HANDBOOK FOR PRACTITIONERS

Exploring careers in guidance provision

CAREER GUIDELINES
Information and guidance on new careers and training pathways
In memory of Enric Renau Permanyer
Irreplaceable friend and colleague

En record d’Enric Renau Permanyer
Amic i company insubstituïble

En recuerdo de Enric Renau Permanyer
Amigo y compañero insustituible

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Este manual está dedicado al recuerdo de Enric Renau Pernanyer, Presidente ejecutivo de DEP Instituto (Barcelona).

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FIRST PART
Introduction

Province of Grosseto

Within the sphere of European employment and lifelong learning policies, career counseling is considered one of the strategic services geared towards promoting citizen access to employment and training and pursuing the objectives defined in Lisbon\(^1\). The need to set up a national standard of qualification for career counseling services and provide counseling professionals from the local level on up with modern and innovative consulting tools was the main motivation behind the international cooperative project entitled “Career Guidelines - Information and guidance on new careers and training pathways”, promoted by the Employment Authority of the Province of Grosseto as part of the European program Lifelong Learning, Leonardo da Vinci, Transfer of Innovation.

This effort has involved a broad and highly qualified group of national and international partners in selecting and adapting to the Italian context a series of tools capable of improving and optimizing counseling and guidance services.

The Province of Grosseto’s experience in this specific area of professional career counseling has been closely connected to the evolution of Public Employment Services which, in Italy as in the rest of Europe, have been progressively called upon to carry out a strategic function – above all aimed at young people and adolescents at risk of dropping out of school or training – of informing, counseling and consulting on training, highlighting the links between potential professional career paths and formal and non-formal learning opportunities in the education system, professional training programs and internships and apprenticeships, as well as within work contexts.

This territorial situation, marked by the presence of qualified professionals who are able to provide young people transitioning from school to work with a number of counseling and tutorship services, has thus been enhanced through the adoption of technological tools, tested and circulated at the national and European levels, which offer professionals in the field a great deal of updated information on pro-

\(^1\) - See in particular the European Council Resolution of November 21, 2008 entitled Better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies - (2008/C 319/02)
fessions and educational/training paths, as well as innovative functions to facilitate the career choices of those who turn to Employment Centers and other structures that offer career counseling services.

In this sense, the Career Guidelines project is an important and exemplary experience of the transfer of innovation from the international level to local contexts, but above all from the perspective of national development, thanks to the active involvement of public and private institutions from the major territorial macro-areas of Italy, including Tuscany, the Marches, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Puglia and Piemonte. The project has extended its reach to the national level through an experimentation of innovation plan that has progressively involved Public Employment Services and career counseling services in other regional and provincial areas, from Trentino to Lombardy to Emilia Romagna, Umbria, Lazio, Basilicata, and Sicily, gaining support and positive acknowledgment especially from career counselors who utilize the project’s tools and methodology in their own daily activities, in direct contact with young people transitioning from the education system to the world of work and professional employment.

In fact, national experimentation has allowed numerous Employment Center operators to evaluate this tool, and also to reconsider their own work practices, proposing instruments and methodologies that can effectively support people as they move through the interactive process of exploring careers.

The Province of Grosseto handled the complex task of coordination within the sphere of the Career Guidelines project, with the awareness that this project was an important step in the process of developing the quality and functions of public employment services in Italy. The presentation in this volume of the results and methodologies adopted during the two-year cooperative effort also offers an opportune moment to express sincere thanks to the people and institutions that participated and made this meaningful endeavor possible, beginning with our colleagues from Cascaid and the University of Loughborough, the University Capital College of Copenhagen, the Spanish research institution DEP of Barcelona, the Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, Region of the Marche, the Province of Lecce, the Ente Bilaterale Turismo Toscano, the CIOFS/FP Piemonte training agency of Turin, Centro Studi Pluriversum of Siena and the Accademia Europea of Florence.

It is our hope and our commitment that this meaningful experience, initiated in a local/territorial context but later shared and expanded to the national level, can provide useful tools and working models to launch and consolidate a process of reinforcement of Public Employment Services, and in particular career counseling services, in other regional and provincial contexts as well as throughout Europe.

Project leader
PROVINCE OF GROSSETO – Employment Service
Council Member Cinzia Tacconi
Chapter 1
The Career Guidelines project: career guidance in a European perspective
Elisabetta Lambruschini, Accademia Europea di Firenze

Career guidance services, at the European level, play a central and strategic role for education systems and employment policies. The most recent European documents underscore the emergence of a new idea of guidance that aids and promotes Lifelong Learning - i.e. the process of learning throughout the entire course of one’s life –, considered a decisive factor in the development of a European knowledge economy. The Lisbon Strategy has already shown that career guidance must be considered a functional and universally-important element for the development of a variety of European policies, relating to support for young people, the right to education, employment and social inclusion. We are talking about a “circular process” focused on the single individual, with his own motivations, interests, knowledge and skills to deal with a continually-evolving job market. Thus, career guidance cannot consider itself isolated and relegated to the scholastic phase, but must configure itself as a process that embraces every phase of life. Career change is one of the most likely changes that individuals will have to deal with in the knowledge society, hence the concepts of lifelong learning and lifelong guidance become crucial and strategic.

The need to guarantee high-quality guidance services and make them accessible to all European citizens in every phase of life is reiterated by the May 2008 Council Resolution, which talks of the “continuous process of identification of one’s capacities, skills and interests”\(^1\). The resolution also encourages coordination and cooperation among various subjects at the national, regional and local levels in the development of European networks geared towards promoting the European dimension of guidance within member states, such as the permanent guidance network (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network - ELGPN) and networks that encourage mobility for study and work (Euroguidance, Eurodesk, Eures). The European and international dimension of guidance is also incentivized by organizations and agencies that propose to improve the knowledge of practitioners and public decision makers, such as the Association Internationale d’orientation scolaire et professionnelle – AIOSP and the European Centre for the development of vocational training – CEDEFOP. The 2008 European Union Council resolution entitled “Better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies” reinforces the current role of lifelong guidance in European policies on education, training and employment. Within this context, four priorities were identified:
- to facilitate the acquisition of guidance skills over the entire course of life;
- to facilitate access to guidance services for all citizens;
- to reinforce the guaranteed quality of guidance services;
- to encourage coordination and cooperation among various subjects at the national, regional and local levels.

In this sense, the Career Guidelines project represents a meaningful international cooperation experience to improve the quality and efficacy of guidance activities through the transfer and adaptation of a technological tool that benefits guidance practitioners and service users alike. The international dimension of the project, promoted by the Province of Grosseto, is borne out by the quality of the partnership, which involved 11 organizations from four different European countries (Italy, the UK, Denmark and Spain). Through the various networks it was linked to, the international partnership offered a vast terrain for discussion, sharing and enhancement of experiences, innovative practices and methodologies useful to the integration of education, training and guidance systems.

The sharing of the methodology on which the international ICAS model – produced by Cascaid Ltd. – is based has allowed for adaptation of the original database to the Italian context, adding specific profiles pertinent to the national context.

1 - CEDEFOP, Accesso al successo. Orientamento permanente per un migliore apprendi-
2 - Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 21 November 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies (2008/C 319/02).
Chapter 2
Emerging needs in career guidance
Paola Paolinelli, Regione Marche

Identifying and analyzing the emerging needs of career guidance services and users was the main theme of the Career Guidelines project partnership. Utilizing a qualitative methodology that combined local/territorial focus groups, a Moodle platform forum and work groups developed as part of a transactional meeting, the partnership compiled a revealing cross-section of needs relating to various population segments, and also developed a comparison between contexts and highlighted existing experiences. In effect, the contributions gathered more than adequately reflect the complex situation career guidance must deal with – more so today than in the past -, expressed from the frontline point of view of those providing and utilizing the services in question.

An initial suggestion has to do with the widespread need to identify connections between educational and career choices, as clearly expressed by young people facing decisions as to schooling, professional training courses or university courses. In fact, the rapidly-changing economic scenario requires that students and – especially in the case of younger ones – their families have access from the outset to information on specific sectors in their regional/local contexts, as well as emerging or developing professions and employment and training opportunities in Italy and Europe. While the primary need is for updated, clear and pertinent data, respondents also indicated that an overabundance of information (often from difficult-to-verify sources) hampers and complicates the identification of the right, preferred educational path. The next hurdle is developing an understanding of one’s own propensities, capacities and possibilities with regard to various professions. The importance of this step is demonstrated, for example, by school dropout rates, but participants in professional training programs or university courses also show phases or moments of decreased motivation and thus reduced commitment to career objectives, which sometimes translates into lack of dedication to the educational process itself.

job market. The Italian version, called S.Or.Prendo, is thus an operative tool at the local level, but is open to an international perspective, since many of the profiles were produced through collaboration with the English partner and based on the same database used in other national contexts [including Belgium, Slovenia, Croatia, Denmark, Canada and the U.S.].

Within the sphere of the Career Guidance project, the tool has been utilized in various contexts, with particular reference to the guidance services offered by Employment Services. A part of an effort to foster international mobility through the use of the Eures network and the promotion of internship opportunities offered by the Leonardo da Vinci program, the tool is a useful support for practitioners, especially in encouraging a broadening of career prospects among users interested in internship or work experiences abroad. S.Or.Prendo, has also been utilized with positive results in the area of activities geared towards international mobility guidance offered by the Accademia Europea of Florence3 to aid young candidates applying for Leonardo da Vinci scholarships.

The sharing of methodologies and tools at the international level is also a significant step towards greater integration and cooperation among local-level information and guidance services that promote mobility for study and work motives. Toward this end, increasing the quality and reach of the European career education and training system means bringing together guidance resources from various contexts involved in the mobility process, i.e. linking services from the country of origin with guidance services from the destination country. The diffusion in Italy of the ICAS tool, which has already been utilized internationally, is yet another piece of this wide-ranging project for the creation and consolidation of a European system of career guidance and mobility.

3 - Website: www.aefonline.eu
In employment services, one of the aspects dealt with in career guidance counseling aimed at new secondary-school or university graduates concerns employment opportunities for young people who still have difficulty focusing on various careers. In these cases, the key is to assist the person in identifying elements of coherence and concord between a career and his or her image of it, a necessary step towards creating concrete and valid action plans that are rooted in reality. Experience in the field leads us to suggest that often, there is an initial need expressed to develop a general idea and learn about the educational and experiential requirements for a given job (since awareness of the existence of such requirements is quite widespread), followed by a request for relevant information for specific situations.

In this same sphere, a trait common among adults was revealed: the need to sort through and re-assemble work experiences – which in the case of young workers are often varied and fragmented – and re-read them with an eye toward re-positioning in the job market. The need to monitor career and professional evolution processes goes along with requests for information that will vary from person to person, but that have now become common counseling needs in both of the situations described above.

Therefore, more today than ever, citizens are dealing with the need to obtain training, to build and manage their skills and develop autonomous learning strategies in the face of significant economic and cultural shifts. Career counseling services are the citizen’s main point of contact and connection with the education, training and employment systems: needs are developed and specific and there is, potentially, a wide range of users of career guidance services.

For public authorities in charge of policy, this means rapidly and fully taking on a lifelong perspective – that is, guaranteeing widespread access to services and working to personalize them and ensure their quality, constantly aiming to create a correspondence between the needs and evolution of the market and of professions. All of these elements require a capacity to work in partnership and to use the territory as a resource, consistent attentiveness to maintaining and improving the skills of guidance service providers – the conduit through which innovative methodologies become services for end users -, periodic needs surveys and monitoring of actions introduced. It means coming up with institutional and technical apparatuses – such as the Tavolo ORientamento REegionale T. OR. RE. (Regional Career Guidance Round Table), which the Region of the Marche\(^1\) intends to set up to coordinate career counseling on a regional scale, perhaps the most appropriate territorial dimension to guarantee governance and lend support to lifelong policies.

\(^1\) Website: www.regione.marche.it
New technologies for information and guidance

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New technologies are both an opportunity and a challenge for guidance services and guidance practitioners. Information and communication technologies (ICT) are a part of everyday life and are one of the drivers of change in society. New technologies cannot be ignored in guidance provision. In fact, the most innovative guidance projects are those that incorporate the use of ICT tools with traditional guidance methodologies.

Among new technologies and tools, the Internet must be highlighted as an important element of change in the field of guidance, in that it has altered the perception and functioning of guidance services, the profile of guidance practitioners and access to information of both guidance practitioners and guidance users. The increase of accessibility, as well as interactivity, is one of the main impacts of new technologies in guidance provision.

The use of new technologies in guidance can currently be seen in three main types of actions: guidance services that use ICT tools to facilitate the provision of information to users, guidance services that use ICT tools to promote communication within their network of influence and the utilization of ICT tools by users to find information and to receive guidance and counselling, in person, and especially at a distance.

New technologies and the Internet permit today’s society access to seemingly limitless information and content at any time and from anywhere. Therefore guidance provision and services within this new context must have effective tools to select and process this frequently overwhelming amount of information. Guidance provision should focus on transforming this information into knowledge for the user.

ICT tools improve guidance provision in this dynamic and complex world by selecting and organizing the large quantity of ever-changing information. New technologies also allow for communication and services at a distance and the use of tools which promote self-reflection and knowledge. ICT in guidance provision facilitates four areas: development of self-knowledge, knowledge of possibilities (education, training or careers), decision-making and transition management learning (such as how to develop a CV).

Information management in the field of guidance requires offering current, quality and organised information to educators, guidance practitioners and users. Information has the ability to educate and motivate, but the user needs to be ready to utilise the information as well as learn to locate, gather, select, sift, organise, evaluate, critique and assimilate information. The role of guidance practitioners in information management is to assist clients by being familiar with different systems and sources of information and their appropriate use, as well as staying up to date with the different types of information media and their use.

New technologies facilitate this information management, and informational and guidance portals help users find and select information related to education, training and the world of work in addition to being a meeting place for educational centres and students.

Careers databases, such as those used within CASCAiD products like Kudos targeted at 13-19 year old students, offer students or other users organized and detailed information about careers and the world of work in addition to course

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1 - Website: www.dep.net
6 - Millar, Rob, Information in the Careers Guidance Process.
7 - Such as www.educaweb.com, the leading guidance portal within Spain with more than 1.8 million pages seen monthly.
8 - www.cascaid.co.uk
or training requirements. Kudos and the other CASCAiD products combine the database containing over 700 careers with self assessment tools that match - among other factors - likes and dislikes to careers. A survey of students who used the Kudos product concludes that the tool successfully matches likes and dislikes to jobs which are perceived by the students as relevant and meaningful, in addition to providing useful information about jobs and related courses and training requirements. The study also concludes that the tool encourages students to consider new or other career pathways.

New technologies can therefore be applied to career guidance provision with the development of tools that effectively present information to users about possible careers pathways, facilitating educational transitions and the entrance into the world of work.

However, new technologies do present some challenges and difficulties. Two main difficulties are the “digital gap” and guidance practitioners’ lack of skills with ICT tools. The “digital gap” means that some people do not have access to new technologies due to various factors such as economic situation, age or lack of knowledge and skills to employ these new technologies. Another difficulty that may arise in the implementation of ICT tools in guidance is guidance practitioners’ lack of familiarity with the new tools. However, there are efforts in place to provide guidance practitioners with these skills. Training of guidance practitioners in the use of new technologies is three-fold: using ICT as a resource, developing ICT-based resources and using ICT as a medium in guidance provision, for example in guidance at a distance. New technologies should not be seen as the enemy, but as a means to support the fulfillment of the mission: providing quality guidance services to users.

The use of new technologies within guidance is being implemented by all types of entities and actors in the field of guidance, including administrations, private enterprises and individuals. Innovative ICT tools in guidance provision are taking many different forms: online guidance platforms, blogs, wikis, social networks, in addition to resources and tools for users, educators or guidance practitioners. Paralleling best practices in the use of ICT, are initiatives that seek to improve the ICT skills of guidance practitioners such as European projects like ‘ICTSkills for guidance’.

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Chapter 4
Theories and methodologies in career guidance

Lene Poulsen, UCC Copenhagen (DK)

“The process of choosing a career path is not an easy one. In making career decisions, people must come to grips with uncertainties about their capabilities, the stability of their interests, the current and long-range prospects of alternative occupations, the accessibility of potential careers, and the type of identity they seek to construct for themselves.” (Albert Bandura, p. 422, 1997)

This chapter will focus on the supporting role and competencies of the career counselor in the guidance process, which involves working with ICT tools and matching programs. The ICAS database and its Italian counterpart (S.Or.Prendo) are programs that make it possible for individuals to work with career decision issues. The programs help the counselees to become self-reliant with regard to information gathering and through matching activities and assessments to investigate connections between specific job demands and personal interests and qualifications. They also give input and inspiration to reflections of the ‘who am I’ and ‘what do I wish’ sort. Rather than being used as oracles, the programs can be used to raise questions and to identify issues for discussions with a career counselor. They can be used to provide new ideas, widen horizons and encourage clients to investigate careers further.

Research over the years (Taber & Luzzo, 1999) has shown that the most effective assistance for clients is a combination of support from counselors and from technology. In other words, not even the most comprehensive system will be maximally effective if used without the support of a knowledgeable career counselor.

In order to achieve maximum effect and to avoid a result like “the test told me what I already know” or, worse, “I was told to enter an occupation which I have little interest in considering” the counselor needs to be very knowledgeable about the program and to stay involved in the client’s process. In light of the above-mentioned difficulties in choosing a career path, the important component of ongoing counselor support needs to be maintained for the purpose of assisting the client to turn data into personally meaningful information that guides decision making.

Reflections before using ICT programs

There are at least two criteria that are useful in determining whether to use a technology-based intervention or not: the client’s presenting problem and his/her readiness. It is important first and foremost to identify the client’s needs, as they will likely include a variety of concerns, which may not be handled with the use of an ICT career tool. Second, not all individuals with a primary need for career planning can profit optimally from receiving these services by computer due to a lack of readiness to process information effectively.

In any case, the responsibilities of counselors in the process include the following:

- determining the readiness of the person to receive information from a computer and apply it effectively;
- expanding on the interpretation of tests and inventories so that they are more likely to inform the client’s decision appropriately;
- assisting the client to identify the personal values that will guide the reduction of options provided by the computer;
- providing motivation and emotional support for continued work related to career planning;
- suggesting creative alternatives that the computer doesn’t ‘know’ (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2002).

The counselor also needs to pay attention to what is called the client’s ‘irrational beliefs’, which may be a barrier to effective use of ICT programs. One such belief is that absolute certainty is a necessity before taking any action related to career; another is that a career decision must last for a lifetime.

1 - Website: www.ucc.dk
In such cases, an introductory interview may be able to identify such attitudes. Computer-based administration may have the disadvantage of leading the client to put too much faith in the results of the assessment because of an unwarranted perception that the computer has some magic power. The counselor also has to reflect on the theoretical foundation of the ICT program and how and why major shifts in career guidance have been shaped by social, political and economic factors, and what sort of dilemmas this leaves individuals with. Being a reflective and dynamic counselor, helping to qualify but leaving career-building decisions to the client, is a major challenge for practitioners.

The concept of career guidance

Throughout the last two decades, the conception of career guidance has changed dramatically due to the changes in societal structures and the relationship between individual and society. These changes reflect a societal shift from the modern industrial society, where predictability and relatively steady structures characterized the society and the labour market, to the postmodern information society, where constant change characterizes jobs and vocations and creates a turbulent and still more confusing educational system due to the difficulty of predicting what skills will be in demand in the future.

As we know, at the same time, individualization has developed in a way that puts a heavy burden upon youngsters – and adults as well – to make the right decisions regarding lifelong career management. Young people face a much wider range of possible alternatives to choose among, but on the other hand they feel great pressure of expectations from outside forces such as parents, school or society in general. Fear of failing to act appropriately, not making the right choice, losing control of one’s life, being a failure… such fear is widespread and almost a character trait among postmodern youth.

In many ways the situation stresses the need for strong professional career guidance support. Choosing a career has indeed become a much more complex act than ever before.

Career guidance is thus ‘born’ into an area of tension between individual and society and the function of the career counselor has been described as a sort of ‘oil can’ in the effort to establish the necessary ‘fit’ between individual conditions and preferences and the workforce expectations established by society and industry. Dilemmas growing out of this field of tension have found their solutions in different concepts of career guidance, dominating in different periods of time.

As an example, tension is reflected in the classic trait-factor theories about choice and guidance (Parsons and Holland) as a question of developing methods to classify or make diagnoses of human beings with a view toward creating a basis for the ‘optimal match’ between the individual and actual job opportunities. The effort has, especially during the last century, resulted in the development of a huge test battery to support the career counselor’s work of classifying clients and following up with the right information and advising.

However, this concept of guidance was long ago questioned and partly replaced by researchers and professionals – first by a humanistic developmental psychological approach (Rogers and Super), which dissociates from the career counselor as a diagnostical ‘expert’ and instead focuses on the client’s developmental potential and right for self-determination, and later on a constructivist approach, which focuses on the individual processes of creating identity in interaction with the social surroundings (Peavy and Savickas).

As time goes by, important terms in career guidance have been interpreted in new ways. At the time of Parsons (1909), traits and personality were more or less viewed as being biologically based and therefore unchanging. The conception was traits could be measured in an objective way and the result of the matching process with suitable vocations was therefore the only way to happiness for both individuals and society. Later, traits were viewed as learned and therefore subject to change. When incorporating this view into matching methods, you have to leave room for the client’s own reflections – and the role of the counselor will change.

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Also, the use of the term career has changed a great deal since the early 1900s—and still is variously understood. From the time of Parsons (1909), the terms career, vocation and occupation have often been used synonymously. Traditional definitions restricted “career” to a professional work life that included advancement. Over time, broader conceptions came along, and today the concept of career has expanded to include not only job and vocation, but all kind of educational activities and other developing activities in between, before and after occupations (Super). With postmodern societal conditions in mind, we have to favor a dynamic definition of today’s career development involving one’s whole life, not just occupation.

“As such, it concerns the whole person… more than that, it concerns him or her in the everchanging contexts of his or her life. The environmental pressures and constraints, the bonds that tie him or her to significant others, responsibilities to children and aging parents, the total structure of one’s circumstances are also factors that must be understood and reckoned with. In these terms, career development and personal development converge. Self and circumstances – evolving, changing, unfolding in mutual interaction – constitute the focus and the drama of career development.” (Wolfe & Kolb 1980 in Patton & McMahon 1999)

This understanding goes along with the European Lifelong Learning policy, with the current focus on development of citizens’ ‘career management skills’. Supporting career development is to support a lifelong process of getting ready to choose, choosing, and typically continuing to make choices and decisions related to career development issues.

As we have seen, concepts and terms in career guidance have changed over the years due to societal changes. However – if we think of the metaphor of waves breaking on the beach – it is difficult to see exactly where one concept of guidance ends and new ones begin. New waves contain some of the old ones as they break against the shore. Though the matching approach as a rationale clearly belongs to the birth of guidance as an institutional societal offering in the industrial society—the testing approach and methods have been refined and adjusted to modern conditions.

The ICAS database is one example of this, primarily based on the philosophy of matching (Parsons and Holland) but also connected to contemporary theories—a with focus on individual reflection.

**Exploring careers – possible themes of content**

The ICAS database encourages users to evaluate various functions in the workplace. Interests and competencies are ‘matched’ against occupations, leading to the creation of a draft career list. Through interaction with the skilled career counselor, the use of the database develops from a pure matching exercise – ‘test and tell’ – to a more dynamic tool in the guidance process. And it makes it possible to activate new theoretical approaches in the career planning process.

The ICAS database is transparent, e.g. results and process are always fully visible. It provides answers to questions on how and why it proposes specific careers and what aspects dominate in a chosen career. Transparency contributes to an open dialogue with the counselor and greater understanding on the part of the user. As many counselors employ eclectic practices, trying to combine ideas from various sources, the counselor should be aware of possible themes of content to discuss in connection with the process. These may be inspired by different contemporary career choice theories.

Reflections on occupations and their connection to individual preferences invite the counselor to focus on the values that lie behind them (Super). According to Super, counselors may also wish to explore the other aspects of the client’s current life construction, including conflicting life roles, crucial development tasks etc.

The program also provides the basis for discussion concerning how the environment affects the individual’s perception of his/her abilities and skills e.g. the importance of direct and indirect feedback from important others (Krumboltz). It encourages the client to be aware of networks and to seek new opportunities. Discussion of work environments also contributes to broadening perspectives when job tasks,
although very different in terms of content, can be found in similar environments. The range of careers proposed provides an opening to talk about how gender, ethnicity and social group influence the choice of careers (Gottfredson). As Gottfredson noted, ‘interests’ play a minor role in career choice compared to gender and status. Or – interests are formed and revised as part of a social process. Therefore, the role of the counselor may be to ‘test’ the quality of the compromise and/or to open up other possibilities.

Further, the client’s ‘self-efficacy’ (Bandura) will probably have a major impact on work with the database. The individual’s thoughts about his own abilities to achieve a goal are crucial in the career planning process, and this suggests the need to explore outcome expectations and work with goal setting (Social Cognitive Career Theory, SCCT).

**Questioning, storytelling and group work**

Questioning is one of the most valued and important activities in the guidance process. But the repertoire of questions is rather large, and it is important that counselors who ask ‘orienting’ questions be aware not to use ‘influential’ questions that generate ideas, reflections and perhaps changes in orientation for the client (Karl Tomm)\(^6\). In any case, questions are powerful tools, and a client/counselor interview should never be like an examination or interrogation in a court room! Supplying questions to the database often serves as a pretense to draw out storytelling on life experiences (Peavy)\(^7\). The client will be invited to explore some of the answers already given to the database and share his or her description with the counselor in a dialogue. In the exploration process, it is important that the counselor not take any description, feeling or value for granted. ‘Not to know’ is an important skill in counseling (Peavy).

Finally, the process of planning and choosing a career can without doubt be improved by group work or class-based intervention. When trying to integrate the use of an ICT program and counselor support practitioners can benefit from associations and reflections among the clients/students, and can use a variety of learning activities during the process.

“The process of choosing a career path is not an easy one” as noted by Bandura. But with skilled cooperation between the database and the professional counselor, the client will likely move closer to the goal.

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\(^7\) Peavy, R. Vance (1998): Constructivist Counselling: Theory and Practice, Danish edition
SECOND PART
Chapter 5  
The English careers database: contents, tools and approach.  

John Kelly, Cascaid Ltd. Loughborough [UK]

CASCAiD is owned by Loughborough University, one of the top 10 universities in the UK with a world-class reputation for research and technological innovation. Cascaid uses this expertise to produce software and databases widely utilized in the UK and internationally. Cascaid software systems are now available in the Republic of Ireland, Denmark, Belgium, Slovenia, Italy, Croatia, Canada and the USA. All these systems are widely used; in some cases they have become the de facto national standard for computer-assisted careers guidance.

The products are based on a comprehensive database of occupational information, built to serve the career guidance and decision process. The international database encompasses over 800 job titles, each meticulously updated each year. Each profile’s description includes: work activities, personal qualities and skills, pay and employment opportunities, entry routes and training, links to reliable sources of further information and documents for in-depth exploration. The most salient profiles are supported by multimedia such as videos and photographs that show users tasks and characteristics of particular careers.

This detailed and structured career profile database can thus be used as an informational tool in career services organizations, schools, career guidance centers and employment services.

But the database’s real strength is the matching tool that allows profiles to be constructed and matched to user preferences on the basis of “aspects of work”. This model was developed following initial research to define a relevant set of characteristics and a long period of testing and adaptation. Each career profile is described in terms of primary characteristics (fundamental for performing a given type of work), secondary characteristics (useful, but less salient) and further characteristics (which may be requested, but are not central to the career).
Users are asked to score or rate their preferences (from “I like very much” to “I do not like at all”) with regard to 116 characteristics used in profile construction. Progressively, as the user responds to the questions, the software openly and transparently provides a personalized list of careers compatible with his or her responses. In addition to this matching function, users have the opportunity to filter proposed profiles by required qualifications (for example, excluding careers for which a university degree is required, or selecting only those profiles for which the minimum education level is a secondary-school diploma).

The software also allows users to reflect and reconsider during the decision process, changing their responses so as to refine matching with the most interesting and appealing profiles. Users can verify levels of compatibility with all of the careers included in the database, and also analyze why some careers they consider attractive may not be proposed. They can then revise choices, refining responses, learning about the characteristics of various careers and widening the range of possible career options, in a personalized mode of software utilization. A further function allows the user to verify his or her level of preparation for chosen careers, through a self-evaluation skills questionnaire. These functions let career guidance counselors “see” the guidance process and note problematical aspects of users’ choices and possible paths of development.

The matching software is based on initial research that analyzed responses provided by users and returned data. Over 100,000 questionnaires were processed in this first phase, to consolidate the tool’s efficacy. Over the years, this sample of users has grown even more, thanks to new technologies that offer online access to numerous Cascaid programs and have allowed for real-time collection of access data, output data, efficacy levels and degree of database completeness.

The international version of the database, called ICAS - International Careers Advice Software -, was developed to adapt the English model to other national contexts. ICAS is also based on methodology of matching interests with career profiles.

It is being utilized by career guidance services with different strategic objectives:
• to raise questions and identify the most significant issues during interviews with career counselors;
• to encourage career guidance service users to increase awareness and seek further information on careers;
• to provide new professional development ideas and broaden perceived personal career prospects.

The software has the capacity to deal with four different aspects of career profile selection: interests, abilities, professional levels and health factors. The profile selection algorithm is linked, case by case, to various national databases developed by partners in the native language of the countries of utilization. In these cases as well, the user can utilize the tool in a straightforward way, going through an exploratory process that simulates the real career counseling process to generate a list of career profiles compatible with his or her preferences and characteristics, based on the degree of matching with all of the careers in the national database. The user can continually see and evaluate how the software interprets various factors, and can change his or her responses based on information gathered from the system. This methodology has been tested and adapted by Cascaid in several countries, always with positive responses from career counselors and end-users. Experience up to now has shown that, through specific actions to adapt the tool and train guidance professionals, this model of career counseling support can be transferred to other national contexts, maintaining a high level of efficacy and positive outcomes.
Chapter 6
The Italian careers database
Giulio Iannis and Viola Pinzi, Centro Studi Pluriversum, Siena (IT)

The development and adaptation of the ICAS model in Italy was made possible through an initiative of the Education and Guidance Service of the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia which, after analyzing various models and tools, decided to create a preliminary version in Italian as part of the Interregional III A Italy – Slovenia 2000-2006 Program. Friuli Venezia Giulia’s decision to adopt this software was based on the need to give regional career guidance practitioners an innovative and effective tool that could provide territorial information on careers and at the same time encourage a process of reflection on career choice and meaningful exploration and broadening of possible options. Positive evaluations were given with regard to the functions that make the tool particularly useful in those phases of the guidance process where exploration and attribution of personal meaning to career options become priorities, through analysis and consideration of decision processes and the drawing of personal relevance from available information (Pombeni, Vattovani, 2005).

The first version in Italian, called S.Or.Prendo3, had 300 career profiles, in part the product of adaptation of analogous profiles from the English database and in part developed in response to specific needs of the regional context of Friuli Venezia Giulia, with some profiles shared by the ICAS Slovenian-language version. This experimental Italian version of the software, albeit with a database of territorial information, was also sent outside regional boundaries with the intention of verifying its potential for possible national development.

The software was then tested in successive phases in Piedmont, Tuscany, Trentino Alto Adige and the Marche, with very positive outcomes. In particular, analysis of data gathered showed that the software allows for enhancement of informational resources, linking them to personal interests and specific career profiles and activating a process of deliberation that lets the user attribute meaning to the informational data. In fact, users can better understand the nature of various careers and evaluate how closely they correspond to their own personal needs and preferences.

Thanks to the Career Guidelines project, as has already been mentioned, this tool has been further implemented and the database updated on a national level, increasing the number of matchable profiles and adding new functions that can facilitate and enhance its use in nationally-organized career guidance systems, such as Employment Centers and the school system.

A fundamental step in development of the Italian version of the tool was the linguistic construction of all of the profiles and the choice of characteristics useful for the matching function. For each profile, possible alternative job titles were indicated (for example, for hairdressers, the titles “hair stylist” and “barber” are also present) along with the level of qualification required (from no university degree to doctoral degree).

For each career, a descriptive file was produced that contains:
• a brief general description of the career;
• typical job tasks and responsibilities;
• knowledge and personal abilities required, described and “skills” and “know-how”;
• job opportunities, in terms of organized contexts in which the work is carried out;
• training or education necessary to enter the profession;
• indication of other sources of information for further exploration.

The descriptions use simple, clear language, avoiding technical terminology as much as possible, to facilitate comprehension and user-friendliness for all of the profiles on the part of all potential career guidance service users. This also facilitates the work of career guidance practitioners and teachers who serve as career counselors in presenting career profiles to users, in group presentations as well as individual interviews.

1 - Website: www.pluriversum.it
3 - Website: www.sorprendo.it
4 - New profiles available online on http://career.guidelines.it
Additionally, each profile contains fundamental, secondary and complementary “characteristics” that define the career and allow the software to make matches with user preferences. The definition of these characteristics is crucial for guaranteeing the efficacy and consistency of the program, so the process was carried out in a cooperative effort by an interdisciplinary and inter-institutional team, involving career guidance experts and experts from various career sectors. As part of the European Career Guidelines project, this phase was further enhanced by involving practitioners who had participated in national testing in profile development as well, gathering useful comments and suggestions to improve the Italian database.

From the technical point of view, S.Or.Prendo is a career guidance program that contains information on 348 careers, which can be analyzed according to various essential characteristics, evaluating their “distance” from the user’s personal interests and career preferences. The program is based on the idea that careers can be described using a limited series of characteristics that represent individual aspects of work and take the form of activities, actions and conditions found to a greater or lesser degree in each career profile. By recording the level of interest users express regarding individual aspects of work, the program creates a list of careers in order of “closeness” of the match between characteristics and interests. Metaphorically, we can think of it as a sort of career DNA, created by combining a limited number of characteristics than can then be easily compared with users’ interests. When the user begins to tell S.Or.Prendo his or her preferences, the software searches for all those careers that have a “compatible code,” in a recursive process that moves gradually towards selecting the careers that best match the user’s preferences.

This approach, which focuses on the user and his or her ability to direct – and redirect, if he so desires – the guidance process, is the tool’s most innovative aspect, as well as its main strength. In fact, the program does not merely provide “closed” and predictive responses, but on the contrary, constantly proposes to “open” and expand the guidance process towards a progressive broadening of the users’ horizons. In this sense, the tool can easily be integrated with educational career guidance activities, offering numerous options for use in group presentations as well as individual counseling. In specialized counseling, it offers functions that allow users to gain greater awareness of their own needs, activating processes of deliberation and providing new knowledge useful to the personal career guidance process.

In fact, another of the most interesting and innovative part of the software is the “Careers and interests” function, which gives the user the opportunity to progressively express his or her degree of “liking” of all of the 116 characteristics on which the career profiles are based.

At the end of each sequence of questions, the software matches the responses with professions, providing a list in order of correspondence with the interests expressed by the user. Careers at the top of the list are those that most closely match the user’s responses. Thus, the user can constantly see the list of careers and notice which likes or dislikes he expresses move which careers towards the top of the list. At any time, the user can decide to explore any individual career in detail by opening its descriptive file, and can thus verify the degree of compatibility with his or her preferences. The user can also decide to change his preferences and thus explore new possible careers proposed by the software; can select and evaluate careers with a higher or lower level of qualification than the one initially indicated; and can search the database for careers he had in mind that were not proposed during the process in order to examine in detail which characteristics proved incompatible with his or her responses.

Another innovation in the national Italian-language version is the addition of a new function, which allows the user – after responding to a series of questions regarding personal skills and abilities – to associate another element of information to the list of careers, highlighting for each career the level of preparedness that the user attributes to himself. This new skills element is very useful for final discussion with the guidance counselor and for planning the successive phases of the guidance process, as it allows for the identification of possible training needs with an eye towards seeking opportune initiatives, or guides the user towards careers for which he already has a good level of qualification.
For career guidance practitioners, the new national version of this tool can be a valuable support in the most delicate phase of the guidance process, i.e. the generation of possible alternatives. And, the information database’s structure also offers immediate availability of all useful information for developing a workable action plan with the user.

Chapter 7
Careers exploration in guidance contexts

Giulio Iannis, Centro Studi Pluriversum, Siena (IT)

The need to bring an innovative tool like ICAS into the Italian context springs from two main factors: on one hand, an evolution of guidance needs and the consequent necessity to adapt intervention methodologies, as has also been indicated by the lines of development of guidance systems defined at the European level by specific resolutions; and on the other hand, the lack of functional tools for guidance counselors that can effectively aid in the decision process and facilitate relations with the user. The first aspect is quite evident if we consider the rapid social, economic and cultural changes underway and the consequent need for individuals to deal with increasingly greater levels of complexity in career decision making. The progressive elimination of many of the traditional socio-economic reference points on which career planning used to be based makes individuals perceive and increasingly pressing need for assistance in dealing with this growing complexity and uncertainty. In fact, this new and changing context, which sociologists define as “liquid”2, imposes equally dynamic changes and new ways of thinking on people: first and foremost, they must learn to be proactive in interpreting and attributing meaning to their own career successes, as well as develop an evolved form of knowledge that allows them to invent ever-more-effective strategies for managing problems linked to their career development and personal life.

The need to find forms and ways to help individuals to “navigate” in these changeable contexts requires guidance, as Peavy has suggested, that emphasizes deep reflection and reformulation of one’s theoretical bases and professional practices3.

1 - See in particular the 2004 Resolution on the Strengthening policies, systems and practices relating to lifelong guidance in Europe, and the 2008 one regarding “better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies”.
3 - Peavy, V. (1997). Sociodynamic Counselling: A Constructivist Perspective for the Practi-
Those who are professional guidance practitioners in any context must in fact be able to understand how these transformations relate to the subjective situations of individuals and to the process of identity-building in complex and multidimensional contexts. But what does it mean to assist people with guidance in the age of complexity? Scanagatta talks of a “subjective ecosystem” to indicate a “personal territory of knowledge” in which the subject is required to actively exercise “self-management”. This exercise of power over one’s own subjective reality is not delegable, but becomes an imperative for all those people who must seek a place in the world of work in the era of globalization: “What counts is keeping in mind that behind these aspects there is always a capacity to self-manage, which is the true substance of the social identity on which a person builds his life path”. For guidance services, then, the key is to promote a capacity – by no means banal or easily taught – to direct and strategically manage or “self-manage” one’s career evolution. The 2008 European resolution speaks of promoting specific career management skills. This skill, typical of managers and high-level professionals, becomes a fundamental resource for getting through phases of social, educational and professional transition that all people are called upon to deal with, increasingly frequently.

In the constructivist approach proposed by Peavy, the purpose of guidance is above all exploratory, linked to the need to create new knowledge useful for bringing meaning to one’s life plans. The constructivist approach adopts a very broad gamma of tools that propose to favor the maximum subjective expression, in highly creative and open ways. In fact, in this rationale, guidance can utilize what Peavy calls “cultural tools”, which stimulate reflection, cognitive decentralization, sensorial and emotional perception of the problem and analysis of perspectives of meaning and cultural elements linked to the context of reference.

Thus, the need to bring into the Italian context a tool more suited to this model of intervention prompted numerous agencies and practitioners in the guidance system to welcome the adaptation of ICAS and the development of a national career profile database.

The relevant aspect of S.Or.Prendo, in this sense, is the opportunity for the subject to gain knowledge to apply in the decision process by being able to change his initial responses, in a recursive process of reflection and revision of his ideas about careers.

Furthermore, the software never reduces the number of options, but simply re-arranges them based on the subject’s choices, thus stimulating further research, new considerations and a progressive broadening of knowledge about career contexts.

One fundamental element in this approach to guidance is the focus on imagination and creativity. Many users come to guidance services completely de-motivated and incapable of expressing new ideas. This “imagination crisis” is a problem for both the counselor and the guidance-seeker, so guidance activities must intervene in this “void” as well. Otherwise, these people may risk being unable to imagine a different future for themselves.

For the guidance counselor, being able to manage this process with the aid of the software is a fundamental step in the right direction. Many guidance tools in the constructivist approach are intended to promote broader exploration of possibilities, even in unforeseen, divergent and often “surprising” directions. To manage the “surprise” of discovering new development options in a positive way, the pro-

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6 - Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 21 November 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies (2008/C 319/02): “Priority area 1: Encourage the lifelong acquisition of career management skills”.
cess must be conducted with the support of a counselor trained to translate these potential possibilities into a coherent action plan.

In this model, the guidance counselor thus plays a central role, helping the subject in the self-evaluation process, with particular reference to comprehension of individual items and the promotion of the career exploration process, beginning with what emerges from the use of the software.

As we have seen, in order to generate the best results, this tool requires that a few fundamental conditions be met: the presence of a trusting relationships between the guidance practitioner and the user; the planning of differentiated times and places for various types of users and interventions; and the counselor’s capacity to promote active self-examination and re-appraisal of experiences by the user.

In the new national version of S.Or.Prendo⁹, new functions have been added that allow the counselor to facilitate the evaluation and decision process, identifying previously unconsidered prospects and opportunities, offering cues for reflection on skills and abilities and promoting autonomy in evaluation and the search for sound training and professional development opportunities.

Within the sphere of the Career Guidelines project, some specific training actions to promote the development of skills useful to improve the efficacy of the software’s use were also tested.

Along with training seminars on methodology and case studies, an on-line platform was activated to promote cooperative e-learning processes among practitioners already utilizing the software. One of the needs that have emerged is that of developing micro-planning of interventions using the software to respond to the many guidance needs in different contexts and for different targets.

The next chapters describe some possible application contexts for the tool, with a few examples and operational proposals.

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⁹ The national project website is www.sorprendo.it.
Chapter 8
Testing of the database in Italy: model, processes, results

Giovanna Del Gobbo, Università degli Studi di Firenze (IT)

Under the aegis of the Career Guidelines project, the crucial strategic phase of transfer of innovation was structured with the development of a national testing plan by Centro Studi Pluriversum of Siena, in collaboration with all of the project partners, which called for:

• analysis of testing possibilities in various Italian regions, taking into account several factors including distribution and type of guidance services offered in the various Italian regions, results of needs analyses, pre-existing contacts and partner networks, new contacts emerging from activities and seminars designed to spread the tool;

• realization of informational meetings and seminars in various territorial contexts;

• involvement of at least 20 Employment Centers and Career Guidance Centers in 5 regions, with the provision of the experimental version of the Italian language database;

• realization of a web platform for distance training of practitioners, with access to an on-line questionnaire to collect data to monitor testing activities and evaluations of the tool.

National testing obtained much better results than predicted, with the participation of territorial agencies and services that were able to utilize the tool in their guidance activities aimed at various target users. The first phase of testing included steps and events to promote the project and the diffusion of the tool in several territorial contexts (including: Piacenza, Rome, Florence, Bologna, Empoli, Parma, Arezzo, Ancona, Lauria, Verona, Trento, Bolzano, Palermo).

Specifically, the database was made available to users at the following structures: Agenzia del Lavoro di Trento, Provincia di Milano, AFOL Milano, FORMAPER Milano, ITS Pasolini Milano, AFOL Monza e Brianza, Città dei Mestieri Provincia di Tre-

Testing involved a large number of structures, practitioners and territories, thus guaranteeing a national diffusion and a national dimension of meaningfulness of monitoring data gathered. This widespread diffusion of the tool also allowed for its utilization by a great number of users, in particular young people in the phase of transition from the education system to the world of work, who were the project’s main target.

During national testing, the staff of the Centro Studi Pluriversum1 guaranteed prompt technical assistance to the agencies involved, and also carried out specific activities to train practitioners, including seminars realized in collaboration with some of the participating institutions. There were 5 regional seminars designed to present the model and train practitioners, held in: Lecce (February 7, 2011); Trento (February 16, 2011); Milan (April 19, 2011), Rome (June 9, 2011); Catania (June 23, 2011).

Additionally, a web platform was created (http://career.guidelines.it/moodle) to offer all practitioners updates and remote technical support, in an environment of cooperative learning developed using Moodle technology. The platform was useful for sharing information among practitioners who had the chance to utilize the tool during testing and those who had already had experiences with S.Or.Prendo in other contexts.

The Moodle platform was also designed to provide access to tools for evaluating the software being tested. In particular, two on-line-accessible questionnaires were created to gather opinions and judgments from practitioners and users.

The questionnaire questions aimed at practitioners and users, in addition to the sequence of individual items and a number of questions (more for practitioners) can be categorized in three macro-areas with regard to the software:

1. evaluation of methods of utilization;
2. evaluation of efficacy;
3. evaluation of educational potential.

The practitioners’ questionnaire

In particular, with regard to the tool intended for practitioners, after an initial survey regarding practitioner/institution characteristics (Region, Province, position in the institution, degree, gender), the questionnaire not only records the practitioner’s evaluation of the tool S.Or.Prendo, but also prompts reflection on his or her working methods and on the results achieved in comparison with goals pursued and educational gains for the user.

Based on the above-listed macro-areas, the practitioners’ questionnaire gathers information on:

1. Methods of using the software with regard to the following aspects:
   - number of meetings necessary to utilize the software;
   - time dedicated to/required for utilization;
   - individual or group utilization;
   - utilization prevalently of certain sections of the software;
   - types of users (category, age, education level) with whom the software was utilized.

2. Efficacy of the software with regard to the following aspects:
   - user-friendliness of the technological tool;
   - completeness and exhaustiveness of information contained in databases;

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1 - Website: www.pluriversum.it
• clarity and accessibility of information;
• flexibility of the tool and utilizability in group activities or individual counseling;
• correspondence to user needs.

3. Compliance of the software with declared educational potential in view of the following anticipated results:

• to promote career exploration processes;
• to provide information and details for the various careers in the database that the user did not previously know or was not aware of;
• to activate processes of self-evaluation and comprehension of personal interests and career aspirations;
• to increase user awareness with regard to the connection between personal interests and careers;
• to develop critical skills that help users verify the coherence of their educational and career choices with their interests;
• to stimulate interests and motivate the acquisition of further details on study and training pertinent to said interests and to the career of choice;
• to support the definition of individual study or work plans (user’s educational and career plan).

By encouraging reflection on the above aspects, the questionnaire renders the purpose of the tool’s utilization more explicit, and while on one hand it allows for effective evaluation of the tool, it also contemporaneously stimulates self-evaluation processes on the part of the practitioner with regard to the guidance activities he performed and the role he played.

The users’ questionnaire

The users’ questionnaire allows us to gather information that can be combined and integrated with that from the practitioners’ questionnaire. Cross-checking the data, we thus have two points of view on practices utilizing the software in guidance services: the first is more of a self-evaluation-based approach to the service, and the second geared toward hetero- or guided evaluation.

In this case as well, following an initial survey of general data to identify the type of user (Region, Province, education level, career situation), the questionnaire gathers the user’s evaluation of the S.Or.Prendo tool and the overall service, and at the same time encourages the user to reflect on his path and the educational gains made.

Again with reference to the above-listed macro-areas, the users’ questionnaire, albeit with a few simplifications and slightly fewer questions, gathers information on:

1. Methods of using the software with regard to the following aspects:
   • time dedicated to/required for utilization of the software;
   • individual or group utilization;
   • utilization prevalently of certain sections of the software;
   • efficacy of the practitioner in aiding with use of the software.

2. Efficacy software with regard to the following aspects:
   • user-friendliness of the technological tool;
   • completeness and exhaustiveness of information contained in databases
   • clarity and accessibility of information;
   • functionality with regard to the need to build a personal study or work plan;
   • flexibility of the tool and utilizability in group activities or individual counseling.

3. Compliance of the software with declared educational potential in view of the following anticipated results:
   • activation of processes of reflection and self-evaluation (better understanding and clarifying one’s own career interests);
   • activation and motivation to acquire further information (on careers and education/training);
   • understanding of the link between interests and careers;
• understanding of the relationship between personal interests, education and career choices and career prospects.

Considering that S.Or.Prendo’s purpose is to support the acquisition of knowledge and skills instrumental to the management of self-guidance processes through a constructivist-type approach, the utilization of the technological tool must allow for reproduction in testing situations of experiential conditions that facilitate (possibly through simulation) the acquisition of greater awareness of one’s situation, aspirations and potential, contributing to both the activation of processes of empowerment and an increased knowledge of certain work situations and capacity to manage said knowledge. In fact, S.Or.Prendo is intended to lead to greater awareness of interests, knowledge and skills that are often implicit and as a whole are linked to individual education, which can also be achieved outside of “traditional” educational and training paths, and at the same time to allow users to explore and acquire useful information/knowledge on education and career profiles. In particular, the software allows information resources to be enhanced through linking to personal interests and careers profiles, thereby making raw data meaningful for the user, who understands its nature and its level of correspondence to his own guidance needs.

The practitioner’s intervention thus becomes a fundamental support for critical reflection and linking between personal (empirical) knowledge, i.e. the attribution of personal meanings to career options, and the new knowledge that the tool allows the user to acquire about the world of work.

The questionnaire designed for testing evaluation is thus itself a powerful and useful tool for educational reinforcement, if intentionally handled in such a way as to activate meta-reflection on the guidance experience: in fact, it allows the user to go back over his experience and critically “reread” it based not only on his own liking, but above all according to evaluation parameters that correspond to the software’s objectives.

The users’ questionnaire, designed not as an evaluation of liking or of the service provided, can in fact:

a) stimulate an overall consideration of the prevalently educational and not solely informational function of the software;

b) facilitate reflection on personal educational gains made in terms of capacity for critical control of personal educational and career paths through greater knowledge of the sustainability of choices made compared with expectations and interests;

c) facilitate reflection on personal education gains made in terms of capacity to re-orient oneself in the face of impeded plans and/or unsatisfactory educational choices;

d) facilitate reflection on personal education gains made in terms of capacity to build a career plan coherent with one’s educational path;

e) facilitate reflection on personal education gains made in terms of capacity to develop active job search strategies and experiment with real-world work experiences.

Quality-of-service monitoring

Testing saw S.Or.Prendo utilized mainly in the sphere of Employment Services, a context that is increasingly considered strategic with the ambit of European Lifelong Learning policies. The relevance of the context requires not only the development of adequate tools to manage the service, but also coherent and functional monitoring. In fact, the need to arrive at national standards of service makes it necessary to systematically gather elements useful for the definition of benchmarks to analyze and constantly improve the service: in this framework, the use of specific tools like S.Or.Prendo must be constantly monitored to verify contextual elements that may condition its efficacy and functionality, paying particular attention to the role and skills of the practitioner.

The setup of monitoring tools was thus consistent with this understanding of the problem and with S.Or.Prendo’s theoretical system of reference. The need to monitor the innovativeness of tested practices provided an opportunity to fine-tune, during 2 - Giulio Iannis, Orientare alle professioni nell’era della complessità. S. Or.Prendo: l’evoluzione di uno strumento di orientamento a dimensione europea, Quaderni di Orientamento n. 37, pp. 68-81.
testing, a monitoring system that can be reproduced and transferred beyond the evaluation of the results of testing itself. In this sense, monitoring and the tools designed for it also fall within an overall focus on the sustainability of guidance practices through the utilization of the software, and represent an already-tested and validated starting part, certainly disposed to further implementations for the creation of a monitoring and evaluation system in keeping with an approach to quality.

In fact, the most accredited and suitable models for certifying quality pathways in service management organizations are distinguished by their attention to self-analysis and self-evaluation as fundamental dimensions of the quality process and as the basis for the creation of constant improvement plans. When an organization – specifically, one offering guidance services – intends to develop strategies and then structure itself accordingly, it becomes vital to know and internally analyze beforehand its strengths and weaknesses (areas for improvement). To ensure that the organization is capable of outlining this knowledge framework for itself, it proves extremely useful to integrate self-evaluation processes with hetero-evaluation activities to better identify the areas that need improvement, acquire knowledge about performance in service provision and stimulate practitioners to plan positive actions to improve weaknesses. In this way, an evaluation system does not consider the practitioner as an “object” of evaluation, but generates value for the practitioner himself, who is called upon to manage his own system by developing planning and improvement skills. Our questionnaires were designed with this purpose in mind as well.

The results allowed us to confirm observations on the use of the tool that had also emerged in periodic evaluations carried out over the course of testing by means of interviews and focus groups with practitioners, highlighting the tool’s strengths and weaknesses, which were in part directly attributable to S.Ot.Prendo and in part to the utilization context. Results of national testing with regard to the question of level of satisfaction with the intervention using the tool are summarized in the graph below.

### Practitioners - Degree of liking regarding the tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Liking</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very much</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of questionnaire and focus group data revealed strengths and weaknesses that will aid in planning the next steps in the tool’s development in Italy and improvement of services.

The strengths can be summarized as:

- immediacy and user-friendliness of the program;
- flexibility of the software for various types of users (adults and younger students);
- the tool’s capacity to provide useful information for foreign users as well;
- efficacy in revealing and highlighting incongruences with depictions in career profiles.

Weaknesses highlighted in testing and interpreted in terms of improvements to be enacted were:

- the need to increase the number of career profiles;
- the need to simplify data updating procedures;
- the need to augment general information provided;
- the need to simplify the organization of educational/career levels to facilitate better access to information;
• the need to improve practitioners’ skills in managing the tool to avoid the risk of “loss of illusions” with regard to the career profile, especially when dealing with users with low levels of qualification.

While improvement plans will involve S.Or.Prendo, on the whole considered a valid aid by both practitioners and users responding to the questionnaire, they must also involve the monitoring instruments (the two questionnaires), which can be adapted and personalized for various contexts and needs and systematically utilized in a guidance service evaluation plan.

Chapter 9 - Application contexts: Guidance intervention in Public Employment Services

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The following chapters will describe some possible application contexts for the tool, with the aim of offering practitioners further food for thought and useful information for planning activities involving use of the database in reference to specific goals and diverse target users.

The first of these application contexts is Employment Services, a priority target for testing of the guidance tool in Italy as part of the Career Guidelines project. Employment Services, although autonomous and locally structured in the form of Provincial Employment Centers, is a national system with tasks and functions geared toward pursuing European development policies and aiding users in making choices regarding professional training and careers.

Within the sphere of the Europa 2020 strategy, the role of Public Employment Services is reaffirmed and expanded with an eye towards guaranteeing widespread application of active and inclusive occupational policies aimed at an ever-larger sector of the population. The quality and efficacy of Public Employment Services at the local and national level are indisputable priorities in terms of the specific objectives the EU intends to achieve by 2020, and will be the basis on which progress will be evaluated. In particular, Employment Services must develop actions and tools to contribute to increasing the average employment rate of people between the ages of 20 and 64 from the current 69% to at least 75%; reducing the average drop-out or school leaving rate from 15% to 10%; and increasing the percentage of the population between ages 30 and 34 that has completed higher-level studies (diploma or university degree) from 31% to at least 40% in 2020.

1 - Website: www.provincia.le.it

Operational employment policies are based on the European model of flexibility and security (flexicurity), giving local-level Employment Services a strategic role in assisting with educational and employment decisions for users who are first entering or re-entering the job market. This model gives enormous responsibility to territorial employment services, which are called upon to offer a crucial service of mediation and support in a dynamic employment market, intercepting businesses’ needs for particular skill sets and also — and above all — guiding young and adult citizens through the complex transition to the world of work with information, guidance, counseling and training support services. These services cannot stop at the merely informative level, providing users with aggregated and complete data on the job market and educational options, but must be equipped with tools capable of helping each user to interpret and lend meaning to the data, facilitating the delicate and complex process of transformation of a mass of information into potential opportunities, with the aim of defining and developing coherent and motivated career development plans.

One of these tools is S.Or.Prendo, which was created specifically to assist and facilitate decision processes in the sphere of career guidance. As we have seen, national testing carried out under the aegis of the Career Guidelines project allows for widespread diffusion of the database at the national level, in territorial contexts that are geographically distant but share the need, in this period of economic and employment crisis, to improve counseling services in response to a growing demand for guidance from unemployed adults as well as a vast number of young people who have not yet had the opportunity to enter the work force.

Employment Centers’ model of service provision is substantially structured into two macro-areas: services for individuals and services for businesses. The area of services for individuals encompasses three other functional areas: basic services (welcome and information), guidance/supervision [which partially overlaps with the job assistance area], and active research and general specialized services, including services for at-risk subjects and adolescents.

In the various territorial testing experiences, the S.Or.Prendo tool was utilized in different ways, but its optimal use was in the area of specialized guidance services, both in individual counseling and group information and orientation activities.

In some of the contexts that more intensely tested the tool, the guidance process with S.Or.Prendo has already become one of the counseling tools that can be proposed to users during the service agreement and action plan definition interview. Some options for utilization emerging from national testing include:

- in **Individual guidance counseling**, in the presence of users who express confusion with regard to their career choice and need specific and specialized assistance in defining career plans and a consequent action plan. The software is utilized to support the practitioner during interviews, particularly in the phase of exploration of career options based on the individual’s specific aspirations and characteristics. At the end of the interview, the list of careers emerging from the database exploration is printed and discussed, and a decision is made as to which careers to insert in the SIL (Work Integration Service) for successive pre-selection by the job seeker of congruent job offers.

- in **orientation and tutoring regarding the right to/duty of education and training** with the possibility of utilizing the software during group meetings to show young users the structure of the career system, and above all as to support the individual process of guiding educational choices and plans and re-insertion into channels for completion of obligatory schooling. For this type of use, as individuals leave the education system, the tool is particularly effective for expanding knowledge of the careers system, particularly in reference to the structures of careers themselves, various paths of access and possible working environments and conditions, which are often not well understood by adolescents, who tend instead to base their choices on partial or stereotypical depictions of jobs.

- in **group training programs** to teach active job search techniques, with the aim of verifying, consolidating and examining career goals through exploration of the various careers in the database and through analysis of individual descriptions of interest, to improve understanding of the chosen career and structure a series of target actions to set out with an effective job placement strategy.

- in the sphere of **internships and work experience programs**, to support the definition of career profiles of interest and lay out learning objectives at the com-
pany and for the related training plan. Also, in the specific area of guidance training courses, S.Or.Prendo serves as a tool for supplementation, monitoring and final evaluation of the experience, allowing the intern to progressively modify his responses and refine his exploratory research into the career areas and types of job tasks that best match his personal interests and career aspirations.

- **in the area of job placement and integration services for the disabled**, the tool proved useful in career guidance activities and the construction of work placement plans based on awareness of job tasks, working conditions and skills required. The tool facilitates counseling by helping practitioners and users to take into account the need to exclude certain careers, and the possibility of considering groups of careers more compatible with the individual user’s characteristics, promoting job integration for the disabled (Law n.68, 1999). The tool also proved useful in the area of specific guidance activities carried out by Employment Centers offering support to at-risk subjects such as immigrants and the incarcerated.

In some testing contexts, such as that of the Employment Services of the Province of Lecce, the introduction of the S.Or.Prendo tool was also an opportunity to initiate discussions and retraining sessions for practitioners regarding inventive methodology, guidance intervention planning and improvement of services. The Province of Potenza also initiated an integrated training activity for its Employment Services staff, involving teachers from the school system and job training professionals as well, utilizing S.Or.Prendo as a shared work tool. In Milan, the provincial AFOL agency inserted the tool into an evaluation process for new guidance service technologies, involving the territorial network of other structure that offer career guidance and training services. The Regions of the Marche and Umbria tested the tool in their regional career guidance systems, involving employment services cooperatively with other territorial subjects including schools and University guidance and placement offices, and organizing training sessions geared towards re-designing services. Other territorial experiences, like that of the Province of Piacenza, confirm the flexibility of the tool, which can enhance planning of guidance interventions that are integrated among various institutional sectors, other education system subjects and social-inclusion services.

At the same time, testers noted the need for specific skills on the part of the guidance practitioner in planning and conducting guidance activities with the aid of the software, especially in terms of enhancing the relational process of reflection in tandem with the user. In the vast panorama of Employment Services, there are still situations in which the heterogeneity of staff skills limits the development of innovative career guidance tools and services: from this point of view, the diffusion of tools like S.Or.Prendo, accompanied by adequate training and/or retraining activities, is also an opportunity to promote constructive critiquing of the methodologies and theoretical models of reference, as well as to facilitate staff qualification processes, improvement of synergy between front office and service specialists and general improvement of the management of service-user relations.
In Friuli Venezia Giulia, use of the S.Or.Prendo software in scholastic contexts falls within a broader systemic intervention promoted by the Regional Administration since 2003 and aimed at improving the quality of guidance services. Over the years, this intervention has been brought to fruition in particular with the diffusion throughout the region of innovative practices and tools and in support for processes of integration between services, through specific occasions for training, sharing and discussion aimed at participants working in various territorial structures.

Within this overall context, the decision to enhance Friuli Venezia Giulia career guidance professionals’ accoutrements with a new product like S.Or.Prendo was dictated by the fact that the territory had on several occasions indicated the need for a specific tool capable not only of increasing awareness of various professions among end-users, but above all of facilitating the usability of such information in decision processes, thanks to a more accurate mediation between what the guidance-seeker sees in his mind’s eye and the actual contents of given professional profiles.

Since 2008, S.Or.Prendo\(^2\) has been in utilization in about a hundred schools (secondary, first and second levels) and training programs in Friuli Venezia Giulia and, with more than 300 guidance professionals trained in its use and supported by periodic meetings, not only has use of this tool been consolidated within traditional career-choice counseling paths offered to students in various school and training contexts, but we have also been able to draw on experience in the field to define and share some methodological proposals for self-guidance education paths geared towards the goals of “accompanying the internship experience” and “preparing for a training or career choice.”

In 2011, this experience led to the consolidation of said proposals through the insertion of some of them into a regional Catalogue of career guidance offerings, which gathers a series of prototypical courses and laboratories that can be realized at first and second level secondary schools and professional education and training institutes in the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, thanks to the contribution of the European Social Fund. In particular:

- the laboratory “Face to face with the world of work” aimed at students involved in work/school alternation situations (internships, apprenticeships etc.) proposes to improve their capacity to monitor and re-read their experience so as to highlight its orienting elements and develop motivation to continue their schooling.

- the “S.Or.Prendo Laboratory” dedicated to young people leaving first-level secondary school who are at-risk and require re-motivation to prevent them from dropping out. The gathering of information on possible careers of interest with the aid of S.Or.Prendo, along with encounters with speakers to discuss various types of job and training opportunities in the territory, is geared towards reducing school failure and increasing awareness of the need to plan for the future.

- the program “Dress rehearsal for developing a career and/or training plan” geared toward students in their penultimate year at second-level secondary schools and Professional Education and Training programs is intended to prepare them to make a well-though-out career choice by developing a career plan that draws on correctly-acquired information, a consequent analysis and processing of that information and a definition of career goals that are coherent with personal preferences and motivations. Within the sphere
of the GIANT project\(^1\), this course was the object of close monitoring, which revealed that the teaching unit in which S.Or.Prendo was utilized was the one most appreciated by students and teachers alike, especially due to the interest it sparked, the usefulness of the content it dealt with, the results it achieved and the enthusiasm it created.

- the laboratory “Getting to know careers and the world of work” geared toward students leaving second-level secondary school and aimed at facilitating the acquisition, analysis and processing of information on the job market and careers, to make such information easily utilisable in decision-making processes.

In schools, the S.Or.Prendo career guidance tool has been utilized with very positive results in other territories, for example, in the Florentine Mugello area. Thanks to a Mountain Community Education Service initiative, a series of training courses geared toward instructors serving as career counselors was promoted to define shared guidelines and quality standards for career guidance programs in schools. In this context, the tool was used to support guidance activities already planned on a yearly basis by various schools in both the first and second cycles to assist students and families in making educational and career choices. As part of the project, the instructors involved developed several didactic proposals to integrate career guidance modules with the S.Or.Prendo database into the school curriculum.

Chapter 11 - Application contexts 3: Vocational training

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The Association C.I.O.F.S. – F.P. Piemonte was founded in 1977 and has worked for more than 30 years in the field of training, guidance counseling and services for territories and businesses\(^2\). In recent years, the Association has endeavored to develop means and products for the application of new technologies to the field of guidance and to didactic methodologies that can be utilized with disadvantaged subjects (drop-outs, the disabled, immigrants, women re-entering the job market, the long-term unemployed, etc.). It has also planned and implemented target-specific methodologies and training courses with personalized job placement assistance, an innovative and integrated educational program aimed at developing career skills and enhancing employability.

Within this framework, the Association also developed a process for testing the S.Or.Prendo software tool, aimed at analyzing and evaluating its operational-methodological functionality in order to propose a model of best practices for interventions for diversified targets within the specific context of professional training.

\(^{1}\) - Website: www.ciofs.net

\(^{2}\) - Nationally, the association operates in 15 regions; in Piemonte it has 13 accredited training and guidance sites and 4 Skills Assessment and Career Guidance Centers, accredited since 2001 by the European Federation of Assessment Centers (Federazione Europea dei Centri di Bilancio - FECBOP). Its activities in Piemonte reach an average of 2800 students per year in terms of training and 2500 in terms of guidance services. The Association has its roots in the Salesian Educational Model, which aims to rekindle each individual’s personal resources, focusing on learning-by-doing, building a storehouse of knowledge, skills and abilities over time and allowing for continual re-definition of plans and career orientation. From this perspective, classroom workshops are the working context in which students are encouraged to actively participate in constructing their own educational and professional path, encouraging the use of worksite simulation contexts to provide the opportunity to deal with and handle issues that come up recurrently in various jobs, as well as an occasion for self-evaluation of career and job skills. Human resources enhancement is also based on this person-centered educational model.
The beneficiaries of these guidance activities were young people between the ages of 14 and 25 who were in the midst of or were just completing training courses.

The testing highlighted three differentiated guidance contexts, for which ad hoc processes were developed that included use of the software.

As part of Obligatory Education courses, a “Career guidance in guidance training” course was proposed for use with groups. In this context (career training pertinent to the Obligatory Education Directive and aimed at youth between the ages of 14 and 17), the goal was to help young people learn about the possibility of transferring skills acquired into professional environments other than those they know and have experience with. The goal of guidance thus becomes that of understanding one’s own potential and predispositions with regard to the careers one can expect to have upon completion of education/training, as compared with other similar career profiles and sectors.

The main purposes can be defined as follows:

- to provide “user-friendly” tools to deal with the theme of versatile skills and personal characteristics in an interactive, non-threatening way;
- to facilitate positioning/placement of students completing various training courses by comparing the requirements expressed in the career profile with their specific characteristics and areas of interest;
- to actively contribute to changing the social depictions [prejudices, preconceptions] of careers that characterize adolescent students’ system of career knowledge and inexorably condition their future choices;
- to explore the concept of transferability of skills and interests to similar career profiles;
- to re-motivate at-risk users and/or aid them in a career-reorientation process in view of a new career choice;
- to plan internships/work experiences (in the 2nd or 3rd year) through an overall evaluation based on preferences, interests, acquired skills and personal and professional plans.

The process is divided into three phases: reception, knowledge and skills development (the phase in which S.Or.Prendo is utilized) and development of a personal educational/career plan.

In the first phase, the goal is to help young people learn about careers (during the first and second year), exploring the career profile of interest and related work environments.

Next, continuing guidance includes the exploration and verification of students’ interests in laboratories that utilize the S.Or.Prendo software to support the development of knowledge and skills. In this context, salient aspects of the careers explored are discussed with the tutor and an internship/work experience plan is drawn up. In some cases, individualized guidance is aimed at drop-out risks and intended to re-motivate or reorient choices in view of personal objectives.

Finally, to provide guidance as students complete their education, a personal training/career plan is developed to assist the student in job placement or, in some cases, in defining a new educational/training path.

A second process that involves the use of S.Or.Prendo was designed through the Guidance Counseling and Skills Assessment Service as a guidance support tool for use from the exploration phase through the definition of a career plan: ‘Career guidance for transition management’. This counseling service is intended to help users get their bearings with regard to their scholastic/educational, work and non-work experiences and identify areas of interest that relate to a future choice to enter the job market or continue their training (university, specialized training, etc.).

The intended users are young people between the ages of 18 and 25 who are completing scholastic-educational courses (second-level secondary school, post-diploma training courses, Higher Technical Education and Training, university) and transitioning to another study or career path: the goal is to define educational and career choices consistent with personal potential and the context of reference. The service requires an average of 10-12 hours of individual interviews, group laboratories and seminars, as well as a few hours dedicated to the exploration
of job profiles, field research for information and materials and interviews with professionals involved in the career area of interest.

This counseling service is also divided into three main phases:

- reception and analysis of the application to define guidance needs and personalize the process;
- analysis of experiences and skills, with exploration of interests and professional values and reconstruction of the career profile (in this phase, S.Or.Prendo is utilized for guidance regarding careers, training process to undertake and comparison with the career profile);
- definition of a personalized plan and validation of job or educational choices made through discussion with job market experts.

Finally, within integrated year-long programs aimed at students aged 14 to 16 who are still enrolled in first-level secondary school but have scholastic difficulties and are drop-out risks, the software is utilized as part of the laboratory/workshop project LAPIS (LABoratories for Success): career guidance for choosing your working future. The process is carried out in the transition phase between first-level secondary school and professional training and is intended as an intervention for social hardship prevention, recuperation, re-motivation, orientation and re-orientation. The activities are aimed at supporting young people in completing their first-level secondary school diploma and obtaining credits for training geared toward the continuation of studies, through experience with career-building laboratories (for example, in the areas of restaurant work, mechanics and trades). In this process, the S.Or.Prendo software is utilized in the initial guidance phase.

The process is carried out in the following phases:

1. Individual and group guidance: students explore personal interests and aptitudes using the S.Or.Prendo software to choose experimental laboratories;
2. Trial laboratories: students explore and verify their interests by trying out activities and simulations and share/discuss the salient aspects of career figures they have learned about with their classmates and tutors; at the end of the trial period, they choose a career workshop area to further explore during the year;
3. Placement and assistance with the career workshop: students gain knowledge in the career workshop and draw up an action plan for future scholastic-training placement;
4. Development of a personal educational/career plan: at the end of the process, students evaluate their experiences and plans, identifying strong points and areas for improvement with their families and teachers.
Chapter 12 - Application contexts 4: Professional sectors and career guidance

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The case of the tourism sector: the role of the Bilateral Tuscan Tourism Agency

The tourism sector has always been a high-mobility sector. Work in tourism is mainly seasonal, so for every worker in the industry, mobility is a necessary characteristic from the outset, and determinant thereafter in allowing him or her to build a professional career, gaining diverse experiences in a variety of different contexts that can guarantee valuable professional enrichment. This concept is a fundamental basis for understanding why, in the tourism sector, career guidance is an extremely important service at various times and in various phases of one’s working life. The Ente Bilaterale Turismo Toscano (EBTT)\(^1\) is accredited by the Region of Tuscany to offer employment-oriented services and has a web portal called INCONTRO\(^2\) (www.turismolavoro.it) to facilitate the synchronization of the supply and demand of labor in the tourism sector. A growing number of people are turning to the EBTT’s territorial branches in search of employment in the Tuscan tourism-hospitality industry, and about 900 Tuscan businesses have sought personnel through this innovative service in the past year. The search for staff is concentrated mainly in the periods just before the tourism high seasons, which include the Christmas holidays and above all the summer vacation period, although this has changed over the years. Vacations have become shorter and spread throughout the year, with a consequent change in personnel requests as well: businesses have begun to seek professional figures with increasingly more experience in the field, and also increasingly specifying the skills these individuals must have. They no longer seek a cook, but a cook with training in food safety, knowledge of issues linked to celiac disease, a specialization in local dishes, etc. The EBTT’s consulting and counseling efforts thus spring from a detailed analysis of the tourism sector and the characteristics of businesses and structures in Tuscan territory, which facilitates interpretation of the specific skills connected to each professional role and an analysis of the contexts – training and otherwise – in which such skills can be obtained. Based on this foundation, the INCONTRO portal allows for the insertion of candidate résumés in a highly detailed way, highlighting skills pertinent to professional profiles in the tourism sector. In the candidate insertion phase, practitioners also offer information and, in most cases, guidance services to help candidates better define their professional goals and realistic employment opportunities in the sector.

During the period 2009-2011, thanks to the Career Guidelines project, EBTT was able to test utilization of S.Or.Prendo at its territorial branches and as part of career information and guidance initiatives carried out at schools and fairs. The testing target dealt mainly with students at Tuscan tourism-hotel training institutes (graduates with third or fourth-level diplomas), who were given the opportunity to learn about the tool and use EBTT’s services. In particular, some “Appointments with Tourism: Job Days” were organized in Grosseto and Florence, during which numerous students participated in career guidance interviews with S.Or.Prendo support, and at the same time met with businesses, experienced their first job interviews and entered their information into the INCONTRO portal, learned about public employment center services, became familiar with the Region of Tuscany’s TRIO web learning portal and video-recorded their curriculum vitae.

EBTT also organizes the “Tourism Job Market Exchange”, an event at which businesses have the opportunity to directly interview candidates prior to the beginning of high season to hire for various positions such as reception, dining room staff, bar staff, cooks, housekeeping staff, technical services, etc. EBTT always sets up an information point at these events to encourage job seekers to use the INCONTRO portal and evaluate other opportunities as well. During these events, career guidance services have been offered, with S.Or.Prendo support.

The software has also been consistently utilized at EBTT sites with adult job seekers who had already accessed the INCONTRO portal but had refused job offers: in these cases, the goal was to help these people more fully analyze their own motivations, as well as the characteristics of certain careers and how they evolve over time.

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1 - Website: www.ebtt.toscana.it
2 - Website: www.turismolavoro.it
The use of the career software has given practitioners the opportunity to re-think their counseling methods, enhancing the guidance function and increasing their expertise in the areas of analysis and description of professions, with particular attention to the evolution of tourism-sector job profiles.

The tourism sector is continually changing, so retraining and openness to different cultures are essential. Consider how travel has changed, shifting from long periods concentrated during the summer season to short “getaways” into which travelers try to pack as much excitement and variety as possible. In this new climate, the vacation becomes almost a primary need that must be planned well and enjoyed at every moment, intensifying activities and calling upon tourism-sector businesses to offer extra services and advice. Other tourists’ opinions are sought — that is, when planning a vacation, one reads about others’ experiences, consulting various social networks, which use accessible, straightforward language and offer a wealth of details and photos. Social networks have thus become one of the major forms of promotion for tourism-sector businesses, which use them to attract customers, aiming at a precise target and not — or in any case much less than in the past — participating in promotional fairs. The “star” hotel classification, in Italy and abroad, no longer adequately reflects a structure’s level of quality, and is no longer perceived as a reliable reference point when choosing where to stay. So, operators in the sector are recognizing the need to move quickly from Star Rating to Guest Rating, as more and more potential visitors look to ratings and classifications on tourism sites such as TripAdvisor, Trivago, etc., which are generated by the evaluations and comments of other travelers, rather than to official classifications. These trends are also profoundly altering the attitudes, characteristics and skills of tourism-sector personnel at all levels. For a hotel receptionist – a fundamental figure for any lodging – it becomes important to be familiar with the web 2.0 world, so as to better understand how to improve the quality of reception services, comprehend the needs of a variety of clients and also recognize the cultural diversity of tourists who today come from all over the world and value different things, perceiving a sense of welcome on the basis of parameters typical of their own cultures and lifestyles. Thus in the current context, new professional figures have arisen, such as the social media marketing expert, who in some larger structures may be a blogger or an SEO hired to complement the work of the Reception Manager.

Just to cite another figure, we can mention the Revenue Manager, who helps the hotel to increase revenue and reduce costs by optimizing tourist-product profits based on the study of historical data as well as studies of the market and of current trends. The quality of service remains the fundamental element, and is guaranteed by the professionalism of staff and their attentiveness to their roles, continually updating their knowledge and choosing a career based on their skills and experience.

The contribution of EBTT and of bilateral agencies general in the area of career guidance should be further enhanced, both in the phase of contact and consulting between workers and businesses and in the management, updating and augmentation of information on career profiles (which are the basic data underlying tools like ICAS and S.Or.Prendo). The opportunity to exchange ideas with career guidance practitioners and experts has also been a constructive learning experience for EBTT, helping to improve the quality of career guidance tools, but also allowing for the sharing of information and specific needs in terms of human capital development strategies and professional skills in the sector.
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The project Career Guidelines aims at improving the quality of vocational and educational guidance services through the transfer of an English model of career guidance, created by CASCAiD Ltd (Loughborough University - UK) and already diffused at international level. The model, based on the use of a career profile database, allows the young customers of the employment and guidance services to define their interests and aims on career opportunities better and helps them to build their career plan.