

Project CREW: A Novel Approach Linking Career Counseling To Workforce Development

*Ray K. Haynes
Nichola D. Johnson
University of Louisville*

The purpose of this paper is to present Project CREW—a novel and innovative collaborative career counseling program that links educational attainment and skills development to community-based workforce development. A review of the literature on career development is provided along with a discussion of how Project CREW's model and program theory aligns with the literature. The paper concludes by providing a program evaluation framework to guide the systematic assessment of Project CREW.

Keywords: Career Development, Career Counseling, Evaluation

This paper presents Project CREW (Connecting Resources, Education and Workforce) a collaborative career counseling program for students and residents in the Louisville metropolitan community (LMC). Project CREW is a new program aimed directly at meeting the career development needs of individuals and strengthening the local workforce. There is a direct link between the career development needs of individuals and the economic wellbeing of a community. Herr (2000) outlined a number of critical economic issues that point to the need for new workforce development solutions. He argued for intensified collaboration among organizations on behalf of career development and suggested that a partnership model combining expertise, energies and insights of different organizations is a unique way to address the career development needs of today's workers.

A review of workforce development initiatives across the national landscape provides examples of various types of partnerships among different organizations in the private, public and non-profit sector. It has been suggested the scope and frequency of such collaborations are likely to intensify in the future as the economy continues to shift and becomes more global (Herr, 2000). The purpose of this article is to present Project CREW, a pragmatic and novel model of a partnership formed to enhance the workforce development needs in the LMC.

Project CREW—Connecting Resources, Education and Workforce

Project CREW was initiated in 2003; its mission is to provide a seamless transition from educational attainment to career placement by fostering academic achievement and successful career planning. Project CREW uses a partnership model to provide collaborative and comprehensive career counseling to individuals in the LMC. The partnering organizations of Project CREW are: Metropolitan College, Jefferson Community and Technical Colleges, Career Resources, Inc, and KentuckianaWorks (Louisville's Workforce Investment Board).

Metropolitan College is a nationally recognized partnership among United Parcel Service (UPS), University of Louisville, Jefferson Community and Technical Colleges, state and local government. Students enrolled through Metropolitan College at any of the partnering institutions receive the full cost of their tuition along with employment opportunities from UPS. In exchange, students work four hours per night in UPS's air hub. Since its inception five years ago, this innovative partnership has helped hundreds of students receive a free education and on-the-job training while simultaneously reducing employee turnover at UPS (Riggert, Ash, Boyle & Rude-Parkins, 2004). Project CREW is coordinated by Metropolitan College and was initially established to help Metropolitan College students identify potential career paths based on their UPS employment experiences.

Jefferson Community and Technical Colleges (JCTC) together form the largest district in the Kentucky Community and Technical Colleges System with campuses in downtown Louisville, southwest Jefferson County, Carrollton and Shelbyville. The colleges will merge to form one college in July 2005. As a consolidated college, JCTC will serve 13,500 students annually making it the fourth largest undergraduate institution in Kentucky. Presently, JCTC offers degrees, certificates and training to meet LMC workforce needs. Project CREW operates satellite counseling centers on three JCTC campuses.

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Career Resources, Inc. (CRI) is a private, non-profit organization that provides career services for KentuckianaWorks, Metro Louisville's Workforce Investment Board. CRI operates a network of One-Stop Career Centers throughout Louisville on behalf of KentuckianaWorks. With its unique "business first" focus, CRI develops innovative workforce solutions for local businesses and has won recognition from the Department of Labor and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

KentuckianaWorks is a business-led, policy-setting board that oversees workforce development initiatives in the LMC. KentuckianaWorks is charged with creating a workforce development system that benefits both employers and job seekers by promoting quality jobs, high skills, high wages and life-long learning. KentuckianaWorks is positioned to raise the educational attainment levels of local citizens across the board—from GEDs to Ph.D.s—and to create a responsive workforce system that meets the needs of employers.

Each partner brings a unique set of skills and experiences to the Project CREW mission. Metropolitan College applies its lessons learned from its UPS partnership to address issues associated with working students. JCTC provides expertise in linking students' career goals and aspirations with academic choices that will prepare them for work. CRI brings its experience as administrator of the One-Stop Career Centers to provide labor and employment information to potential employers and employees. Finally, KentuckianaWorks provides the partnership with access to resources in support of workforce investment initiatives. Furthermore, the participation of CRI and KentuckianaWorks allows Project CREW to provide unlimited on-demand career services to students as well as the general public free of charge. This feature makes Project CREW unique in the realm of career counseling. An analysis of similar programs revealed that most career programs, particularly those offered by community agencies or postsecondary institutions, tend to charge a fee for service, require appointments, provide a limited number of sessions per client and limited walk-in service, and serve specific client populations (e.g. low-income workers, students.)

In a dynamic society, organizations are challenged to shift paradigms to create "career-resilient" workers—those who are equipped with skills and knowledge to manage their careers and adapt to change (Waterman, Waterman & Collard, 1994; Collard, Epperheimer & Saign, 1996). As previously noted, a collaborative combination of expertise, resources and insights is important to career development in today's changing economy. While dynamic socio-economic issues affecting the workforce may require new practices, it could be argued that the theoretical tenets of career development are important regardless of context or climate. A review of the literature identified the fundamental propositions of career development theory—that programs should foster positive career-related activities (career exploration and personal assessment; information gathering; decision-making and career planning); include a wide range of interventions (individual counseling, small groups and workshops, and computer-assisted guidance); and positively influence individual and societal work-related problems (enhancing educational attainment and academic achievement; reducing work-skills gaps; facilitating job placement; and reducing unemployment and other work transition problems.) These elements are the basis for most traditional career development program models (Brown & Brooks, 1996; Herr & Cramer, 1996).

In describing the "ideal" model for a career development program, Herr (1997) cited the following quotation: "comprehensive career counseling, synthesized from the best models and methods of career counseling, also incorporates the best from theories of counseling and psychotherapy and goes considerably beyond them" (Crites, 1981, p. 14). In 1995, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education at the University of California at Berkeley conducted a study supported by the U.S. Department of Education that identified characteristics and models of exemplary career guidance programs in secondary and postsecondary institutions. The programs were recognized for three program components: (a) comprehensive career guidance and counseling promoting students' self-knowledge and self-awareness, educational and occupational exploration, and decision-making and career planning; (b) strong collaboration, articulation, and communication efforts among parents, businesses, community organizations, teachers, and other school personnel; and (c) institutional support, leadership, and program evaluation (NCRVE, 1995). The study suggested that programs incorporating these three components produce positive student outcomes that ultimately impact entire communities. Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthen (2004) noted that any program should be evaluated based on specific process and outcome measures and that a plausible program model should be developed around normative (practical) and causative (theoretical) information to characterize an overall program theory. Fitzpatrick et al. cited Chen's (1990) definition of program theory as "a specification of what must be done to achieve the desired goals, what other impacts may also be anticipated, and how these goals and impacts would be generated" (2004, p. 205). Fitzpatrick et al. suggested that a program theory is needed to help an organization understand its inputs, actions and outcomes, and to guide the evaluation process. Guided with a vision of becoming an innovative career development program. Project CREW marshaled the missions and resources of its partners to create an exemplary career guidance program as espoused by NCRVE (1995). The challenge for Project CREW is to effectively validate its program theory. What follows is a review of the major career development

literature in an attempt to reconcile Project CREW's program theory with the literature and to provide a theoretical framework that might serve to guide future program evaluation.

Review of the Literature

Career development is not new. The literature on career development theory is rooted in the work of Frank Parsons, whose theory of career counseling was based on the Socratic dictum "know thyself" (Brown & Brooks, 1996). Parsons' model was derived from personality theory and emphasized three steps: (a) understanding of self (aptitudes, abilities, interests, resources and ambitions); (b) knowledge of the requirements for success in work, including opportunities, advantages, disadvantages and prospects in different lines of work; and (c) true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts (Parsons, 1909). When Parsons developed his theory, the nation was experiencing rapid industrial change and population growth. Parsons determined that the nation needed a new framework for matching vocational guidance with the needs of immigrant workers and youth (Brown & Brooks, 1996). Parsons' model provides the framework for career development theory and practice and continues to be a major influence today.

Within this framework, career counseling is intended to help people assess their career needs and to provide guidance toward achieving career goals. The literature describes career development as a process by which individuals choose the best career path through appropriate exploration and planning (Brown & Brooks, 1996). While the ultimate outcome of career counseling is individuals being placed in their chosen fields, the process should not be viewed as solely being focused on individuals making a choice of a job (Herr, 1997). Rather, theorists describe career development as a process that endures throughout the life span and includes activities that aid in the holistic development of individuals. The National Career Development Association defines career development as "the total constellation of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to influence the nature and significance of work in the total lifespan of any given individual" (NCDA, 2003). The factors that combine to form the career development process are categorized into three parts: career exploration, career planning and career placement.

Career Exploration, Planning and Placement: The Pillars of Career Development

The first stage of career development involves a period of focused exploration, including a series of personal analysis tasks to help individuals identify choice factors such as values and interests, and serves to increase career information-seeking (Spokane, 1991). The original model of vocational development set forth by Parsons emphasized the importance of self-assessment to understand personality traits that inform vocational choices. Trait and factor theories assume that an individual's unique traits can be identified and measured, and that it is possible to match individual traits to occupations (Brandt, 1977; Brown & Brooks, 1996; Herr & Cramer, 1996). Holland's (1985) Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments is most notable among trait-factor theories. Holland postulated there is a person-environment fit, in that people influence their environments, and environments influence people. Holland developed a six-category typology in which personality types and environments are described as realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. Holland assumed that people look for environments that fit within their personal typology, and that personality and environment interact to produce behavior. According to Holland, congruency between personality and environment results in greater career satisfaction. Career development that applies focused career exploration incorporating information that is congruent with a person's identified personality traits leads to more relevant career choices (Holland, 1985).

In addition to person-environment fit, other theories involving self-understanding and choice focused on the incorporation of life-span development (Brown & Brooks, 1996; Herr & Cramer, 1996). The most influential life-span theory is Super's (1957) Theory of Vocational Choice, which emphasizes that people seek work roles in which they can express themselves and develop their self-concepts. According to Super, vocational self-concept is developed as people pass through life stages and develop knowledge of the world of work. Herr and Cramer (1996) said that a major concern of career development is the clarity and accuracy of the self-concept as the evaluative base by which individuals judge career options. Self-concept manifests as career maturity, which is the readiness to make appropriate career decisions (Lundberg, Osborne & Miner, 1997). Super and Thompson (1979) identified six factors of career maturity: (a) awareness of the need to plan ahead, (b) decision making skills, (c) knowledge and use of information resources, (d) general career information, (e) general world of work information, and (f) detailed information about occupations of preference. Super (1983) operationalized career maturity as incorporating autonomy, time perspective (reflection on experience, anticipation of the future), and self-esteem. Luzzo (1995) and Lundberg (1997) found that career maturity is significantly influenced by self-esteem issues related to perceived barriers of gender, age, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. While research has shown that career maturity is

influenced by various personal characteristics developed over the life-span (Gottfredson, 1981, 1996), information obtained by assessing personal traits and exploring the world of work also enhances career maturity (Super, 1983).

Roe (1956) theorized that personality factors developed over the course of a person's life also significantly influence career choice. Roe's theory categorized eight groups of occupations (service, business, organization, technology, outdoor, science, cultural, and arts and entertainment). According to Roe, people explore and choose work within one of these eight occupational groups based on biological, psychological and sociological factors developed over the life span. Ginzberg (1972) also suggested that life development plays a critical role in career choice. Ginzberg's theory included career exploration as a process in early life stages in which people first imagine their work roles then recognize their interests, abilities and values. According to Ginzberg, exploration leads to more realistic identification of occupational choices.

Social cognitive theories have more recently emerged in career development (Brown & Brooks, 1996; Herr & Cramer, 1996). These theories are focused on how people process, integrate and react to information. This line of research focused on how people learn skills and make career decisions (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996; Peterson, Sampson, Reardon, & Lenz, 1996; Gati, 1986). Social cognitive career theories are derived from the work of Bandura (1986) and incorporate the influence of self-efficacy beliefs, environmental factors and outcome expectations on behaviors and goal achievement.

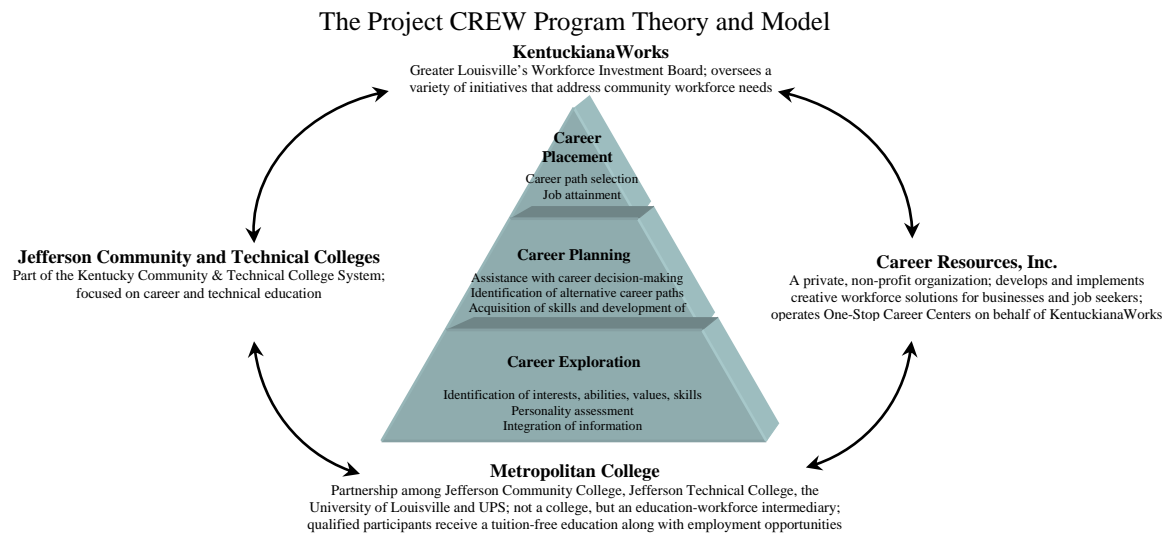
Central to the career development process is the use of tests and inventories to promote career exploration and facilitate career planning (Spokane, 1991). Researchers have developed a number of psychometrically sound career assessment tools (Kapes, Mastie & Whitfield, 1994). The most common assessments are the Myers-Brigg Type Indicator, the Strong Interest Inventory, and Super and Thompson's Career Development Inventory. More recently, there has been a movement toward instruments that can be self-administered (Gati, 1994). For example, the DISCOVER system, developed by the makers of the American College Testing Entrance Exam, is a computer-aided personal inventory and career guidance system that helps clients understand how their interests, values, skills and personality relate to academic programs and careers (Kapes et. al., 1994). Luzzo and Pierce (1996) found that students who used DISCOVER showed significant gains in career maturity. The System for Interactive Guidance and Information PLUS (SIGI-PLUS) is another commonly used computer-based career guidance system (Kapes et. al., 1994). Kivlighan and Johnston (1994) found evidence in support of previous studies that advocated the use of the SIGI-PLUS system. Specifically, the system promoted significant gains in vocational identity.

After a period of focused exploration, an individual may then proceed into the development of a career plan, which is a sequence of steps and activities required to achieve desired career goals (Brandt, 1977; Spokane, 1991). Career planning is an element of Super's (1983) model of career maturity and involves processing exploratory information, making decisions toward a career path, and taking action toward achieving career goals (Spokane, 1991; Brown & Brooks, 1996; Herr and Cramer, 1996). Traditionally, the role of career counseling has been to provide appropriate levels of intervention to help people make concentrated efforts toward career planning and decision-making (Brandt, 1977; Super, 1983; Seligman, 1994). Holland (1974) and Brandt (1977) outlined models for the delivery and levels of intervention of career counseling services. The models include one-on-one intervention with a career counselor, small groups and workshops, and computer-based self-instruction.

Recent studies produced findings about the various levels of interventions and effects on different client populations. Oliver and Spokane (1988) examined the effects of career interventions on career decision making, effective role functioning, and counseling evaluation relative to different levels of treatment. Individual counseling was found to have the largest effect size, followed by workshops/structured groups. Whiston, Sexton, and Lasoff (1998) replicated Oliver and Spokane's study and found that individual counseling still had the most effect on the outcome variables, but computer-based intervention had the next highest effect size. Kivlighan and Johnston (1994) found that clients with high work-goal instability were dissatisfied with computer-based intervention and preferred individual counseling. Luzzo (1999) suggested that while non-traditional college students tend to possess higher levels of personal agency toward making career decisions, they require more targeted levels of intervention that include high levels of interpersonal contact (e.g. individual counseling and workshops/structured groups).

As previously noted, researchers have linked career development with Bandura's social-cognitive theory of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1986) self-belief intervenes between knowledge and action. Bandura theorized that knowledge, skill, and prior attainments do not necessarily predict subsequent attainments because the beliefs that individuals hold about their abilities and about the outcome of their efforts powerfully influence the ways in which they will behave. Through the career development process, individuals are guided toward developing broad pictures of themselves and in interpreting the results of focused exploration activities. The process helps inform and alter their self-beliefs and environments, which in turn inform and alter their subsequent attainments. By "knowing thyself," a person is essentially better equipped to successfully move through the career development process, make positive career transitions and actualize into her/his ideal career path and subsequent placement in a job.

The career development process may be likened to Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, in which he described how people satisfy various personal needs in the context of life and work. Maslow theorized that there is a general pattern of needs recognition and satisfaction that people follow and that a person could not recognize or pursue the next higher need in the hierarchy until her/his currently recognized need was substantially or completely satisfied. According to Maslow, an individual seeks to ultimately actualize into a desired state of self-fulfillment in what she or he does in life and work. In the same manner, the career development process may also be viewed as hierarchical. The previous literature review on career development showed that theorists placed importance on a person investing a significant amount of time at the lower end of the process (i.e. exploration) to aid that person in pursuing the next level of development and subsequent placement in a career. As the lower-order needs are met and new information is processed, individuals are driven toward more targeted means of achieving their career goals. Career counseling, then, may be viewed as an intervening variable in the recognition and satisfaction of the work-goal needs of individuals. The following illustration depicts a hierarchy of the career development process and introduces the Project CREW program model:



The Project CREW Model

Project CREW clients receive personalized counseling through individual and group interventions. Clients have access to a team of counselors, computer applications and information systems designed to help them identify and cultivate their academic and career goals. Clients are taught to map out each stage of the career development process. As stated previously, career exploration, planning and placement are the essential dimensions of the career development process.

The Project CREW model involves an initial period of exploration and career assessment. The literature explained that assessment is an integral part of the career development process and it helps clients make informed decisions. Clients begin this stage by initially interviewing with a CREW counselor. During this stage, counselors assist clients with exploring self-identities and potential careers while emphasizing appropriate academic preparation. In these sessions, clients are encouraged to engage in activities that will position them for future career growth. After the intake session, the DISCOVER system is administered to help clients learn about interests, values and goals as well as academic majors and occupations that fit their interests. The DISCOVER system can also be used as a research tool. The system has three parts and is accessible from any computer with Internet access once a user ID and password is obtained from a CREW counselor. Clients may also research career information through the Kentuckiana Occupational Outlook, which includes information about job trends and projections on more than 700 occupations in the LMC.

The second stage of Project CREW's career development model involves helping clients develop short-term and long-term plans. CREW counselors help clients integrate newly acquired career exploration information with practical applications of course work and work experiences. Project CREW operates continuously throughout the year and conducts a series of workshops and career classes. In addition, clients may come to the center at any time with or without an appointment for one-on-one counseling, academic planning, preparing for job interviews, and help with writing cover letters and resumes.

Project CREW offers the Internship, Co-operative and Experiential Education Program through which eligible students obtain paid and unpaid jobs. Internships introduce students to the “real world” and help students learn to think and solve problems and develop their communication skills, which are all critical components of an education (Raymond & McNabb, 1993). The value of experiential learning is that it connects students with the realities of theories learned in the classroom. Students are able to experience situations instead of simply discussing how they would hypothetically approach situations (Kolb, 1984). Raymond and McNabb (1993) studied the perceptions of business students and employers to determine the efficacy of various teaching methods on work skills and abilities, and both groups ranked internships as most effective.

Project CREW guides and assists clients in selecting academic programs or career paths and employment opportunities. Academic planning and transfer services are offered to assist clients who wish to pursue higher levels of education. CREW counselors conduct job fairs, coordinate job interviews and provide access to job postings. To identify specific job opportunities, clients may use computers to access regional and national job posting websites. In keeping with the Project CREW mission, clients are encouraged to seek opportunities in the local community. Project CREW’s main resource for local job postings is *GreaterLouisvilleWorks.com*, a regional job portal that provides lists of open positions and allows job seekers to post their resumes.

Keys to Success

Many factors have contributed to Project CREW’s success so far. First, Project CREW’s value proposition is its collaborative partnership utilizing counseling professionals with significant knowledge in workforce development, human resources and academic advising. This partnership provides services that meet the essential career development needs of career exploration, planning and placement. Moreover, CREW provides fee-free services, which increases the program’s accessibility to diverse populations.

From academic and career assessments to resume development to assisted job searches, CREW counselors have already helped numerous clients and demand has steadily increased since program inception. During the first year of operation, CREW counselors conducted approximately 1,100 individual counseling sessions at the center and more than 1,500 sessions outside the center at workshops and classroom presentations. Moreover, Project CREW established additional counseling centers at other locations much earlier than originally planned to handle the growing demand because of the resounding success and steady enrollment growth of Metropolitan College.

Not only have students responded favorably to Project CREW, but faculty members from Jefferson Community and Technical Colleges have also responded with enthusiasm. Faculty members encourage—and some even require—students to visit and research Project CREW as part of their normal course requirements. The leadership of JCC/JTC reacted so positively that they have invited CREW counselors to make presentations to students in general education courses and are considering making Project CREW part of a mandatory first-semester course for entering freshmen. Local businesses have also shown interest in establishing connections with Project CREW. CREW counselors regularly conduct presentations to business leaders and human resources professionals to simulate the Project CREW model from the client’s perspective. Feedback indicates that the simulation provides greater insight into the career development process and how the program benefits clients. As a result of the CREW Simulation, local businesses are seeking assistance from Project CREW to not only connect with potential job applicants but are also exploring the possibility of incorporating Project CREW into their own human resources strategies for developing existing employees.

A Framework for Evaluating Project CREW

Now that Project CREW has entered into a second year of operation, an evaluation framework must be developed to assess the extent to which program components are in place, to identify program metrics and measure specific outcomes, and to guide Project CREW for performance improvement. As noted earlier, Fitzpatrick et. al. recommended evaluating programs based on specific process and outcome measures. Using the guidelines established by the NCRVE (1995), Project CREW should incorporate formative evaluations to validate knowledge claims, assess pragmatic assumptions about the efficacy of Project CREW and integrate the attitudes of stakeholders (e.g. clients, staff, partners and faculty). Lapan & Kasciulek (2003) further argued that collaborative career counseling programs should also employ formative models to determine the extent to which all partners operate from a common framework. This data should be collected from interviews and open-ended survey questions.

Concurrent data collection procedures would broaden the level of interpretation of the program evaluation. Therefore, summative evaluations must be developed to directly address program outcomes. Outcomes refer to the resultant effects of career counseling (Peterson & Burck, 1982) and include the skills, knowledge, or attitudes

acquired by participants because of career counseling (Peterson & Burck, 1982) and are also referred to as learning outcomes (Oliver & Spokane, 1988). Other outcomes of career counseling include impacts on behavior, such as academic performance, job attainment, or satisfaction with academic/career choices (Tinto, 1993). The literature recommends numerous socio-cognitive and behavioral outcome domains to consider for evaluation. Drawing on the most significant findings from the research, a useful assessment model for Project CREW would include summative analyses of the following: client profile data (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, academic status, employment status, etc.); short-term or learning outcomes (e.g. self-knowledge and vocational identity, career decidedness and career maturity/adaptability); long-term or behavioral outcomes (e.g. academic performance, job attainment and satisfaction with academic/career choices); and evaluation of counseling services (e.g. ratings of satisfaction and efficiency). In addition to existing data collected through intake and results from DISCOVER, Project CREW should employ the use of scales or inventories. A number of psychometrically sound instruments such as the Career Factors Inventory and the Career Decision Scale (Kapes et. al., 1994) are available for this process. Super (1983) also recommended conducting follow-up evaluation of clients after program completion to determine if career counseling had long-lasting effects. Follow-up evaluation might include administering psychological surveys and assessing academic or career activities of former counselees. Finally, program administrators must effectively link Project CREW's performance measures to economic trends and the realization of workforce development goals of the community and local businesses.

Concluding Comments

Project CREW is a novel career development program that links educational attainment and skills development to community-based workforce development. The literature provided a conceptual framework for Project CREW's program model and showed that Project CREW fits directly with theory. However, Project CREW goes beyond traditional approaches to career counseling in that it is formed around a comprehensive-collaborative framework. Traditional program models provided a foundation for evaluating the effects of career counseling. Newer models like Project CREW must go beyond traditional ones by providing individuals with knowledge and skills to not only choose a career, but to become career-resilient and skillfully plan for career transitions. The true test of Project CREW's efficacy is the ability to produce practical results that benefit all stakeholders, and such results can only be demonstrated through formative and summative evaluations of the program.

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