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Questions to ask of a model: A framework to help practitioners understand and choose between models for career development practice

Pete Robertson, Edinburgh Napier University

Julia Yates, City, University of London

In recent years, career practitioners have had access to more and more models, frameworks, approaches, and tools. This is, of course, a good thing - we can learn from new ideas. But it does leave practitioners with a challenge: how can we make sure we are selecting the right approach for our practice? Models can be very well packaged and if presented with confidence and a nice diagram, they can appear persuasive. They may also appear effective and widely applicable. But we need to delve a bit deeper to make sure that we are using the right model, at the right time, for the right client.

We thought it might be useful for practitioners to have some support with this challenge, so we devised a framework that could help. It consists of a number of questions, and aims to help career practitioners understand and critique any model for careers work and assess whether it is going to be useful in practice.

Our focus here is on practice models – what you might call *models of guidance* – those that structure our direct contact and service delivery with clients. We are not talking about career theories that inform our wider understanding of career choice and development. Models of guidance tell you how to structure your career conversations. Examples might include Egan’s Skilled Helper, the GROW model, Ali and Graham’s four stage counselling approach, Jennifer Kidd’s four stage counselling approach, and the ABCDE model from cognitive behavioural coaching. Or, for those of you who trained in the last century, the models of guidance taught at training centres such as Swanley or Nottingham Trent.

Those models of guidance are intended for one-to-one work, and that is often what first comes to mind. But the term ‘model’ is also used to describe practical ideas for use in career education, such as the DOTS model, or for use in group work, such as the FFAST model. Sometimes we also have models that include suggestions on how services should be organised, or set priorities, such as CIP model from Florida State University.

A suitable model needs to be fit for purpose, and appropriate for the specific context, so our framework is divided into two parts: firstly, we offer some questions that will determine whether the model is robust; secondly, some questions that will determine whether it is a suitable model to choose for the particular setting.

No model will ever be perfect. The questions in this framework are wide ranging and even the best of models would fall short under this level of scrutiny. It is striking how most models are under-specified: they fail to provide important information, for example, about their purpose and limitations. These questions are intended as a starting point to stimulate your thinking. Some might not seem so relevant to you, and perhaps there are some others that you would like to add – we suggest you use the framework as a starting point and tailor it to your own needs and context.

Questions to help you understand and critique a model

The nature of the model

What is the purpose of the model?	Is there an explicit aim? Is there a statement of the value or contribution of the model?
What is it a model of?	Stages of helping? Helping processes? Desired outcomes?
Who is the model for?	A process of change that clients go through? How to organise services? How to plan career learning? Practitioners - to guide interventions? Service leaders – to inform service design? Clients – to teach them about careers or the guidance process? Policymakers or funding agencies – to explain and justify CEIAG/employability activities?

The rationale and the evidence

What is the underpinning theory or philosophy?	Is it one that aligns with your worldview and understanding of career development?
Is there any published evaluative research on the model?	If so, is the methodology sound? If not, is there research on similar approaches in similar settings, or research supporting the assumptions made in the model?
Is there practitioner experience of using the model?	What is the context in which these practitioners work? What does their analysis tell you about the model's value?
Is there any available client feedback?	Is the model already in use and is data on clients' reactions available?
What does the body of evidence tell us about its strengths and limitations?	Is this evidence relevant to your context?

Values, ethics, and culture

Does the model align with your values?	Is it compatible with the CDI code of ethics? Is it consistent with your own professional values?
Is the model culturally specific?	Are there elements that may not transfer well between cultural settings? Are there explicit or implicit assumptions that could exclude any group of clients?

Target group

What kinds of clients does this model aim to support?	Does it apply to clients of suitable age / stage of education/stage of life-span development?
Are there any contra-indicators?	When or for whom is it <u>not</u> appropriate?

Questions to help you choose a model

Practicalities

Can the model suit your activity?	Individual or group? Remote or face-to-face? Human or automated?
Does the model suit your specific client group?	Does the model seem a good fit for the context? Will it meet the needs of your client group?

Resources and logistics

Over what time period is the activity expected to take place?	From start to finish how long does the process take? How many contacts between practitioners and service users are expected? Of what duration?
What other resources are needed?	Can the approach be used on a large scale or is it too resource intensive?

Working alliance

Will the model allow you to develop a suitable relationship with your client?	Does the relationship align with your approach? Does the relationship suit the context in which you are working?
Is it easy to explain the model to the client?	Does it allow the practitioner to be transparent about what they are doing?

The practitioner

Are you suitably equipped to use the model?	Do you have access to the required training and experience? Do you have access to a supervisor or an experienced colleague to help you to reflect on the process?
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