of communication. The common way to become a career counsellor in Bulgaria is through the Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) programme. It teaches you different theories, methods and practices about the job. The rest is just practice and trying to stay up-to-date with the labour market, the new jobs, trends and careers. It is definitely an amazing job! I love every day of my job!" (Kristian Libih, Bulgaria)

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GOOD PRACTICES[13]:

- **Austria** has recently established comprehensive educational databases (www.erwachsenenbildung.at, www.eduvista.com) that provide a nationwide platform for independent and supra-institutional education information, guidance and counselling services.

- **Bulgaria:** the website www.jobtiger.bg launched in 2000 offers integrated internet–based career services for job-seekers. The website provides job adverts and training opportunities, labour market information and analysis, jobsearch support and tips; as well as HR services - recruitment, training, career guidance and employer branding. Job-seekers can post a CV online and apply directly to an advert. They can find average salaries for different sectors and positions. JobTiger organises the National Careers Days and is very actively on social networks with its blog, Facebook profile and online TV channel. The website www.kakvidastanem.bg facilitates vocational choices, linking information about 254 occupations with the relevant graduate programmes and education institutions, in which the required qualification can be obtained.

- **Czech Republic:** the VIP Kariera information system (www.infoabsolvent.cz) has been available to students and adults since 2007 to support their career decision making. As part of it, continuing education of teachers has been developed to improve their skills to deal with career management related issues at school.

- **Germany:** The information portal www.planet-beruf.de is a combination of different online media supporting young people, teachers and parents in all issues of career choice and also to find the regional service for career guidance and placement into apprenticeships.

- **Great Britain:** Learndirect (www.learndirect.co.uk) exploits call centre technology to widen adults' access to education. Learndirect deliver information, training services and career guidance to individuals and to employees through online courses supported by tutors in learndirect centers or remotely via the web and telephone. Since its launch in 2000 more than 3 million learners have enrolled on almost 6.56 million courses. Learndirect operates a network of around 400 online learning centers in England and Wales. These provide flexible learning for adults. Courses cover a range of subjects, including management, IT and Skills for Life at all levels. In the past ten years learndirect has become a nationally recognised brand for learning with the largest e-learning network of its kind in the world. The helpline is open 365 days/ year. A Typetalk service is available for learners who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired.

- **Greece:** The Greek National Resource Center for Vocational Guidance (EKEP) developed a national database Ploigos (www.ekep.gr) with information that helps students and graduates with their education and career decisions and with labour market related issues. The website is accessible through the portal of Ploteus http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus.

- In 2007, **Finland** launched an electronic system for application and admission to VET and general upper secondary education to replace the old-fashioned paper-based system. The electronic

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13 CEDEFOP, 2011. Lifelong guidance across Europe: reviewing policy progress and future prospects

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system provides applicants with extensive information on education and training opportunities, entry requirements, information on the application and admission process, and up-to-date information on applicants, admitted and rejected students. The goal is to make the information, guidance and counselling provision more effective, to increase cooperation between different actors, to speed up entry into education and training, to reduce drop-out rates, and to speed up graduation.

- **In Ireland** the National Training and Employment Authority, which is responsible for the provision of guidance, advice and information on employment and career choices, has established a national internet-based job vacancy contact centre and developed a multimedia careers package. Career Directions (www.careerdirections.ie) links to current vacancies and training courses. This nationwide online programme allows users to perform self-assessments and access information on over 720 careers.

- **Netherland**s - The website www.werk.nl developed by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment contains labour-market forecasts for some 2500 occupations; it also presents education and training routes linked to these occupations. The website www.stagemarkt. nl, launched by the Dutch knowledge centers for education and the world of work provides information about existing job opportunities and information about VET, career planning and development to young people.

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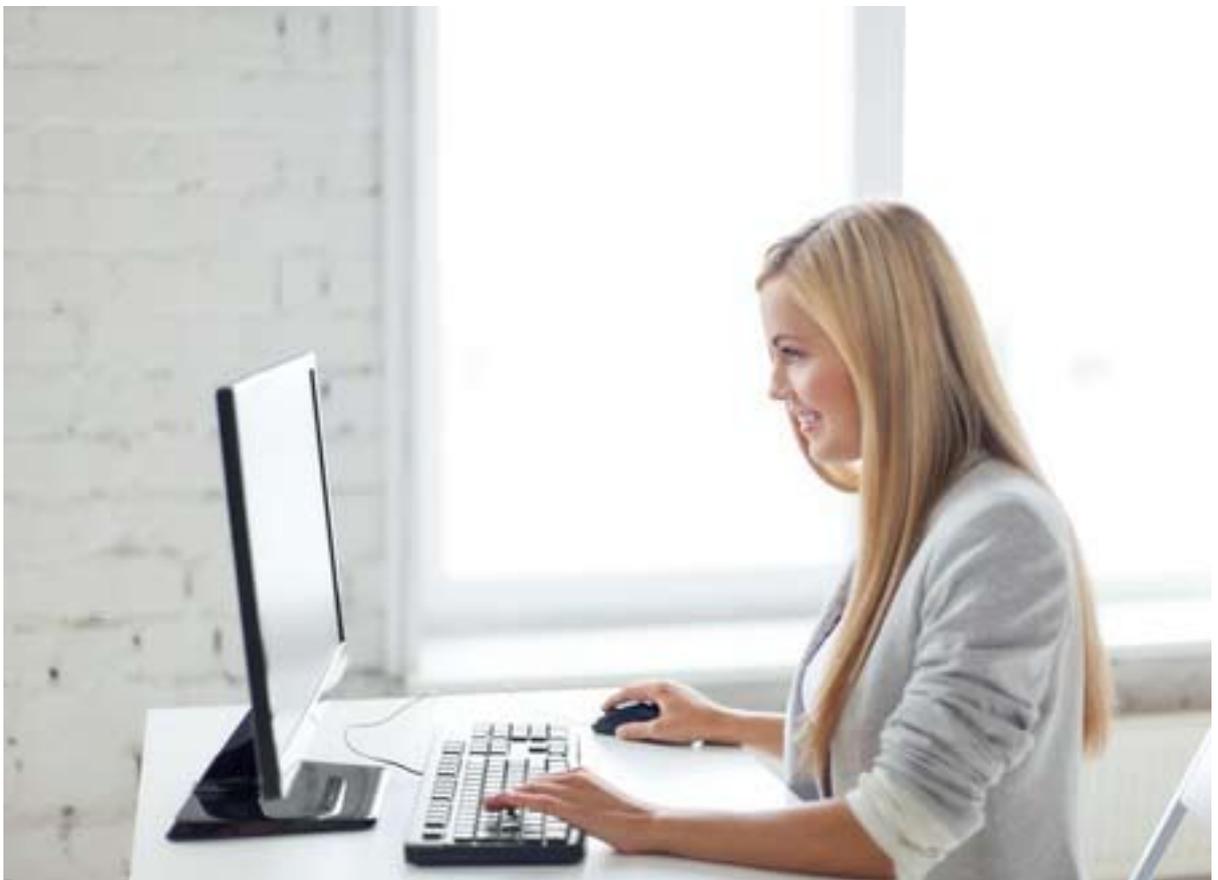
- **Norway:** The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration has developed the web-based self-help career choice programme Veivalg – http://www.nav.no/ (in Norwegian). It offers self-assessment of interests, work values and skills as well as an occupation matching facility and job-seeking assistance for students in lower and upper secondary education. A digital career plan has been developed in Norway to assist students to reflect on their choices of education and training.

- **Lithuania:** In 2009, the Ministry of Education and Science launched an upgraded version of the Open information, counselling and guidance system AIKOS (www.aikos.smm.lt). This contains information on education and training in Lithuania; study programmes, qualifications, licenses, occupations, admission rules of vocational and higher education institutions; education and labour market statistics; and Europass certificate supplements. Customised pages cater for specific target groups, including early school leavers, parents, guidance counsellors, policy-makers, employers, the disabled, immigrants, (ex)inmates.

- **The Portuguese** PES enables jobseekers and employers to register their profiles online (www.netemprego.gov.pt). Candidates can upload their CV and personal details and employers can specify a number of characteristics of posted vacancies. The system then assists the matching process with varying levels of service involvement. The e-guidance service allows users to access content connected to skills development, professional information, labour market trends, and entrepreneurship.

- **Turkey:** the web-based National Career Information System was launched in 2010 to serve all target groups within a lifelong guidance perspective: the young, adults, the employed, unemployed, women, retired, and disadvantaged groups. The system consists of a self-assessment part, databases on education-training programmes and labour market information.

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EU ONLINE CAREER RESOURCES

Europass - https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/bg/about/news - aims to facilitate mobility and transparency of qualifications and competences across Europe.

EURES - http://ec.europa.eu/eures/ - the European job portal provides information, advice and recruitment services for job-seekers and employers througout Europe.

Euraxess - http://ec.europa.eu/eures/ is a network for promoting career opportunities, information and assistance for researchers' mobility throughout Europe.

Ploteus - http://ec.europa.eu/eures/ - is a portal that helps students, job seekers, workers, parents, guidance counsellors, trainers to find out information about studying in Europe.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) - www.cedefop.europa.eu/ - supports development of European vocational education and training (VET) policies

The Euroguidance Network - www.euroguidance.net - provides support in the areas of learning mobility and lifelong guidance development within education, training and employment.

European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, ELGPN - www.elgpn.eu/ - aims to assist European countries in developing co-operation on lifelong guidance in both the education and the employment sectors.

Eurostat - http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/labour-market -

Online assessments instruments, tests and tools (in English and other partners' languages)

Mind Tools - www.mindtools.com

MAPP (Motivational Appraisal of Personal Potential) Assessment - www.assessment.com

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator - www.knowyourtype.com

Strong Interest Inventory - www.cpp.com

Keirsey Temperament Sorter - www.keirsey.com

TestingRoom.com - http://quintcareers.testingroom.com

CareerPlanner.com - www.careerplanner.com

16 personality types test - www.16personalities.com

Career Key Test - www.careerkey.org

www.prometheus-eu.net

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