

READER

FINAL REFLECTION

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1 CONTEXT OF A GUIDANCE PROFESSIONAL

The profession of guidance counselling is embedded in various context factors. Ethical standards, digital counselling settings, counselling controlling, and professional networks are among those.

1.1 Ethical standards

For ethical standards, there are many frameworks applicable to guidance counselling. In general, these frameworks serve as a reference for (IAEVG 2017):

- a) decisions and measures as individual counsellors,
- b) the planning of policies and services of guidance institutions,
- c) informing the public about expected standards for professional practice and conduct,
- d) the provision of assessment criteria for self-assessment, peer evaluation and supervision to ensure quality standards in service delivery, and
- e) seeking organisational support for their own professional development.

To get acquainted with various ethical frameworks, look at the guidelines of the [IEAVG](#), the [German Coaching Association \(DCV\)](#) or a study by the Institute of Business Ethics (IBE), "[Ethics at Work](#)".

1.2 Digital Counselling Context

Digitalisation affects not only the context of a (female) leader but also the counselling setting itself. Three trends change the way of interacting with a counselee: (1) diversity of communication channels and real-time communication, (2) incalculability of communication through social media, and (3) professionalism of communication through data-driven and automated processes (Kühte & Rohde, 2023).

As for digital HR structures, six aspects might be applied (Jäger & Petry, 2021):

1. Agile, strategic human resource planning is a critical aspect of any organisation. Establishing digital planning software can help in this regard. This software can store and analyse staff data such as fluctuation, age, and competence structure. It can also be used to store labour market data such as demographic development, graduates by field of study, and average market salaries. Strategic measures such as necessary competencies, change of business model, and product changes can also be included. Development scenarios such as changes in demand, technological developments, and political changes can also be analysed using the software.
2. Recruitment and personnel marketing are also essential aspects of digital human resource management. Job exchanges, mobile recruiting, simplification and consumerisation, robot recruiting, candidate experience management, and onboarding are some of the processes being digitalised in recruitment and personnel marketing.
3. Human resources development is another crucial aspect. Learning approaches in the digital age, such as On-Demand Learning, Experiential Learning and Workplace Learning, Collaborative Learning, qualification counselling, mobile learning, virtual and augmented reality, learning journeys, learning platforms, MOOCs, web-based training, and webinars are some of the methods used in human resources development.

4. Company-specific apps for profile-based internal job search and personal career planning, digitised feedback tools such as an app for instant feedback, and IT-supported performance management with individual and team-based development discussions for employees and managers are some methods used in staff deployment, staff appraisal, and remuneration.
5. Personnel controlling and personnel administration help digital human resource management. Digital personnel files, people analytics, mobile self-service apps, and the use of blockchain technology are to be mentioned here.
6. Adjustment of staff capacity without redundancies, networking with public and private employment services, intensive use of job exchanges, outplacement counselling, and counselling for business start-ups are some of the methods used in personnel transfer management.

As for the specific context of digital guidance counselling:

Distance counselling is a form of guidance that is conducted remotely. Therein, writing-based counselling is asynchronous, so no direct interaction happens between the counsellor and the counsellee. Written-based forms of distance counselling are mail consultation, chat counselling, and voice message counselling. Contrary to written-based counselling, there is real-time counselling, such as telephone, video, and hybrid counselling. These methods are a form of direct and synchronous interaction between the counsellor and counsellee. Additionally, apps for online counselling, including coaching, are also available.

The advantages of distance counselling include allowing clients who otherwise would not be able to access mental health services. Additionally, distance counselling provides flexibility in location and scheduling, which benefits both counsellees and counsellors. However, there are also some drawbacks to distance counselling. One significant difference between traditional in-person and distance counselling is that clients and counsellors do not meet face-to-face, making building rapport and trust more difficult. Distance counselling can present counter-productive factors during sessions, such as a lack of non-verbal cues and reduced empathy for the patient.

1.3 Controlling

Controlling can be understood in the sense of steering or regulating. In relation to counselling, it supports the process of goal setting, the planning and management of counselling and the achievement of counselling goals.

In counselling, controlling includes the following tasks, among others (Scharpf 2021, p. 76 ff.)

- Definition of quality-relevant goals and perspectives in counselling work
- Formulation of quality standards in the counselling work (target values)
- Regular review of the extent to which the counselling results (actual values) meet the specified quality requirements
- Identification and analysis of target/actual deviations
- Development of solutions to improve the quality of counselling services
- Elimination of deficiencies by means of suitable measures (countermeasures)
- Follow-up (review and evaluation of results)

Controlling can be utilised very well for quality management, as it includes the management of a systematic improvement process. This process includes formulating objectives, deriving measures, measuring changes and progress, analysing deviations, and, if necessary, countermeasures in the event of deviations from the plan. In other words, quality management must always be steered by an efficient controlling system so that the objectives, measures, results and effects can be reviewed.

Counselling work requires high professional quality. For example, regular collegial and external supervision is standard in most counselling centres in order to ensure the quality of counselling. Based on quality objectives and standards, quality is reviewed and further developed in various fields of counselling. Traditionally, a distinction can be made in counselling between structural quality, process quality and outcome quality:

- **Structural quality:** personnel and material requirements for counselling services (e.g. skills and qualifications of the counsellors, workplace equipment, communication, personnel capacities, budget, information material for those seeking advice, counselling methods)
- **Process quality:** Requirements for the procedure and implementation of counselling services (e.g. availability of counsellors, waiting times, number of contact persons, transparent complaints procedures, processing times, data protection and confidentiality, networking)
- **Outcome quality:** Statement on the characteristics and features of the service provided (counselling) and the extent to which it meets the requirements of those seeking advice (e.g. accuracy and legality, traceability of decisions, effectiveness, reliability)

The counselling's effectiveness (efficacy) and efficiency (profitability) also play an essential role. These can be illustrated using the 3-level model. This frame of reference can be used primarily to explain operational behaviour. According to this model, effectiveness (target level), efficiency (product level), and cost-effectiveness (resource level) are among the factors that determine counselling. Furthermore, the legality, lawfulness, and quality of service provision form the framework conditions for counselling. Based on the counselling objectives, the counsellors use the available inputs (resources, e.g. time, financial, human and material resources), which are transformed into outputs (counselling services) in the course of the realisation process. The realisation process consists of many processes that serve to create services. The outputs should be created as efficiently as possible, i.e. economically. An important measure here is cost-effectiveness, i.e. the ratio of minimum target costs to actual costs. The outputs produced should also have an impact (outcomes, i.e. intended positive (direct) effects as a result of the counselling). Effectiveness measures the extent to which the outputs or outcomes contribute to achieving the counselling objectives.

For counsellors to be able to assess the quality of their counselling services, suitable metrics and indicators, as well as evaluation procedures, are required. In addition to supervision, the quality of counselling can be assessed and, if necessary, improved by utilising critical self-reflection and

surveys of those seeking advice. A key quality indicator for counselling is the satisfaction of those seeking advice, which can be determined through systematic surveys. The dimensions and characteristics of structural, process, and outcome quality must be sufficiently considered and weighted if necessary. The following key questions - from the perspective of the counsellor - can be helpful:

- Has the counsellor answered all the questions that are important to me?
- Did the counsellor show me how they can support me?
- Did I leave the counselling session with a good feeling?
- Was the content of the counselling understandable to me?
- How do I rate the counsellor's expertise?
- Am I more open to change as a result of the counselling?
- After the counselling session, do I know what the next steps are?
- Can I better assess my chances in the labour market after the counselling?
- Can I implement the goals I set for myself during the counselling session?
- Did the counselling help me to make (career) decisions?
- Have I already been able to realise the agreed goals/planned steps of the counselling session?

However, quality objectives should not only relate to the counselling context (client and counsellor system) or client satisfaction. It makes sense to develop a broad understanding, i.e., include the organisational and social contexts in quality controlling. The individual levels exhibit causalities and interdependencies. The characteristics of high-quality counselling can, therefore, not be assigned exclusively to an individual level (counselling system - interaction between the person seeking advice and the counsellor).

All three levels should be used for defining quality objectives and indicators and, thus, for controlling. The BeQu standards developed by the nfb ("Competence profile for educational and vocational guidance practitioners") and indicators are suitable for self-monitoring by guidance practitioners and for checking the quality of their guidance services (nfb 2014). These standards are integrated into the self-evaluation questionnaire of the DIGIGEN up-skilling programme, integrated with the DIGIGEN website.

1.4 Networks

The term network is used in many scientific disciplines (business administration, biology, computer science, mathematics, sociology, etc.). A network is generally understood to be an informal and formal network of relationships between people and systems in which exchange processes are realised (Miller 2005). It consists of different actors who interact and interlock with each other. They act not only as individuals or representatives of an institution but also as partners in the network. For example, there are social, innovation, strategic, and information and service networks.

Networks primarily serve to pass on and exchange knowledge and experience (information function), to expand the expertise of network actors (learning function), to create incentives and exert influence (psychological function) and to realise network goals (political function).

Formally, a network can be characterised by a finite set of nodes and the edges running between them (Sydow & Lerch 2013). Nodes are, for example, individuals, groups of individuals or even entire organisations; edges are a set of relationships, i.e. existing connections that can be unidirectional or reciprocal. The visualisation of networks aims to show the respective roles of the network actors and the relationships between the network actors.

A fundamental distinction can be made between analogue networks (e.g., personal meetings) and virtual networks (e.g., internet-based networks such as Xing, LinkedIn, and Facebook). In addition, a distinction is made between real-life networks, i.e. networks of relationships that have grown naturally and are lived in personal relationships, and organised networks, i.e. specifically designed professional networks of (inter)disciplinary connections.

In addition, “structural holes”, the “concept of the strength of weak relationships”, and “social capital” are relevant at a theoretical level when describing networks.

- “A structural hole is a relationship of non-redundancy between two contacts” (Burt 1992, p. 65). Thus, structural holes are characterised by low cohesion in the network and a lack

of overlapping contacts (Burt 1992). This means that individual actors can relate networks to each other and consequently fulfil a broker function.

- In addition, a network can have solid and weak contacts or relationships; this depends on the interaction frequency of the actors involved (Bommes & Tacke 2011).
- Another important characteristic of a network is social capital, which represents the current or potentially accessible and mobilisable social resources in a network. It is assumed that social relationships positively influence the results of network work, the flow of information, credibility and reputation, etc. (Portes 1998).

The following criteria, among others, must be taken into account when forming networks:

- Objectives of the network
- Time perspective
- Voluntariness
- Distribution of power and competencies
- Density
- Size
- Distance of network partners
- Involvement of external partners
- Resources

Every network is unique, as the framework conditions and strategic objectives differ.

In order to identify the strategically relevant network players during the consultation, it is advisable to carry out a stakeholder analysis. In this way, the expectations/interests, as well as the influence of existing and potential network players, can be determined. The results can be visualised in a stakeholder matrix. This shows, among other things, what influence the respective stakeholder can exert on the counselling and what interests the counsellor must consider. Standardisation strategies provide concrete recommendations on how to deal with individual network stakeholders:

- Low interest - strong influence: Win in favour of networking!
- Low interest - weak influence: Not relevant for networking, but for information work!
- Strong interest - strong influence: Core of the network!
- Strong interest - weak influence: Important for information work (allies)!

2 SUMMARY OF THE PROGRAMME

Our program is designed to enhance the preparedness of women in management positions to navigate the evolving landscape of the modern workplace effectively. These transformations are evident in digitalisation and the New Work paradigm. Women in management positions are responsible for making critical decisions within an environment that is becoming progressively more volatile, uncertain, complex, and marked by ambiguity, as outlined in the VUCA framework (Barber 1992). Through our program, women will acquire the necessary skills and competencies to mitigate potential disadvantages, such as the Gender Digital Gap, and excel in their professional journeys.

The program primarily targets individuals in HR departments, career counsellors who serve as intermediaries, and women in direct management roles. It's crucial to emphasise that the program's objective is not to compensate for a competitive disadvantage compared to other genders but to address gender-specific disadvantages stemming from women's workplace dynamics in management positions. Rather than attempting to level the playing field, the program aims to unlock economic advantages by mitigating structural obstacles women encounter in managerial roles. It's important to acknowledge that our program focuses on gender equality efforts within the workplace, which, while significant, represent just one facet of broader diversity initiatives.

Our efforts to achieve these goals in a three-part up-skilling programme were expressed concretely in the steps of digital leadership, female empowerment, and modern and corresponding counselling approaches, the latter being specifically oriented towards the needs and expressed wishes of the target groups.

We try to approach the VUCA framework along the solution strategy proposed by Johansen (2012) to concretely counter volatility with a vision, uncertainty with understanding, complexity with clarity (in doing) and ambiguity with agility. Our approach incorporates the latest scientific findings and, in its concrete design, is closely oriented to a needs assessment of the target groups of this up-skilling programme, launched specifically for this programme.

3 YOUR TASK

Any up-skilling programme is only as good as the target groups perceive it to be in terms of added value in a critical review. This also includes making suggestions for improvement or comments, ultimately to do justice to the ongoing dynamics in the labour market in the future. A programme is not designed for eternity but must a) always be able to adapt to current needs and requirements and b) also to meet the subjectively perceived needs of the target groups. Hence our urgent call: Help us to make the up-skilling programme even more meaningful for the target groups.

We look forward to your constructive feedback!

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