AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF COUNSELLORS' EXPERIENCES OF CAREER COUNSELLING WITH STUDENTS

by

TSHIFHIWA MARYLENE KODISANG

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SUPERVISOR: DR. E. M. CRONJÉ

CO-SUPERVISOR: PROF. J. M. NIEUWOUDT

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Declaration

I declare that

"An ethnographic exploration of counsellors' experiences of career
counselling with students"
is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have
been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Ms T Kodisang   Date

Student number: 3045-299-6

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to explore the following:

1. The counsellors' experience of the process of career counselling provided to students at a distance learning institution
2. My own experiences of doing counselling with Unisa students.
3. How Holland's career theory, the social cognitive career theory and the chaos theory of careers could shape the process of career counselling.

The themes that emanated from the stories of six counsellors indicate that they view counselling as a continuous process wherein it is necessary to strike a balance through blended counselling between the needs of individuals versus helping the multitude of anonymous students. In order to facilitate counselling effectively, counsellors need resources and in order to develop these resources they use a diversity of career theories which act as a frame of reference.

Attention is given to the development of career counsellors' identity and self-confidence and how this impacts on the counsellors' growth.

The recommendations of this study hold the promise of contributing to the counselling process at the DCCD

Key words: Directorate for Counselling and Career Development (DCCD), career counselling, career counsellor, student, blended counselling, qualitative research, ethonography, auto-ethongraphy, Holland career theory, social cognitive career theory, chaos theory of careers.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

References

List of tables

List of figures

Chapter 1
Career counselling at Unisa

1.1 Introduction

The Directorate for Counselling and Career Development (DCCD[1]) at the University of South Africa (Unisa) provides career counselling services aimed at assisting students and prospective students with career choices and qualification selection. As Unisa is a distance learning institution, career counselling is facilitated through different modes in order to ensure that the majority of both prospective and registered students, as well as the broader community can utilise these services. Career counselling is thus provided one-on-one or to groups. Here, various media are utilised such as the telephone, e-mail, posted letters and workshops. The University has accepted an open distance learning model that emphasises the provision of student support to all students regardless of constraints. The main constraint for many students is their geographic location since the student population is spread all over South Africa. Most Unisa students live in South Africa, followed by Africa and other countries (University of South Africa, 2008).

There are various counselling services offered by the DCCD. Some of the initiatives involve pre-counselling, whereby all students applying to the university for the first time are asked if they need career counselling before they register. Those who indicate that they do, are contacted either by phone, e-mail or letter and invited to see a counsellor in person or join a series of career workshops. The following are the Directorate's aims in providing career counselling to prospective students (University of South Africa, 2010, p.1):

The aims of the DCCD are to:

- "assist prospective students with information and activities to make a career decision.

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[1] In this thesis the Directorate for Career Counselling and Development will interchangeably be referred to as "DCCD" or "The Directorate".

- encourage prospective students to engage with the information so that they can take ownership of their study and career choices
- model the process of studying through open distance learning: Self-management, information gathering and decision making skills are important
- discourage the perception that there is a quick fix for making career choice"

In summary, the Directorate's main role is to facilitate counselling that impacts on the student's life as a whole: This extends to more personal counselling, such as coping with relationship difficulties and even loss while the academic counselling involves aspects such as choosing a career, selecting the appropriate qualification, developing the applicable study skills, problem solving skills and decision making skills.

As a professional counsellor, I have been counselling Unisa students for seven years. Prior to this, I worked with students as an Assistant Student Counsellor for two years and also as an Administrative Assistant for three years. In these positions I was also allowed to render counselling since I was registered for my Masters in Clinical Psychology. When reflecting on my role as a counsellor, it remains a challenge to assist students within a distance learning institution. Sometimes I feel that I do not reach the students and at other times I am encouraged by the positive feedback.

The DCCD does not have any written or unwritten agreed approach or framework to guide career counsellors. Therefore, my experience has been that each career counsellor follows his or her own approach when providing career counselling to students. This creates a challenge when a student has to follow up with a different counsellor and there is a contradiction in styles and approaches. There have however been many debates among career counsellors at the DCCD in order to find consensus on how to provide career counselling to students. Some of the questions and concerns raised are related to the impact that our different approaches to counselling have on facilitating the career decision of our clients. Our differences have not been resolved and I remain uncertain about the most effective way of facilitating career counselling in

a distance learning context. Despite the fact that the directorate as a whole does not have a pronounced framework, when I started working with a team of counsellors who were responsible for the development of career resources especially resources meant to assist prospective students, I realised that they always integrate theory and their experiences as well as feedback from prospective students in order to have a framework to assist prospective students. I realised that this alone does not assist the counselling process. However, it was also effective for me to have such a framework when I had to train or model the career counselling process to counsellors, assistant student counsellors and peer helpers whom I trained and supervised.

There has not been any attempt to investigate the process and its impact in a practical way by means of research. This means that there is a dire need to do research on the suitability of different approaches, or the possible combination of approaches when providing career counselling to students.

Stemming from this gap in knowledge and need to do research, it should be noted that facilitating career counselling in a distance learning context rarely creates a space that allows the counsellor and the student to reflect on and evaluate the counselling process. This is due to a number of factors, such as the distance learning context where students find it hard to follow up, and the large number of students in relation to the small number of personnel.

There is also a need to get feedback from students in order to inform the counsellor whether he or she was effective in addressing their needs. Furthermore, feedback from students can help us to evaluate the relevance of the counsellor's preferred career counselling theoretical framework. This means that as we conduct research, we are evaluating the impact of our theory and its practise on our career counselling process, as experienced by the counsellors and the prospective students. This could be a more ethical way of using the theories as a framework which guide our counselling process and also use the same framework to develop career counselling interventions, since

they will be sensitive to the student's needs and context. Maree (2013, p.409) argues that "counselling theories provide counsellors with the theoretical foundation to establish best practices in the best interest of clients".

1.2 Background to the study

Watson and McMahon (2009) argue that the field of career counselling in the 21st century has been using individualistic theories and models which originate from developed countries such as in North America. The validity of these models and theories is questionable within the developing world's context. South African authors such as Mkhize and Frizelle (2000), Maree and Molepo (2006) and Watson and Fouche (2007) are critical of the over-reliance on the adoption of the de-contextualised career counselling models and approaches. They point out the limitations in adapting such models within the South African setting. According to Stead and Watson (2006), career counselling in South Africa is in need of research that provides evidence for workable career models and techniques. They further propose that career practitioners and researchers should provide new techniques and models rooted in the South African environment.

Watson and McMahon (2009) found that the debate on the adoption of and adapting the North American models to the South African context has been more on a theoretical level, rather than on a practical level. Maree (2009) argues that career counselling in South Africa is still characterised by psychometric assessment procedures in comparison to the rest of the world, which is becoming more qualitative. Furthermore, he points out that many colleagues have criticised the application of the test-and-tell approach in isolation and of accepting models developed in North America and Europe in South Africa, without questioning the validity and reliability thereof. Maree (2009) further questions whether the most viable option is to develop unique models for developing countries or whether to adapt North American models. He has called for research into an approach that would take a developing country perspective into account.

Watson and McMahon (2009) acknowledge the fact that there have recently been attempts to change by applying the constructivist approach to career counselling. Constructivism represents a philosophical shift from logical positivist traditions with the reliance on observable, linear, objective and predictive measurement; towards a more interactive and dynamic approach to career counselling in which individuals construct their own reality within the environments they live in (Watson & McMahon, 2009). It encourages the use of qualitative and narrative approaches to career counselling that value clients as active agents in the creation of their careers.

This approach has been applied within the context of South Africa by career practitioners and researchers such as Eloff, Stead and Watson; Fritz and Beekman; and Maree and Molepo (cited in Watson and McMahon, 2009). It has been found to be relevant within the South African context as they recognise the holistic and interconnected nature of the individual in career counselling. However, the existing research and application of the constructivist approach, as applied to career counselling models relevant within the South African context, are still not focusing on the process of career counselling in a distance learning context. Thus the purpose of this study is to explore counsellors' experiences of the career counselling process with students at a distance learning university.

Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2009) however argue that despite the substantial influence of career development theory, we know relatively little about the career counselling process as career counsellors rarely study how career counselling actually "works". They further note that many career development researchers focus their effort on career counselling outcomes.

Whinston (2003), in support of the above view, states that despite more general evidence that career counselling is effective, we know less about the effectiveness of specific career counselling models. This lack of information is said to be even more

glaring when considering which career counselling models work for which clients, under what conditions. Whinston (2003) points out that there have been significant theories related to career choice and development; unfortunately, these important theories cannot be directly translated into an approach to career counselling. Furthermore, there is not an established method or model for conducting career counselling that is consistently used in the field and evaluated by researchers. Hence, career counselling professionals do not have a clear understanding of precisely what is effective. Whinston (2003) further argues that contrary to other counselling fields, the theoretical models in career counselling have not evolved to the point where it is possible to say Theory A is better than Theory B with a specific group or specific circumstances. Whinston (2003, p. 40) therefore calls for a "surge in research that focuses on the process and outcome of career counselling", in order to address the current gap in career counselling.

Whinston's reference to the gap in career counselling research became more evident to me when reviewing career counselling research conducted within the distance learning context. I could not find any South African or African study after a thorough and intensive literature search. This highlighted the importance of such a study at a distance learning institution, such as Unisa. The dearth of research on the process, further made me aware of the importance of focusing on the process of career counselling as experienced by counsellors who facilitate the process.

I could however find a related longitudinal study done in England at the Institute of Employment at the University of Warwick, which examined the exact nature of effective guidance and how it affects clients' lives. Fifty in-depth case studies were completed during the period 2003-2004 and clients were followed-up over a four-year period, from 2004-2007. Client perceptions of guidance have been compared with practitioners' perceptions and those of a third party, who was regarded as an expert witness (Bimrose & Barnes, 2006). The findings of the initial phase of the research indicates that guidance is useful to clients when it provides challenge and direction, gives access to relevant resources, can be assessed over a period of time, brings about positive

change(s) and provides support and safety (Bimrose & Barnes, 2006). One of the gaps identified by the study was that there is little evidence of new approaches to career guidance, which raises questions about different approaches being used and also what constitutes good practice and how it can be supported.

1.3. Statement of the problem

The DCCD's core business in the University is to provide career, academic and personal counselling to all prospective and registered students. These services are rendered by counsellors who have different backgrounds with regard to their experience, qualifications and professional training. Furthermore, different interventions have to be developed to assist counsellors to address the career needs of Unisa students during career counselling. This includes tailor made e-mails, templates that are completed during telephone counselling and workshops facilitated to groups.

This research arises from my experience facilitating career counselling to students and contributing to the development of resources used during the career counselling process from 2009 to 2014. In addition, I also had to train and supervise counsellors on how to facilitate counselling and use the appropriate resources. Since 2009, the framework that was initially developed has changed over time. These changes were influenced by students' feedback responses, the counsellors' experiences and the counsellors' exposure to new counselling theories. Even though different theories impact on the content and the style of how career counselling is being facilitated, it does not represent the standard DCCD framework. The onus is therefore on the counsellors to facilitate the counselling as they see fit. Despite being involved in the process; I still cannot articulate how other counsellors experience the career counselling process with students.

The aim of this study is to explore counsellors' experiences of different forms of counselling sessions they rendered with students such as face to face career counselling, or career workshops. This study could serve as a foundation for further

exploration regarding the integration of theory, research and the practise of career counselling at a distance learning institution. This in turn could be used in the development of additional career counselling models at Unisa and other similar institutions.

The research problem of this study is formulated as follows: What are the counsellors' experiences of the career counselling process with students?

1.4. Purpose of the study

A qualitative research approach will be used where career counsellors can provide detailed descriptions of their experiences of the career counselling process. An ethnographic research design is relevant since it involves "an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context" (Tedlock, 2000, p. 455). Furthermore, an ethnographic study as described by Tedlock (2000) allows the research process that integrates research methods such as field work, and various methods of inquiry to produce historically, politically and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations and representations of human lives.

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to explore:
- the counsellors' experience of the process of career counselling provided to students at a distance learning institution;
- my own experiences doing counselling with Unisa students;
- the role of theories in the career counselling process – how various theories shape the process of career counselling provided.

1.5 Significance of the study

The study intends to enhance the effectiveness of the career counselling provided to prospective students as it would attempt to provide a framework based on research and practise. Counsellors would also be able to apply the framework when facilitating career counselling which will minimise contradiction. This could also impact on the

development of a framework for other career counselling interventions offered to students at distance learning institutions. Maree (2009) confirms that the frame of reference of the theory base for offering career counselling in institutions of higher education in South Africa needs rethinking. By developing this framework for counselling at a distance learning institution, it could benefit other South African institutions of higher education when rethinking the frame of reference, especially in addressing the career counselling needs of students.

1.6 Overview of the chapters
The remaining chapters will include the following:

In Chapter 2 the research methodology of the study will be discussed. Attention will be given to qualitative research methodology, with ethnography research as the specific approach that will be applied in this study.

Chapter 3 is a presentation of the career counselling theoretical framework underlying the facilitation of the career counselling process to students. Holland's career theory, the social cognitive career theory and the chaos theory of careers will be described.

Chapter 4 focuses on the presentation of the research participants' stories of becoming career counsellors. The participant biographies as well as their academic and professional training, the theoretical frameworks that they use in career counselling as well as on their successes and disappointments will be explored.

In Chapter 5 the themes and subthemes derived from the participants' stories as well as my own experiences will be presented.

Chapter 6 presents a conclusion as to whether the study has met its aims and will give recommendations. Suggestions for further research will also be made.

1.7 Conclusion

From the literature review and my own experience as a career counsellor at the DCCD, I have noted that there is no defined model for career counselling within a distance learning context. The fact that every counsellor at the DCCD follows their own approach when rendering career counselling services creates problems as continuity is lacking. There is also no research to be found on the career counselling process within a distance learning context. Results from the literature review indicates that most career counsellors in South Africa seem to believe that career counselling approaches and models developed outside their context are not reliable and valid.

The aim of the study is to explore counsellors' experiences of the career counselling process with prospective students at a distance learning university and the role of the career theories in shaping the counselling process.

Chapter 2
Research methodology

2.1 Introduction

I chose qualitative research methodology for the study since it allows me to gather data through natural interaction with the participants who are counsellors in the DCCD. Ethnography is the most suitable qualitative research design because the aims of the study are to explore the culture of the career counselling process as experienced by counsellors. The fact that I also reflect on my own counselling experiences lends itself to auto-ethnographic research.

This chapter discusses the research methodology of the study. Firstly, an overview of research methodology will be given, followed by the differentiation between qualitative and qualitative research. Next, I describe the qualitative research and the ethnography approach that is applied in this study. Here, the epistemology and practise of ethnography and auto-ethnography research and its underlying assumptions will be discussed. Next, the methods of data collection, sampling of research participants, sites, and data analysis process will be discussed. I will also examine reliability, validity, and generality of the study and the ethical issues pertaining to this study.

2.2. Research methodology overview

This section provides an overview of research methodology. It is important to clarify the terms research methodology, research methods and research paradigm as Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p. 20) state that "the conceptual terms are often used interchangeably and confusingly". Research methodology focuses more on the core principles for conducting qualitative research and learning to make sound judgements about the methods (Neuman, 2011). Research methods deal with specific strategies and procedures for implementing a research design, including sampling, data collection, data analysis and interpretation of the findings (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Research methods are determined by the overall methodological orientation of the researcher.

The role of the research methodology is to guide the research and to indicate how the researcher can practically study the phenomenon in question. The emphasis of research methodology is therefore an understanding of the entire research process. Neuman (2011, p. 2) argues that "research methodology and methods are closely linked and interdependent".

In order to further understand the concept of research methodology it is important to define the concept of research paradigms. Paradigms are all "encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 6). These authors describe the three dimensions as follows: Ontology guides the researcher to the nature of reality of what will be studied, and what can be known about it. On the other hand, they state that "epistemology determines the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known" (p. 6). In other words, epistemology shapes the focus and the interaction of the researcher with the participants. The methodology of the study "specifies how the researcher may go about practically studying whatever he or she believes can be known" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 6). The research methodology determines the research questions and the type of data to be collected and the data collection process.

Delport, Fouché and Schurink (2011) point out that the research paradigms do not necessarily answer the important questions, however, they guide the researcher on where and how to look for answers. In addition, they shape the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Researchers in the social sciences have a variety of paradigms to choose from depending on the nature of the social behaviour they want to understand. Each paradigm through its assumptions provides researchers with a unique way of looking at human social life and the nature of reality. "Paradigms are neither true nor false; they are only more or less useful" (Delport et al., 2011, p. 298).

Gladding (2007) argues that when selecting a suitable research methodology, counselling researchers are confronted with various challenges. This is mainly because there is no particular research method which can be regarded as best since different research methods address different research questions. In addition, Gelso (cited in Gladding, 2007) highlights that all research methods have "bubbles or flaws", and that as much as research methods are imperfect, they are still valuable since the only way to avoid all flaws, is not to do research.

Research methodology within the social science research can therefore be summarised as the understanding of the entire research process. This includes the social-organisation context, philosophical assumptions, ethical principles, and the political impact of new knowledge from the research enterprise (Neuman, 2011). The selection of a research design is therefore influenced by the nature of the research problem, the researcher's personal experiences and the audiences of the study (Fouché & Delport, 2011).

In order to set the context for this chapter, the section will provide an overview of research methodology, as well as articulating the importance and the role of the research methodology, research methods and paradigm in the research process. It is important for this study to discuss and differentiate between qualitative and quantitative research methods which will be described in the next section.

2.3 Qualitative vs. quantitative research approaches

This section discusses the two research approaches namely, qualitative and quantitative. The discussion then shifts to the qualitative research methods that have been selected for this study.

Authors such as Denzin and Lincoln (2005), Creswell (2009), Delport and de Vos, (2011) view qualitative research as a process that study phenomena in their natural settings, while attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the

meaning people ascribe to them. The focus in qualitative research is on process and meaning, which emanates from the socially constructed and established relationships between the researcher and what is being studied. Qualitative research allows the researcher to capture the stories or experiences of the participants in their own context. This leads to the researcher being able to report the emerging themes emanating from their own accounts (Delport & de Vos, 2011).

On the other hand, quantitative research is described as a means of testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables (Delport & de Vos, 2011). Creswell (2009, p. 3) points out that the variables in quantitative research have to be "measured on instruments so that the numbered data can be statistically analysed in order to determine the predictive generalisations of the theory".

Leedy and Ormond (cited in Fouché & Delport, 2011) have identified the following characteristics of quantitative research:

- It is applicable and effective wherein the research questions focus on relationships in order to explain, predict and control phenomena since the goal of the research process is to establish, confirm or validate relationships and to develop generalisations.
- The research process is structured and the study concepts, as well as methods of measurement are clearly defined even before the study commences.
- During the research process quantitative researchers ensure that they strictly control and isolate the variables they want to study. Data is collected through standardised procedure and then statistically analysed.
- Deductive reasoning seems to be more predominant in quantitative research, whereby they begin the research with certain premises and then draw conclusions from the premises at the end of the research.

The following are the common assumptions of the qualitative research design as stated by Creswell (2011 & 2013):

- Data is collected directly from the participants in their own environment.
- The data collection process involves interviews, observations and documents, observing behaviour and interviewing participants rather than relying on a single data source.
- The researcher interest is on learning the meaning that the participants hold about their experiences related to the problem or issue being studied.
- During the data analysis stage of the research process, the researcher engages with the data collected in order to establish patterns, categories and themes.
- The research process is fluid and cannot be predetermined since the research process may change or shift after the researchers enter the field or during the process of collecting data.
- The researchers disclose their personal position in the study and how it influences the research process.
- Qualitative researchers investigate the research problem in a more circular way in order to allow a more holistic and broader picture of the problem under study.

Gladding (2007, p. 302) concludes that qualitative research is "inductive and phenomenological, placing primary emphasis on understanding the unique frameworks within which persons make sense of their feelings, thoughts and behaviours". The focus is therefore on understanding a complex social situation without previously defined parameters. This justifies the use of qualitative research in this study, since I could not find any research study conducted in the African or South African scientific research literature on counsellors' experiences of the career counselling process with prospective students. The feedback from this study could therefore play a major role in understanding the career needs of prospective students and how career counsellors can effectively address them during career counselling. The recommendations could then be applied in order to strive towards addressing their career needs and further recommending a framework that could be applied when facilitating career counselling at Unisa. The findings are even more critical in a distance learning institution such as Unisa, since in my experience there is no study done to provide a better understanding

of career counsellors' experiences of the career counselling process with students in a distance learning context.

The distinction between quantitative and qualitative research does not imply that these approaches are mutually exclusive or the other one is better than the other. Fouché and Delport (2011) argue that the distinction is meant to clarify how each method has its own unique characteristics, which needs to fit with the nature and aims of the study. Durrheim (2009, p. 43) concurs with the aforementioned authors by pointing out that "qualitative and quantitative research have differing strengths and weakness, and constitute alternative, not opposing, research strategies". It is important to realise when differentiating between the two that each one has its own strengths and advantages when being applied in a specific research process.

The discussion above that summarises the main characteristics of a qualitative study, affirms the decision to choose the qualitative methodology as appropriate for this study. Therefore, I will be exploring the experiences of counsellors of the career counselling process with students. Working with the different career counsellors' experiences creates a context for multiple realities to emerge.

Qualitative research also allows me as the researcher to be part of the research process as I reflect on my own experiences when interacting with counsellors as well as students. It is also important to clarify that the research study fits with the assumption of the social constructivism research paradigm since the study seeks to understand the world in which the researcher lives. In the social constructivism paradigm, the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participant's views of the situation and it addresses the process of interaction among individuals focusing on the specific contexts. The research aims of the study and the process allow the study to fit with the social constructivism research paradigm and the qualitative research methods (Creswell, 2013).

Gladding (2007) argues that differentiating between the two approaches does not imply that either qualitative or quantitative research is superior to the other. However, what determines which research approach is appropriate for a specific study is the research question being explored. Qualitative research methods therefore allow me to engage in an open-ended, inductive and exploratory research process. It enables me to focus on the experiences of the career counsellors and also to investigate how the Holland career theory, social cognitive career theory, and the chaos theory of careers impact on the facilitation of the career counselling process with students. Cresswell (2013, p. 69) has described the five qualitative approaches to inquiry which are "case study, grounded theory, narrative, phenomenology and ethnography". I have chosen ethnography as the research approach for this study. I will now describe ethnography as the research method of the current study.

2.4 Method of the present study

Ethnography as a research method has been chosen for the current study. Since I am also part of the research this study is therefore also auto-ethnographical in nature. Tedlock (2000, p. 455) describes "ethnography as an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events and understanding into a fuller, more meaningful context". Wolcott (2010, p. 172) define auto-ethnography as a "self-narrative that places the self of the researcher within the social context under study". I am sharing my own story of my experiences as a counsellor at Unisa while also exploring how other counsellors experience the counselling process.

2.4.1 The nature of ethnography

Ethnography and ethnographic research are regarded as the oldest forms of empirical research which is now regarded as social research (Winiecki, 2009). Winiecki (2009) further points out that ethnographic research has its roots in the discipline of anthropology where it is a preferred research method when investigating the exotic non-western cultures and peoples of whom there is little formalised knowledge. The ethnographic research approach enabled anthropologists to learn social and cultural

values, rules and how those things are brought together to produce and maintain social systems.

Wolcott (2008) cautions that ethnographic research is no longer the study of culture as is normally described but a study of social behaviours of an identifiable group of people. Wolcott (2010, p. 23) argues that "ethnographic studies are studies of everyday life not of culture since 'culture' is the biggest generalisation". Wolcott (2010) clarified that the use of the word culture was useful for keeping the anthropologist oriented however it has no utility in presenting data and on current research.

The term ethnography has its origin in the Greek word that refers to a description of a group of people and their way of life (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis and Quizon, 2005). Creswell (2013, p. 73) describes ethnography as "a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviour, beliefs and language of a culture sharing group". The culture sharing group of the study population according to Creswell (2013) could be a small group or a large group. However, the most important aspect is that there is an interaction among the people who are the focus of the study.

Wolcott (2008) further points out that the focus on ethnographic research is on developing a complex, complete description of the culture sharing group. According to Cresswell (2013) the researcher in ethnographic research studies the meaning of the behaviour, the language and the interaction among the members of the culture sharing group. Patton (2002) concurs with the above and further states that the central guiding assumption in ethnographic study is that any human group of people interacting together for a period of time will evolve a culture. Culture, according to Patton (2002, p. 81), is described as "the collection of behaviour, patterns and beliefs that constitutes standards for deciding how one feels about it and standard for deciding how to go about it." The focus of the study in exploring the counsellors' experiences of the career counselling process with students, fits with Patton's description of culture described

above. The practise of career counselling also fits the description of a culture and also the interaction among counsellors as well as the interaction between counsellors and the students.

Ethnography as a research approach is described as both an approach in data collection and a philosophical paradigm (Wolcott, 2010). In addition, Patton (2002) describes ethnography as both a process and a product. Ethnography allows the researcher to be part of the day to day lives of people and observes and interviews the group of participants. The main research method of ethnographers is participant observation (Wolcott, 2010).

Wolcott (2010) explains the importance of theory in ethnographic study. Theory helps the researcher to focus on patterns of a culture sharing group, even when interacting with research participants. Suzuki et al. (2005, p. 206) conclude that "ethnography describes forms of social research that focus on:

- exploring the nature of particular social relationships
- gathering and using unstructured data
- using a relatively small number of participants
- interpreting the meaning of human behaviour."

The relevance of the ethnographic approach in this study is that it will enable me to contextualise the experiences of counsellors, prospective Unisa students and also my own experiences of the counselling process within the Unisa context. According to Wolcott (2010) there are two fundamental questions that an ethnographic study must answer: The first question relates to an understanding of how the participants manoeuvre the information and the relationships to ensure the functioning of the system. The second question relates to how the knowledge is shared to the new counsellors who join the counselling team. These questions also apply in the context of the study when exploring the experiences of career counsellors and their experiences of

the counselling process which incorporates how they negotiate relationships as well as how career counsellors share the information especially with new members.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) identify a number and types of ethnography that include life history, memoirs, narrative ethnography and auto-ethnography. I will briefly explain auto-ethnography since I will be including my experiences not only of the research process but also of the counselling process with prospective students and with counsellors.

2.4.2 Auto-ethnography

Ellis (2004, p. 73) defines auto-ethnography as "a research process with multiple layers of consciousness which includes the vulnerable self, the coherent self, self-critiquing and the self in social contexts, the subversion of dominant discourses and the evocative potential". Ellis (1999, p. 671) describes auto-ethnography research as "a research process that allows the researcher to understand themselves in a deeper way and this further allows them to understand others in their context that shares the same experiences with them". Muncey (2010) further added that this research process has impact in the individual while engaging in the research process.

Ellis (1999) argues that through auto-ethnographic research the researcher creates an opportunity to do something meaningful for themselves and others. I embarked on this research study after reflections, conversations with peers and being part of the counselling process with students. I realised that there are questions that remain unanswered and that I have uncertainties about the experiences of the career counselling we offer to students. The research study process helps me to connect to my experiences, my uncertainties and to further make sense of the other counsellors' experiences. The research process also provides space for career counsellors to reflect on their career journey and the practice as counsellors at Unisa.

Ellis (2004) explains that auto-ethnographical studies contain the personal story of the researcher as well as the larger cultural meaning for the individual story since the researcher's own experiences are used to gather more insights into the larger culture or subculture of which they are part of. Auto-ethnography as a subsidiary of ethnography forms part of participant observation. Muncey (2010, p. 4) mentions that "not only is the individual a participant in the social context in which their experience take place, but also an observer of their own story". Furthermore, in ethnographic research there is no distinction between doing research and living a life since the auto-ethnographer is both the researcher and the researched. The reason is that the researchers in auto-ethnographic studies cannot separate who they are from what they do (Muncey, 2010). Contrary to other research methods, in auto-ethnography subjectivity of the researcher does not have a negative impact since making links between the researcher's experiences and the research process is regarded as healthy.

Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 737) point out that auto-ethnography has a wide array of textual practise and describe some of the widely used expressions that provide a sense of the range of approaches associated with auto-ethnography such as reflexive ethnography, native, and analytic auto-ethnography. This research study fits more with analytic auto-ethnography. Anderson (2006, p. 380) refers to analytic ethnography as "a research process where the researcher is a full member of the research group or setting and is visible as such a member also in published text. Furthermore, the researcher is committed to theoretical analysis in understanding the social phenomena".

Ellis and Bochner (2000) conclude that an auto-ethnography study explains struggle, passion embodied life and the collaborative creation of sense making in situations. The research process requires the researcher to be vulnerable and intimate to the research group. Ellis (1999, p. 669) suggests that auto-ethnography "connects the practices of social science with the living of life. The goal is to open conversations about how people live rather than close down with a definitive description about the world as it truly exists outside the contingencies of language and culture".

2.5 Research setting and time frame

Suzuki et al. (2005) explain that prolonged engagement in terms of ethnographical study is defined in terms of a period from 6 months to 2 years' investment in the field. The authors argue that this is recommended to allow the researcher to develop a relationship with the communities that they study. It was easy for me to access the research data and research participants since I was a counsellor at the research setting. I started with my research process in 2009 and I have formally and informally interacted with research participants and shared their experiences as counsellors with students. I could negotiate directly with the research participants without the influence of the gate-keepers.

Wolcott (2010) cautions that when the researcher reports on their personal experience, they must not allow personal feelings to interfere with the accuracy of the reporting. However, there is no limitation on how personal and revealing the researcher can become when sharing their experiences.

2.6 Sample

In this study purposeful sampling will be used as this sampling method involves choosing individuals who have had experiences with the phenomenon under study. Purposeful sampling is applied in qualitative research to enable the researcher to select participants and sites that can purposefully inform and provide a detailed and rich understanding of the research problem of the study (Strydom & Delport, 2011). Purposive sampling is also seen as judgemental sampling since the sample of participants chosen are entirely based on the researcher's judgement on whether they fit the characteristics or have had the experiences of the population that serve the purpose (Strydom & Delport, 2011). Cresswell (2013) point out that ethnographers rely on their judgement to select members of the subculture or unit based on the research questions.

The research sample will be composed of six Unisa career counsellors (at various levels of seniority) chosen by the researcher for their experience in the field of career counselling with students and their willingness to participate in the study (from a total staff number of 17). The counsellors will have had experiences of working with prospective students facilitating career counselling. The background and level of training of the counsellors will be described in Chapter 4 as well as the themes emanating from the counsellors' experiences.

2.7 Data collection

Suzuki et al. (2005) point out that ethnographers rely on a variety of techniques that are practical and relevant to the ethnographic research process such as participant observation, fieldwork and prolonged engagement. Interviewing and participant observation are the techniques most often used in ethnographic research. I will conduct semi-structured interviews with Unisa career counsellors (at various levels of seniority) who facilitate the career counselling process. Interviews will be conducted in a private place or office and can take about an hour per interview. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed afterwards.

In exploring the experiences of the counsellors I will explore some of these aspects in semi-structured interviews using the following questions:

- What are the main career needs that students present during career counselling?
- How long have you been involved in the facilitation of the career counselling process?
- How has the process of facilitating counselling to students changed for you since you started?
- How have you experienced the impact of the career counselling on prospective students?
- What guides you when facilitating career conversations with students?
- How do you use experiences/interactions and feedback from students to shape your career counselling process with prospective students?

Even though I have an idea and interest in exploring their experiences in relation to the questions above, the research participants will still be allowed to share their experiences freely without being restricted by my questions. I will even redirect the interview so that they will be able to tell their experiences in career counselling. My role will be to facilitate the conversation, however, allowing my participant to lead. Smith (1997, p. 17) explains that in "semi-structured interviews the researcher does not have to follow the sequence of questions nor does every question has to be asked in exactly the same way of each respondent".

Since I am part of the research context and interact with prospective students and counsellors, participant observation is also part of the research methods in the study since this allows also my own reflections and experiences to be integrated in the data collection. I will, however, take into account what Tedlock (2000, p. 464) cautions researchers: "ethnographers must be aware of the dynamic nature of the observational process since they both experience and observe their own and others' co-participation within the ethnographic scene of encounter."

2.8 Research objectives

There are three kinds of research objectives that influence the researcher when embarking on a research process. The objectives are personal, practical and researcher's objectives. I will discuss each of these objectives below in relation to the study.

2.8.1 Personal objectives

Creswell (2003) views qualitative research as an interpretative research which allows the researcher to be involved in the research process with the participants. I am aware of my dual roles in the research process and I will remain sensitised towards my own personal objectives so that I do not compromise the research process or silence the voice of the research participants, which could invalidate the research process.

Qualitative research implies the assumption that the researcher filters the data through a personal lens that is situated in a specific socio-political and historical moment (Creswell, 2003).

I have not tried to escape my personal interpretations, but have described my involvement with the counselling process to prospective students in Chapter One. It is a way to acknowledge my interest and my curiosity in understanding the experiences of counsellors of the counselling process at Unisa. It is also for the same reason that I have chosen the research method to be ethnography and auto-ethnography since it is aligned to my stance in this research study. Suzuki et al. (2005) explain that ethnographers are neither invisible nor neutral since they become part of the research process. These authors further highlighted that the most important thing is that researchers remain conscious about how they impact on the research process. I acknowledge that being part of the career counselling directorate influences the research process in how I look at the research questions, collecting data as well as analysing and interpreting data. The research process is influenced by my lenses when listening and experiencing the process as I immerse myself in a process that is not only intellectual, but also emotional. This awareness however helps me to consciously step out of the process in order to allow the voice of the research participants to be heard. I will systemically reflect on how my own experiences, roles, training background and my interactions with counsellors and students shape the study (Creswell, 2003).

2.8.2 Practical objectives

Practical objectives of the research process are aimed at understanding and/or, addressing the need to change the situation. This is in line with the notion that the "qualitative approach is used to answer questions about the complex nature of a phenomenon, with the aim of describing and understanding the phenomenon from the participant's point of view" (Fouché & Delport, 2011, p. 64). Furthermore, Suzuki et al. (2005) point out that ethnographers need to attend to the following in their study of human experience: what people do, what people know and how they describe their

process and the things people make or use. The research objectives of the study are aimed at counsellors' experience of the process of career counselling provided to students. Furthermore, how Holland's career theory, social cognitive theory and the chaos theory of careers shape the counselling provided and the integration of the theory with the counsellors' experience and clients' feedback and how theory shapes the career counselling process.

The research objectives have the implication of reflecting on the nature of career counselling provided at Unisa. This will not only be achieved by the researcher's report but also by the context that the research study creates with counsellors to share their experiences. This process has further impact on addressing the career needs of students in a distance learning institution which is a complex issue, especially within the South African context where the majority of our prospective students do not have access to resources that could inform them about their career choices (Maree & Molepo, 2007). Furthermore, looking at the counsellors' experiences of the career counselling process and the integration with theory could assist in generating a model which could be effective in facilitating the career counselling process with students.

2.8.3 Researcher objectives

Researcher objectives focus on gaining an understanding of a particular context. In a qualitative study researchers immerse themselves into the complexity of the situation in order to fathom the experiences of the research participants, thereby gaining an understanding of patterns and themes within a particular context. By engaging with the career counsellors who are involved in the facilitation, I hope to gain a better understanding of the career counselling processes at Unisa in order to understand the different perspectives and also the depth of the career counselling process offered from the various perspectives since I will engage with counsellors on various levels of seniority. Suzuki et al. (2005, p. 213) concur with my objective when stating "that it is important that ethnographers remain aware that the complexity of human experience

lies in the reality that people can and do hold taking into account that there will be contradictory perspectives on any given topic".

In ethnography, the researcher's personal interests and curiosity are important motivations to conduct research. I am therefore not only involved in the study as an outsider. I am also involved in the career counselling process offered to prospective students. Furthermore, my role is also to develop resources used by counsellors to assist students in making a career decision. I also train and supervise counsellors on how to facilitate the career counselling process.

I therefore have a vested interest and curiosity regarding the experiences of counsellors of the career counselling process. My interactions with prospective students during the career counselling and conversation with other counsellors initiated my thinking about my role as counsellor within a distance learning context. The selected method of the study is influenced by my own biography as a counsellor and the struggle to manoeuvre between the research process and my involvement in career counselling, which are inseparable in my daily working life. In addition, I will also try to identify the limitations of existing practices in order to make recommendations on how to strengthen the process.

2.9 Data Analysis

I will start by providing an overview of the data analysis that will be undertaken and introduce thematic data analysis as the method that will be used in analysing the data of this study. The phases that will be involved in analysing data will also be described.

2.9.1 Overview of data analysis

The analysis of data involves the process where the researcher starts to systemically organise, examine and integrate data in order to be able to search for patterns and relationships with regard to the phenomenon being studied (Neuman, 2011). It is through data analysis that the researcher is able to generate understanding, expand theory and advance knowledge (Neuman, 2011). In addition, Neuman (2011) argues

that in a qualitative study, data analysis begins while gathering data even though such analysis tends to be tentative and incomplete.

Creswell (2009) explains that the process of data analysis can be best represented by a spiral image, which moves in analytical circles, sifting out themes and connecting patterns rather than using a linear approach. Creswell (2009) further argues that data analysis involves an on-going process involving continual reflection on the data collected. The researcher needs to be continuously asking analytical questions, while bearing in mind the purpose of the study even while gathering the data, making interpretations and writing the final report.

2.9.2 Thematic data analysis

The data will be analysed by using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is described by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) as "a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data". It is regarded as a method that allows the researcher to organise and describe data set in a rich, complex and detailed manner. Compared to other methods of qualitative analysis, such as grounded theory, thematic analysis is found to be accessible and theoretically flexible (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 81) argue that "thematic analysis can be viewed as an essentialist or realist method which reports experiences, meanings and realities of participants, or it can be seen as a constructionist method which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings and experiences are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society."

Thematic analysis is suitable for both a research study where the aim is to reflect reality, as well as to unpick or unravel the surface of the reality. It further speaks to its suitability as the study aims to explore the experiences of the career counsellors when facilitating career counselling with prospective students as well as to unravel the reality of the career counselling process.

2.9.2.1 Phases of data analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) and Creswell (2009) suggest that the phases or steps in analysing data need to be applied from the specific to the general and should involve multiple levels of analysis. These phases or steps are: familiarising yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Even though the phases or steps suggested seem to be linear and hierarchal, researchers are cautioned to view them as more interactive in practise and the various phases or steps as interrelated (Creswell, 2009).

The following phases or steps will be applied when thematically analysing the data in this study:

(i) Phase1: Familiarising yourself with your data
It is important that the researcher scans through the data that needs to be analysed. This involves transcribing interviews, scanning material, typing field notes or sorting and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information (Creswell, 2009). Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that it is important that the researcher should be familiar with the depth and breadth of the content by immersing herself in the data even though she has collected the data through interactive means.

Immersion in the data requires the researcher to read through the data in an active way by constantly searching for meaning and patterns. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the data has to be read through at least once before coding as identification of patterns are shaped as the researcher reads through the data.

In this phase of the study I will read through the data collected through the semi-structured interviews and participants' written reflections in order to identify the patterns and meanings that emerged from each participant's story.

(ii) Phase 2: Generating initial codes

Creswell (2009) describes coding as the process of organising the material into chunks or segments of texts before creating meaning from the information. In its practical application it involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences or images into categories, and labelling those categories with a term which is related to the language used in that specific context.

Coding forms the foundation of analysis since it organises data in a meaningful way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes therefore represent data patterns that appear to be interesting to the researcher and also data patterns that seem to be meaningfully related to the aim of the study.

Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 89) recommend that researchers work systematically through the entire data set, giving full and equal attention to each data item in order to be able to identify interesting aspects in the data items that emerge as patterns. In addition, it is important to code for as many potential themes/patterns as possible. When analysing data and generating codes Creswell (2009) suggests that researchers analyse the data for material that address the following:

- Codes that are related to the literature reviewed in the study.
- Unexpected codes that were not anticipated at the beginning of the study.
- Codes that are conceptual and also those that address theoretical perspectives.

(iii) Phase 3: Searching for themes

The phase of searching for themes involves re-focusing the analysis to the broader level of themes, rather than codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) point out the following difference between coded data and themes: themes are broader and only start to develop when

the process of the interpretative analysis of data occurs, which is in relation to arguments about phenomena being examined.

Therefore, themes entail engaging with different codes in order to determine potential themes and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. The researcher critically evaluates the different codes so that they can be combined to form a theme (Creswell, 2009). This involves looking at relationships between codes, between themes and different levels of themes and sub-themes. The researcher also revisits the categories of codes and decides whether some codes may be abandoned.

The researcher can therefore start to relate the individual themes to the aim of the study. There is however a caution not to abandon anything at this stage without looking at all the extracts in detail until the next phase, where some themes might be combined, refined and separated or discarded.

(iv) Phase 4: Reviewing themes
By reviewing themes, the researcher ensures that data within the themes are coherent and meaningful and that there are clear, identifiable, distinctions between the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is therefore important that all the themes are reviewed and refined in order to check if they are really themes and to see if there is enough evidence to support them, or decide whether they are too diverse. Next, themes need to be collapsed into one another where they mean the same thing or, if they differ, to separate them and create different or subthemes.

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe the phase of reviewing themes as a process which takes place on two levels. The first level involves reviewing all the coded data extracts. This means reading all the collateral extracts and check whether they form a coherent pattern. If they do not form a coherent pattern, the themes have to be re-considered, taking into consideration the extracts that fit and that do not fit (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The second level involves reviewing all the themes in relation to the entire process. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that this involves reviewing the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set, but also to determine how the thematic map of themes accurately represents the meanings in the data set as a whole. It is important that further reviewing and refining is done until the researcher is satisfied that the thematic map is coherent (Creswell, 2009). On conclusion of reviewing the themes, the researcher should have developed an idea of what the different themes are, how they fit together and the overall story they tell about the data (Creswell, 2009).

(v) Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

Defining and naming themes involve identifying the essence of what each theme is about, and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) it is important to ensure that themes do not capture too much, or are too diverse or complex. This phase involves revisiting the collated data and extracts of each theme and organising them into a coherent and internally consistent account with supporting narrative (Creswell, 2009).

A detailed analysis, as well as the story that each theme tells, has to be considered in relation to the broader story that the data tells that responds to the research question. The themes are then considered individually and also in relation to each other to determine the thread of the story related to the study. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) the researcher must be able to coherently describe the scope and content of each theme in a couple of sentences.

(vi) Phase 6: Producing the report

The purpose of the written report in a thematic analysis is for the researcher to tell the complicated story of the data in a way that convinces the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis (Creswell, 2009). In order to achieve the above, it is important that the analysis, which involves the write-up including extracts, are concise, coherent, logical,

non-repetitive and is an interesting account of the story the data reveals (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In producing the report, the researcher interprets the data in order to clarify its meaning and to illustrate the lessons learned in the process. Creswell (2009) points out that the lessons learned could include the researcher's personal interpretation and understanding of the study. In addition, it could also be derived from the theoretical literature where the study could either confirm past findings or diverge (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, Creswell (2009) states that it also includes new questions that arise or that need to be asked emanating from the data and analysis.

In writing the ethnographic study, the researcher relies on the participants' views as an insider emic perspective and reports them in a verbatim quote. The interpretation is a description of the group and themes related to the theoretical concepts being explored in the study (Wolcott, 2008).

2.10. Data validity, reliability and generalizability

It is important to clarify the reliability, validity and generalizability of the study since these issues have implications for the practitioners.

2.10.1 Validity

The research process will be valid if it reflects trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility (Creswell, 2009). The following three strategies will be used in this study to ensure that the process and the research results are valid:

- Creswell (2009) state that research can only be valid if it provides rich, thick descriptions of the process to convey the findings. I have already described the research process, allowing the readers to understand and have the shared experiences of the process. Furthermore, the qualitative, ethnographic and auto-ethnographic nature of the study will enable me to represent the findings which capture the in-depth experiences of the research participants. Different

perspectives about the themes will be provided where possible to enable the results to be realistic and richer to the reader.

- I will continue to reflect on my bias and my personal involvement in the career counselling process that impacts on the research process. Creswell (2009, p. 187) argues that "self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers". Furthermore, he states that good qualitative research is said to contain comments by the researchers about how their interpretation of findings is shaped by their background.

- According to Creswell (2009) spending a prolonged time in the field allows the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the study phenomenon. This allows the researcher to convey in detail the context which creates validity to the study since there is a relationship between the researcher's experience with participants and the accuracy and validity of the findings. Participants will also be invited to read and comment on their story to ensure that I have captured their story accurately.

2.10.2 Reliability

In a qualitative study, reliability implies that the research approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects (Creswell, 2009). In order to ensure reliability of the study the following procedures recommended by Creswell (2009) will be applied:

- I will check the transcripts to ensure that they do not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription.

- I will ensure that the themes will be clearly discussed as required by thematic analysis.

- I will also ask another researcher to validate the themes in order to present accurate and reliable themes.

2.10.3 Generalizability

An ethnographic study is concerned about capturing the experiences and the dynamic relationship of the group under study (Haverkamp, 2005). They are not searching for

universal laws or generalised processes. The counsellors' experiences cannot be generalised as the experiences of all counsellors at Unisa or any other institution. The experiences of each counsellor will also be captured as their own unique story. However, the study will share the patterns or similar patterns within the counsellors' stories of their experiences.

Creswell (2009, p. 192) summarises the argument of qualitative generalization by pointing out that "it is a term that is used in a limited way, since the intention is not to generalize findings to individuals or places outside of the study; however, the value of qualitative research lies in particular description and themes".

2.11. Ethical considerations

Suzuki et al. (2005) argue that the work of ethnography is grounded in genuine relationships and researchers must behave in ways that preserve the integrity and humanity of the study of participants and collaborators.

As a counsellor who is embarking on this research process, I have the responsibility to adhere not only to the Unisa's research code of ethics, but also to ensure that I adhere to the Health Professions Act of 1974 (Act no. 56 of 1974) since failure to comply could have an impact on the profession, institution and may cause unnecessary harm to the research participants. As part of complying with the institution's research ethics the study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology.

In addition, I have also complied with the ethical principles of informed consent, privacy, confidentiality and accuracy formulated by Denzin and Lincoln (2005). Suzuki et al. (2005) point out that in ethnographic research, ethical concerns arise in the recruitment of research participants, informed consent, confidentiality, protection from harm and deception.

Research participants will be informed about the nature and consequences of the research before they get involved. I will ensure that:

- research participants freely agree to be part of the research process.

- they are fully informed about the study.

- research participants could discontinue their participation in the research process if they wish to do so.

I will get the informed consent of all the participants before they participate in the study by ensuring that they understand the consequences of the research before signing the consent form. I will ensure that the identity of all the participants is not revealed in the discussion of my findings. Therefore, all data gathered will be secured properly, so that confidentiality is not breached. Therefore, all names of participants are pseudonyms. Information gathered that according to my judgement can be embarrassing or humiliating will not form part of the research report.

Furthermore, with regard to accuracy, I will ensure that I report accurate information representing the experiences of the participants and the findings of the study. The research participants will each read their individual story to ensure that they can comment if I have captured it correctly. Participants can comment and correct where they feel I have not captured their story correctly.

2.12. Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was to describe the research methodology of the study. I started by providing the overview of research methodology wherein I clarified and differentiated the important concepts such as research paradigm, research method and research methodology. The differences between qualitative and quantitative research method was discussed focussing on the key assumptions. I also clarified why a qualitative research approach is a method suitable for the study.

Ethnography and auto-ethnography as the method of the present study were described focussing on their epistemology and practise. Furthermore, the methods of data collection which are semi-structured interviews and document analysis were defined and clarified. Purposeful sampling as a sampling method in the study was then unpacked. Data collection and analysis and phases of data analysis in thematic analysis were described. I also explained how I will ensure that the issues of validity, reliability and generalizability will be complied with in the study. I concluded by discussing the ethical issues which are important such as informed consent, accuracy, privacy and confidentiality.

Chapter 3
Theoretical framework underlying the career counselling process.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide the theoretical framework underlying how I try to understand the career counselling. I will start the discussion by providing an overview of career counselling theories that are relevant to this study. Here, the discussion will focus on the main assumptions of each theory. These theories will be referred to in the next chapters of the study when discussing the experiences of the counsellors. I will describe Holland's career theory, social cognitive career theory, and the chaos theory of careers.

Jones and Abes (2011, p. 151) explain that "theories help to simplify and make sense of the complexities of life, representing an attempt to organise and integrate knowledge and to answer the question 'why?'" This chapter is my attempt to do justice to this quotation.

3. 2 The necessity of career theories

Harper and Quaye (2009, p. 11) defined theory as "a framework through which interpretations and understanding are constructed". Theory is thus used to describe human behaviour, to explain, to predict and to generate new practices and research. Hartung and Niles (2002b, p. 4) concurred with the aforementioned definition and further stated that "theories of career choice and development offer career counsellors a variety of practical ways in which to understand and promote career development to their clients, who so often search for the meaning in their academic, career, and other life pursuits".

Career counsellors at institutions, such as universities, can use career theories and develop theories as guidelines to understanding students' career challenges and to develop strategies to effectively deal with them (Hartung & Niles, 2002a). Hartung and

Niles (2002a) further explained that there is an interplay between theory and practice, since theory is used to recommend tentative solutions to educational challenges and gaps. Therefore, without theories, counsellors would struggle to perform their duties effectively and efficiently (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Hartung & Niles, 2002a).

The other important issue in career counselling practice is to continually assess and revise the interventions, while taking into account the institutional context and the career needs of the clients (Hartung & Niles, 2002b). Here, alternative career theories or integration of theories can be applied when deemed necessary, depending on the effectiveness and the outcome of the intervention.

This integration of theories is important as Hartung and Niles (2002b) support this view by proposing that different theories emphasise different issues. In addition, Jones and Abes (2011, p. 150) argue that when applied with the understanding that career theories are socially constructed and do not capture the diversity of all theories, theories can serve at least six purposes. These purposes are to namely, "describe, explain, predict, influence outcomes, assess practice and generate new knowledge and research" (Jones & Abes, 2011, p. 151). Therefore, depending on the nature of the theory, from time to time one theory can be effectively applied in respect of all six purposes.

Lewin, cited in Jones and Abes, (2011, p. 149) suggests that "there is nothing so practical as a good theory since theories represent more than a common sense or a particular view based upon one's experiences, assumptions and beliefs". The reason is that theories assist in simplifying and making sense of the complexities of life; representing an attempt to organise and integrate knowledge; and to answer the "why", which cannot be answered by our individual assumptions and beliefs (Jones & Abes, 2011). Jones and Abes (2011, p. 151) conclude by stating that "theories [including career theories] are grounded in the particularities of individual stories and experiences and serve as a way to make sense of the diversity and complexity of phenomena by reducing many aspects of phenomenon into a more integrated representation".

The following section of this discussion will focus on the specific career theories that are relevant to this study.

3.3 Career theories

This section discusses the three career counselling theories that apply to this study, namely, Holland's theory, the social cognitive theory and the chaos theory. These theories are discussed in turn.

3.3.1 Holland's theory of career choice

The Holland theory of career choice, also referred to as Holland's theory, has been described by Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2009, p. 62) as a "theory that belongs to a tradition of theoretical perspectives seeking to describe individual differences in personality types". Hartung and Niles (2002b) further explained that this theory is structural-interactive because it organises information about people and occupations, and assumes that vocational and social behaviour results from the interaction between people and their environments.

Holland's theory (1985) promotes the notion that people seek out environments that fit their personalities (Hartung & Niles, 2002b). Holland (1973) argued that people feel most satisfied when they work, associate, and live with people who most resemble themselves. Brown (2012) further substantiates this view by adding that according to Holland's theory of career choice, people need an environment that would enable or allow further development of their personality, interests, values and attitudes in their career interest and career choice. Holland (1973) concluded that this is possible when individuals are in a career environment that is congruent to their personalities.

The role of the career counsellor is to work with students to assist them in understanding their adaptive personality. Hartung and Niles (2002b) argue that matching one's personality type to a corresponding environment allows the person to

feel supported and to thrive. Holland's theory describes four assumptions, which are the heart of the theory, which indicate the nature of the personality types and environment models (Holland, 1997**)**. Here, the focus is on describing how the different types are categorised and how they influence an individual in making a career decision. The four core assumptions of Holland's theory are as follows:

i. Most people can be categorised as one of six [personality] types, namely, realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising or conventional.

ii. There are six types of environments: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional.

iii. People search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles.

iv. A person's behaviour is determined by an interaction between personality and the characteristics of the environment

(Holland, 1973, p. 26).

These four assumptions are further discussed in the section that follows.

3.3.1.1 Assumptions of Holland's career theory

In this section, the four aforementioned assumptions are discussed in turn.

i. First Assumption: Most people can be categorised as one of six [personality] types, namely, realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising or conventional (Holland,1973, p. 2).

Holland (1997) argued that the description of each personality type is a summary of what we know about people in a given occupation. Most people can therefore be categorised as one of six types mentioned above. The theorist developed these personality types by examining the theoretical ideal type in a specific environment. Holland (1973, p. 2) regarded "the ideal type as a model that can be used to measure the real person". Holland (1997, p. 11) further explained that personality types are shaped by the individual's interaction with a variety of "cultural and personal forces, including peers, parents, social class, culture and social environment".

Therefore, Holland (1997) stated that in making a career decision, individuals start by learning or identifying their preferred activities and these preferred activities then develop into interests. The role of the counsellor is therefore to work with students to help them understand their adaptive personality. Hartung and Niles (2002b) argue that matching one's personality type to a corresponding environment allows the person to feel supported and able to thrive. Here, career counsellors accomplish this task by using the interest inventories which Holland (1997) developed such as the self-directed search and vocational preference inventory.

Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2009) pointed out that the self-directed search and vocational preference inventory are used to translate individual self-estimates of interest and competencies into Holland's types. The self-directed search consists of an assessment booklet which is then used to identify the individual's Holland types, an occupation finder and an interpretive guide. The self-directed search "is regarded as the most widely used interest inventory" (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009, p. 69).

I will now differentiate between the six personality types. This is important as each personality type is fundamental to the facilitation of self-knowledge of students during the career counselling process.

- **Realistic type**

Realistic people are "doers" who prefer activities in which they can manipulate objects, tools, machines and animals (Hartung & Niles, 2002a, p. 24). They value practicality, tradition and common sense and usually avoid social situations and prefer mechanical, technical and tangible activities (Holland, 1997). They are usually perceived as "asocial, conforming, hard-headed, natural, practical and effacing" (Holland, 1997, p. 13). Realistic types prefer careers in the areas such as engineering or technology.

- **Investigative type**

Investigative people are "analysers who prefer activities that entail the observational, symbolic, systematic and creative investigation of physical, biological and cultural

phenomena in order to understand and control such phenomenon" (Holland, 1997, p. 14). They avoid activities that involve persuading or interacting with others and would therefore prefer to primarily work alone with data or ideas (Hartung & Niles, 2002b). Holland's theory (1997) predicts that the investigative person would most likely be perceived as analytical, cautious, critical, rational, and pessimistic, precise and unpopular by others. They prefer major subjects such as chemistry and biology.

- **Artistic type**

Holland's theory (1997) differentiates the artistic type by their special unique personality traits and their experiences. According to Holland (1997) these traits and experiences lead to a preference for ambiguous, free, unsystematised activities that entail the manipulation of physical, verbal or human materials to create art forms or products. Holland identifies artistic people as having an aversion to highly structured, methodological and routine activities (Hartung & Niles, 2002b). They come across to others as impulsive, expressive, independent and non-conforming. Holland (1997) predicts their interest in areas such as music, art, drama and languages.

- **Social type**

The social type is viewed as "discussers" since individuals in this category prefer activities that involve training, informing, developing or interacting and talking with other people (Hartung & Niles, 2002b). The main values that stand out are cooperation, generosity and service to other people. Social type behavioural tendencies lead to the healthy development of human relation competencies and underdeveloped manual and technical competencies. When compared to other people they are viewed as cooperative, generous, friendly, insightful, idealistic, sociable warm and understanding (Hartung & Niles, 2002b).

- **Enterprising type**

Enterprising people are drawn to activities in which they can manipulate people to attain organisational, personal and economic gains (Hartung & Niles, 2002b). They are viewed as persuasive and value risk taking, status and competition. Holland (1997) argued that enterprising people avoid scientific and observational activities and prefer business-oriented, economic activities in which they can take a leading role. They are more

comfortable when engaging with other people rather than with data or things since their intentions in interaction are to manipulate or advance their own organisational needs. In relationships they present themselves as acquisitive, adventurous, self-confident, optimistic, extroverted and domineering (Hartung & Niles, 2002b). They enjoy subjects such as finance, accounting or economics.

- **Conventional type**

Conventional people are "sustainers", since their role is to maintain the status quo and follow tradition (Hartung & Niles, 2002b). They prefer activities where they can manipulate data, keep records or machines to achieve organisational goals. It is important for conventional people that processes are accurate, stable and efficient. They experience challenges in an environment which they perceive as ambiguous, unstructured, and impractical situations and are more comfortable in well-defined, routine and methodical activities (Holland, 1997). Conventional people prefer working with data or things and when interacting with others they are perceived as careful, conforming, efficient, and persistent (Hartung & Niles, 2002b).

ii. *Second Assumption: There are six types of environments: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional (Holland,1973, p. 3).*

Holland's theory (1997) stated that each environment is dominated by a given type of personality and is identified by physical settings, which in turn poses special problems and stresses. As different personality types have different interests, competencies and dispositions, they tend to surround themselves with special people and materials and therefore seek out problems that are congruent with their interests and outlook on the world. This theory concludes that where people congregate, they actively co-create an environment that reflects their personality type and it is then possible to assess these environments in the same terms that we assess people (Holland, 1997). Brown and Lent (2006) concluded that the environment could be an occupation, a job, leisure activity, an educational activity or field of study or even the culture of the organisation.

iii. Third Assumption: People search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles (Holland, 1973, p. 4).

If people are looking for social connectedness in their environments, they are more likely to create a work environment of people with shared interests (Brown & Lent, 2006). This suggests that individuals will search and enter work environments congruent with their personality type that will enable them to exercise their skills and abilities. Further, the theory stated that environments search for people through friendship and recruitment practices; while an individual's search for an environment occurs in various ways, at different levels of consciousness, over a long period of time (Hartung & Niles, 2002b). Hartung and Niles (2002a, p. 9) concluded that the third assumption of Holland's theory reflects the underlying notion that "birds of a feather flock together".

iv. Fourth Assumption: A person's behaviour is determined by an interaction between his personality and the characteristics of his environment (Holland, 1973, p. 4).

If a person's personality pattern and the pattern of his or her work environment are known, we can, in principle use our knowledge to predict the outcome of such a relationship. The outcomes could include choice of vocation; job changes; vocational achievement; personal competence and education; and social behaviour (Holland, 1997). Hartung and Niles (2002b) explained that if the environment resembles a person's personality type, it will reinforce and satisfy the person, and the consequence will be a person with stable and predictable behaviour patterns. The assumption is that the person will find success and satisfaction in the work environment. On the other hand, if an individual's personality and work environment do not match significantly, it could result in job changes and dissatisfaction (Holland, 1997). A person's behaviour is thus determined by an interaction between his personality and the characteristics of his environment and vice versa.

3.3.2 The social cognitive career theory

The social cognitive career theory (SCCT) is categorised by Brown (2012) as a learning theory that reflects modernist or positivist philosophical thinking. The theory builds upon the assumption that cognitive factors play an important role in career development and career decision-making. Lent, Brown and Hackett (2002, p. 256) described social cognitive career theory as a "theory that attempts to trace some of the complex connections between persons and their career related contexts, between cognitive and interpersonal factors, and between self-directed and externally imposed influences on career behaviour".

In addition, according to Lent et al. (2002), SCCT complements conceptual linkages with other theories of career development. The authors further pointed out that in formulating the social cognitive theory, they tried to adapt and extend those aspects of Bandura's theory (1986) that seem most relevant to the processes of interest formation, career selection and performance (Lent et al., 2002). The aspects of Bandura incorporated in the SCCT are the triadic reciprocal model of causality, which asserts that personal attributes, the environment, and overt behaviours operate as interlocking mechanisms that affect one another (Lent et al., 2002). In addition, the SCCT is further linked to Krumboltz' learning theory of career counselling with regard to specific cognitive mediators through which learning experiences guide career behaviour (Hacket & Betz, 1981; Krumboltz, 1980; Lent, 2005).

3.3.2.1 Assumptions of the social cognitive career theory

The SCCT highlights the interplay between three personal variables that influence career development, which are self-efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goals (Lent, 2005). Lent et al. (2002, p. 262) view the "three variables as building blocks or central pieces of the puzzles for the social cognitive theory". Sharf (2006) further explained that the theory is quite complex since it involves the interaction between self-efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goals. These three variables are seen as

directly or indirectly influencing each other in a circular process when individuals make a career choice and career decision.

<u>Self-efficacy variable</u>

Lent (2005, p. 104) described self-efficacy as "people's judgements of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance". The author further highlighted that self-efficacy is different from self-esteem, since it is not a unitary or global trait like self-esteem, which refers to the general feelings of self-worth (Lent, 2005). Self-efficacy is conceived as a dynamic set of beliefs that are linked to particular domains and activities. These beliefs impact an individual's behaviour and how they interact with the environment (Lent et al., 2002). Here, the question that an individual asks him or herself is, "Can I do this?" (Lent et al., 2002, p. 256). Brown (2012) further pointed out that self-efficacy beliefs and expectations of outcomes interact and contributes towards the development of interest. This is mainly due to the author's conclusion that people tend to be interested in activities and tasks that they believe they can do well to produce valued outcomes (Brown, 2012).

Self-efficacy beliefs are acquired and modified via four primary sources of information (or types of learning), namely:
- personal accomplishment;
- vicarious learning;
- social persuasion; and
- physiological and affective states
  (Lent et al., 2002, p. 262).

Lent (2005) argued that the impact that these informational sources have on self-efficacy is determined by a variety of factors, such as, how the individual pays attention and further interprets these factors. Personal accomplishment is viewed as having the greatest influence on self-efficacy. However, the compelling success experienced with a

given task will be impacted by raising the self-efficacy in relation to the task, while repeated task failures tend to lower self-efficacy (Sharf, 2006). Sharf (2006) concluded that individual estimates of self-efficacy have an influence on career interests and possible career choices as opposed to an individual's estimation of their abilities.

<u>Outcome expectations variable</u>
Outcome expectations are personal beliefs about the consequences or outcomes of performing particular behaviours (Sharf, 2006). This includes the imagined consequences of performing a course of actions (Lent, 2005). Here, individuals ask themselves questions such as, "If I try this, what will happen?" (Lent, 2005, p. 104).

Both self-efficacy and outcome expectation variables play a role when individuals choose the career activities they would want to pursue or avoid. Lent (2005) argued that self-efficacy may be a more influential determinant in many situations that call for complex skills or potentially costly or difficult situations, such as pursuing a medical degree. Lent (2005) further illustrated how in such situations people might have positive outcome expectations about a medical degree resulting in attractive payoffs; however still avoid choosing the degree since they doubt they have the required capabilities. Lent (2005) concluded that self-efficacy and outcome expectations can influence choices; however, the impact of self-efficacy or outcome expectations on the individual's choices is influenced by the person and the situation.

Further, outcome expectations about different academic and career paths develop as the result of an individual's direct and vicarious learning experiences, such as perceptions of the outcomes they have personally received in the past and the second-hand information they acquire about different careers (Lent, 2005). Self-efficacy can also impact on outcome expectations, especially when the outcomes are linked to the individual's performance quality since people usually expect to receive favourable outcomes in tasks at which they feel competent (Sharf, 2006).

<u>Personal goals variable</u>

Lent (2005) described personal goals as the individual's intention to commit in participating in activities or processes that will contribute towards specific outcomes. According to the social cognitive theory there are two types of career goals. The first type of goal is referred to as the choice-content and entails the "activity or career the individual wishes to pursue" (Lent, 2005, p. 105). The second type of goal is known as performance goals and focuses on the quality of the performance the individual aims to achieve (Lent, 2005).

Lent (2005) explained that setting personal goals assists individuals to plan and motivate themselves in achieving their career goals, even when they are experiencing challenges. Goals therefore allow individuals to exercise their choices with regard to the qualifications and the career they would like to pursue. Lent (2005) argued that individual choices and goals are affected by the self-efficacy and outcome expectations. On the other hand, progress or lack of progress in attaining goals has a reciprocal influence on self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Therefore, when goals are successfully pursued, there is a positive impact on self-efficacy and outcome expectation. Sharf (2006) stated that individuals do more than just respond to the events and the environment around them. Goals are self-motivating and the satisfaction that comes with meeting goals, such as graduating, is highly significant. Goals, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations are therefore related to each other in a variety of ways (Sharf, 2006).

<u>Three segmental models</u>

According to Sharf (2006) other key components of the theory are the three segmental models, which form part of the social cognitive career theory's framework. The three segmental models are namely the interest model; choice model; and performance model (Sharf, 2006). In the sections that follow, I will briefly discuss the three segmental models.

The social cognitive career theory proposes that the development of academic and career interests, the formation of educational and vocational choices, as well as the nature and results of performance in academic and career spheres are the outcomes of the three distinct, but interlocking process models (Lent, 2005). Lent (2005) further asserts that in each model, the three building blocks or variables described above which are namely, self-efficacy; outcome expectations; and goals, are seen as operating in conjunction with other aspects of an individual (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity), their contexts and learning experiences to help shape the contours of academic and career development. Next, the three segment models, as previously stated, as the interest model, the choice model and the performance model (Brown, 2002), will be discussed in turn.

Interest model

According to Brown (2002), an individual's areas of interest are assumed to be an important determinant in career choice. The social cognitive career theory as manifested in the interest model emphasises both the experiential and cognitive factors that give rise to a career related interest, while also tracing the role of interest in choice behaviour and skill acquisition (Brown, 2002).

Lent (2005) explained that SCCT in the interest model view is that home, educational, recreational and peer environments expose children and adolescents to activities, such as, crafts, sports and socialising that have an impact on their career decisions. Lent (2005) argued that individuals are encouraged by parents, teachers and other influential persons to pursue certain activities that have positive outcomes. Self-efficacy and outcome expectations about particular activities therefore help to mould career interests. Lent (2005) concluded that interest in a particular activity will increase and can also be sustained if the individual's perception of their performance in the task is positive and in addition they are expecting positive outcomes. Sharf (2006, p. 336) concurred with Lent (2005) by stating that "individual interests affect their intent to do certain activities and affect their goals that relate to activities".

SCCT does acknowledge that social cognitive variables exist in relation to other relational and contextual variables such as race, gender, physical health, genetic endowment and socio-economic conditions (Lent, et al., 2002). These factors are assumed to be influential in the career decision process of an individual.

Choice model

The choice model presents a career choice as a process that involves a number of sub-processes before a decision is taken. Furthermore, the process is viewed as continuous (Lent, 2005). SCCT states that some of the sub-processes include the development of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, interest and skills in different performance domains (Sharf, 2006).

Lent (2005) argued that once initial career choices are made, they are further reflections which might lead to revision of the decision made, since individuals and their environments are dynamic. Here, life events that happen, as well as circumstances that may have changed or were not taken into consideration during the initial choice of career, may now need to be incorporated into the career choice. Lent (2005) suggested that career selection must therefore be viewed as an unfolding process with multiple influences and choice points.

SCCT divides the initial career choice process into three components (Lent, 2005, p. 108):
  a. The expression of a primary choice (or goal) to enter a particular field.
  b. An individual's taking actions designed to implement his or her goals (e.g. enrolling in a particular training programme or academic major).
  c. Subsequent performance experiences that form a feedback loop, affecting the shape of the individual's future choice options.

According to Lent (2005), the conceptual process described above, assists in the preparation of an individual making career choices as well as in resolving problems which confronts them in the choice-making process. This also highlights the point that throughout the choice process, people do not choose careers unilaterally; environments also choose people.

Lent (2005, p. 109) pointed out similarities between Holland's theory and SCCT in the respect that "birds of a feather flock together", where individuals' interests influence choice options that enable them to work in an environment and with people that fit well with their interests. Lent (2005) further stated that an important condition for the process of "flocking together" to be successful, is that there are supportive environmental conditions. However, an environment may not be supportive of an individual's choices, which means that people are not always able to pursue their primary interests and choices. Lent (2005) highlighted factors such as family wishes, economic realities, and the quality of one's prior education, as factors that could constrain one's choices. This could result in an individual not focussing on their personal interest, but on other variables that could still influence the choice process.

Performance model
Lent (2005) indicated that the SCCT is not only concerned with the development of interest and choices, but also with factors that affect academic and career related performance. The theory focuses on factors such as the quality of the individual's work, the degree of commitment and persistence in career choice path or task, especially when they encounter challenges (Lent, 2005). Lent et al. (2002) state that persistence can be seen as a matter of choice stability, involving the decision to remain with or to disengage from a particular activity. Furthermore, it could also serve as an indicator of the individual's performance in their chosen career path.

Lent (2005) asserts that from the educational and work perspective, persistence is also viewed as a sign of performance adequacy. The assumption is that competent

performers tend to persist in completing a task. According to Lent (2005) this assumption could be problematic in certain instances since persistence alone is an imperfect indicator of performance adequacy. The argument raised is that people often discontinue their involvement due to other reasons beyond their control, such as opportunities to pursue a new job or career path (Lent, 2005).

SCCT asserts that there is a feedback loop between performance attainment and subsequent behaviour. Positive benefits are linked with attempting and succeeding at a performance task, especially the task that was viewed as challenging (Lent, 2005).

3.3.2.2 Goals of career counselling from the social cognitive career theory perspective

Lent (cited in Swanson & Fouad, 2010) explained that the role of career counselling from the social cognitive career theory perspective is to facilitate a process that will allow clients to identify faulty efficacy beliefs and unrealistic expectations that might lead to poor career choices. Lent (2005, p. 118) suggested that four basic tenets are inherent in career counselling from a social cognitive framework, namely to:

a. help clients explore and identify those options that they have foreclosed because they have unrealistic or faulty self-efficacy beliefs or outcome expectation(s);

b. identify and evaluate barriers to, and support for various career choices, particularly barriers that may have led clients to eliminate a career possibility prematurely from consideration;

c. help clients modify and counteract faulty efficacy beliefs and faulty occupational information;

d. help clients with goal setting and implementation of the goals set.
(Lent, 2005, p. 118).

Lent and Brown (1996, p. 402) concluded that "the goal of career counselling within the social cognitive career theory is to help clients find a career that matches their interest,

values and skills". This is achieved through a process that helps clients to explore possibilities that fit with their personality, however discarded due to poor self-efficacy or inaccurate outcome expectations (Lent & Brown, 1996). It is important to note that the process underlying the basic tenets cannot be viewed as linear (Swanson & Fouad, 2010). These four tenets are discussed in turn.

(i) Identify foreclosed options
The first tenet refers to career counselling's first step and speaks to helping to clarify the goals for career counselling. Swanson and Fouad (2010, p. 200) pointed out that the counsellor achieves this by asking the question, "When will you know counselling has been successful?" Clarifying the counselling goals helps the client and counsellor focus the assessments and interventions towards that goal and helps clients and counsellors evaluate the process and the result(s) of counselling.

(ii) Re-evaluate and modify efficacy beliefs
The second tenet of the SCCT is that counsellors need to help clients modify faulty self-efficacy beliefs that are preventing them from considering viable career options (Swanson & Fouad, 2010).

Lent (2005) pointed out that the role of the career counsellor is to work with clients with low self-efficacy beliefs to evaluate their perceptions of their skills. Lent (2005, p. 56) suggests the following strategies a counsellor could use to help clients to modify faulty self-efficacy:
- help clients to create opportunities in order to experience successful performance accomplishment;
- help clients to attribute their performance correctly as related to their abilities especially when they perform well, and discouraging them from always attributing their accomplishment to external sources;
- ask clients to re-analyse previous experiences that they had [where they] concluded that they cannot accomplish a task;

- encourage clients to identify faulty self-efficacy beliefs that they had that led them to close off the options available to accomplish a task; and
- analyse which of those efficacy beliefs are still operating to help the client to identify methods to change those beliefs.

  Lent (2005, p. 56)

These strategies allow counsellors to facilitate counselling to encourage performance accomplishments and to rethink previous performance accomplishments. It also allows the clients, with the assistance of the counsellor, to interpret their past and present successes in a manner that promotes rather than discounts perceived competence, specifically with clients who need to modify their faulty self-efficacy (Lent, 2005).

(iii) Identify barriers and support

Lent (2005) made the assumption that people are more likely to implement their career choices if their perception is that their preferred choices will be confronted by support from their environment and that they will only encounter minimal barriers. This assumption and third tenet led to the consideration of barriers and support into the counselling process, including the workshop and its content. Lent (2005, p. 120) described the following steps in helping clients during the counselling process:
- identify and anticipate possible barriers to the choice implementation;
- analyse the likelihood of encountering these barriers;
- prepare barrier-coping strategies; and
- cultivate support for their goals with their key social systems.

  Lent (2005, p. 120)

Lent (2005) argued that it is part of the counsellor's role to assist clients to consider where and how to access the required support. Here, the counsellor could encourage the client to strengthen their available resources or to start to develop a new relationship for support.

(iv) *Goal setting and implementation*

The fourth and final tenet is goal setting and implementation. Lent (2005) highlighted the need for structure in order to manage the process of achieving clients' career goals. This is important since clients can become overwhelmed if they just have a bigger picture of their career, but lack a sense of direction regarding achieving their career goals. It is therefore important for them to leave the counselling session with some sense of commitment.

In addition, Lent (2005) stated that after the counselling session, clients are confronted with circumstances, including aforementioned barriers that could impact their career goals. It is therefore important to help prospective students to frame their goals in a way that are "clear, achievable, and specific and practical" (Lent, 2005, p. 123). This will also allow them to manage the barriers that could impact on the implementation of their career goals. When setting career goals, clients also need to look at barriers that they may encounter and where necessary explore alternative ways of reaching their career goals (Lent, 2005).

3.3.3 The chaos theory of careers

The last theory that impacts on the counselling process is the chaos theory of careers. The discussion will begin with the introduction to the theory, followed by the theoretical assumptions.

Pryor and Bright (2011, p. 25) explained that "the chaos theory has neither a unique founder nor a specific date of formulation". The authors however stated that the term "chaos" used in relation to human behaviour originated from a study by Li and Yorke entitled, *Period Three Implies Chaos* published in 1975.

The chaos theory has its roots in the systems theory approach of understanding natural phenomena with the view that nature is completely deterministic and cannot be

predictable (Pryor & Bright, 2003a). Pryor and Bright are the theorists associated with the development of the chaos theory of careers (Pryor & Bright, 2003a).

When reflecting on the development of the theory, Pryor and Bright (2014) described the chaos theory of careers as the theory that coherently articulates career development behaviour in an integrated way. The authors further point out that it has integrated both modernists' and post-modernists' perspectives (Pryor & Bright, 2014). Pryor and Bright (2003b) acknowledged the contributions of other theories such as systems theory and constructivism in the development of the chaos theory of careers.

The chaos theory of careers contends that "existing theories did not relate well to the realities beyond the immediate challenge to make a career decision" (Pryor & Bright, 2014, p. 4). The chaos theory was therefore conceptualised in 1990 as a result of the dissatisfaction with the prevailing career theories, including the trait and factor theories, Holland's theory, social cognitive theory and others. Pryor and Bright (2003a, p. 13) noted that there are "four crucial elements in career development and career choice that other theories failed to consider". The four elements are the following:

- Firstly, there is a general failure to incorporate the sheer complexity and range of potential influences on people's careers.
- Secondly, because so much contemporary theory deals with a narrow sense of matching the dynamic, interactive and adaptive nature of human functioning in the world and in making career decisions, career action is frequently neglected.
- Thirdly, the tendency of humans to construe and construct experiences and perceptions into meaningful and often unique interpretive structures for understanding themselves, their experiences and their world is acknowledged more often than actually incorporated into most contemporary formulations.
- Fourth, human experience and career development in particular tend to be laced with unplanned and unpredictable events and experiences which are often crucial and sometimes determinative in the narrative of people's careers, while gaining increasing research interest (Bright & Pryor, 2003a, p. 13).

The chaos theory of careers in its formulations and theoretical assumptions focuses on acknowledging the four aforementioned elements, which according to its theoretical views, other theories fail to address. Next, the theoretical assumptions are discussed.

3.3.3.1 Assumptions of the chaos theory of careers

Pryor and Bright (2003a, 2005, 2011, 2014) discuss a number of theoretical concepts when describing the theory. I have however decided to focus on the concepts that are relevant to the career counselling process, while still representing the theory in a manner that allows the reader to have a clear representation of the theory.

The general statement of the chaos theory was articulated by Pryor and Bright (2003a, p. 123) that "chaos theory repudiates that we live in a static, linear, cause-effect world in favour of a world of non-linear, dynamical systems, full of motion, change and emerging events". Therefore, when it comes to career choice, the future is not viewed as some distance image, but rather is regarded as close as the next career choice, next thought and next action. The concepts that are central to the theory are "complexity, chance, purposefulness, planning, and client expectations" (Pryor & Bright, 2003a, p. 124). The concepts are also quite interlinked; therefore, I have decided to integrate these concept definitions into the discussion.

According to Pryor and Bright (2010), the chaos theory of careers views career choice and career development as a process influenced by a number of factors that are constantly changing. Chaos theorists understand reality, which includes career reality in terms of complex, dynamical systems. Pryor and Bright (2012, p. 70) described the reality as "multi-dimensional, multi-casual, and multi-influenced". Pryor and Bright (2012) further stated that the reality is characterised as dynamic due to its ever changing nature that also occurs at different rates.

Brown (2012) explained that the chaos theory of career's view is that many of the forces that influence the changes are chance events that cannot be predicted, although it is still possible to plan. Amundson and Alden (2014) further described the goal of the chaos theory of careers in counselling as pushing the boundaries of clients' limitations by exploring the rigidity and flexibility of the client's capacity for change. Pryor and Bright (2011) however argued that individuals can strive for stability and control, while being sensitive to change. They therefore caution against rigidity and linear focus of viewing the career process. Pryor and Bright (2012) further cautioned that this approach can negatively impact on individuals as they tend to be unprepared to face unexpected life events.

The chaos theory of careers suggests two ideas for clients struggling with coming to terms with chance and uncertainty. The first idea is that they need to realise that the reality of chance and unpredictability does not mean that the making of and implementing career decisions and choices are futile and unnecessary (Pryor & Bright, 2011). Secondly, they need a shift in mind-set to that of the reality of chance and unpredictability in terms of their careers and life (Pryor & Bright, 2011). The shift views uncertainty as presenting opportunities for action to enhance or broaden an individual's career development and life prospects (Pryor & Bright, 2011). The authors point out that fear is a contributing factor, since they argued that clients often become overwhelmed, which impacts on their view of the uncertainty or chance events they are experiencing (Pryor & Bright, 2012). According to Pryor and Bright (2011), when overwhelmed, the focus tends to be on the negative possibilities, rather than the shift to positive possibilities that could rise from chance events.

The role of the counsellor is to enhance a client's own creativity and imagination as a way to commence change. Therefore, clients have to initiate the change by exploring possibilities in order to have a more fulfilling life and career. Amundson, cited in Pryor & Bright (2011, p. 97) concludes that, "they need encouragement to dream and hope, to

see the situation from a different perspective, to utilise the power of intuition and imagination and to consider creative possibilities".

Pryor and Bright (2011) suggested that although individuals need to plan they must also remain open and responsive to potential changes that impact positively on their career development. It is important to highlight that the chaos theory of careers does not necessarily advocate that decidedness is always the best outcome for career counselling, because undecidedness is also viewed as the appropriate and the most adaptive response in a complex, changing and unpredictable world (Pryor & Bright, 2005). Therefore, the emphasis of the chaos theory of careers is on complexity and change. According to Pryor and Bright (2003a, p. 14) the theory is regarded as a "systems theory approach in which complexity is acknowledged as contributing to the susceptibility of a system to change".

Bright and Pryor (2005) stated that client expectations are important for the counselling process since they act as a foundation for the career counselling process. Client expectations influence how the client perceives, interprets, participates and evaluates the career counselling process. Amundson, as cited in Pryor and Bright (2003a, p. 16) pointed out that "client expectations of themselves, of others, career counsellors and of life in general, and work in particular, all play a role in the career counselling process". Furthermore, clients' expectations structure their view about the appropriateness of career counselling interventions during the counselling process.

Pryor and Bright (2011) cautioned that if client expectations are not addressed the results could be a miscommunication between the counsellor and the client. Furthermore, Pryor and Bright (2011) explained that the first step in the career counselling process is for the career counsellor to reframe client expectations in line with the realities of a chaos-filled world of complexity, change, chance and interconnection. This involves clients being aware of the recognition of chance. Pryor and Bright (2011) further argued that it is a challenge for most clients to accept and

embrace unpredictability and uncertainty as an on-going career development. Chen, as cited in Pryor and Bright (2011, p. 91) explained that "one of the major goals of career counselling is to normalise chance". In other words, clients need to be sensitised regarding the possibility of experiencing unplanned circumstances that could impact on their careers and their career development.

In addition, it will also be important for clients to accept human limitation (Pryor & Bright, 2011). Therefore, clients need to confront their limitations in terms of knowledge and control since this has an impact on their career choices and decisions. Another important aspect related to complexity is the fact that clients could become overwhelmed since they could feel that there is too much to take into account. In addition, there are always other influences of which no one is aware of, which can also undermine all the decisions and actions taken on the basis of a client's knowledge when they make the decision (Bright & Pryor, 2005). Bright and Pryor (2011, p. 95) suggested that the "client's feeling of being overwhelmed needs to be acknowledged as a realistic reaction to complexity." Bright and Pryor (2003b, p. 122) concluded that "career counselling from the chaos theory of careers perspective is viewed as a collaboration with clients to negotiate, for the benefit of those clients, a chaotic reality to which no one has all the answers". The chaos theory's view is that counsellors must not tell the client what to do, however they can collaborate through conversations (Pryor & Bright, 2011).

Pryor and Bright (2011) pointed out that clients have a compelling need for certainty where they need to predict outcomes from actions. These clients constantly overestimate their levels of control and repeatedly underestimate the incidence and impact of chance on their daily lives. The chaos theory of careers proposes that one of the desirable outcomes of counselling is to enable clients to be able to acknowledge, and to live with and actually utilise the uncertainty of a chaotic reality (Bright & Pryor, 2005). Clients could only achieve this by developing a contingency plan, while still thinking creatively.

Pryor and Bright (2012, p. 75) highlighted that "career counselling needs to shift intervention perspectives from just formulating plans, to plans and planning". The authors further point out that in the changing world, plans may be addressing situations which can no longer be obtained (Pryor & Bright, 2012).

Pryor and Bright (2012, p. 75) further state that "in a complex, changing world, the chaos theory of careers suggests that individuals need to learn to be watchful, rather than assume that how their world is operating at the moment will continue to be the case indefinitely in the future due to changes in the person and the context". The authors therefore recommend that individuals need to regularly and continuously be monitoring and evaluating their career goals and plans in order to re-plan accordingly (Pryor & Bright, 2012).

3.4 Conclusion

Theories provide career counsellors with a grounding wherein they can position themselves. The theoretical stance is not only relevant to the actual career counselling, but is also applicable to other career counsellors' related professional activities which include the development of the resources.

When positioning within the specific theoretical stance, career counsellors use the theory as a foundation for their process. The theory shapes the language and focus of the career counselling process.

In this chapter I defined theory and explained the role of theory in career counselling. I also provided an overview of the three theories underpinning this research, namely, Holland's theory of career choice, the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) and the chaos theory of careers.

The discussion focused on the presentation of the main assumptions of the aforementioned theories. The first theory discussed was the Holland theory of career

choice with its four main assumptions about people and work. The first assumption that people can be categorised as one of six personality types which are: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional. The second primary assumption is that the environment can be similarly categorised. The third assumption proposes that people seek environments that allow them to use their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values and take on problems and roles that fit them. The theory's final assumption is that the interaction between personality and environment determines individual behaviour.

The second theory discussed was the social cognitive career theory (SCCT). The main fundamental concepts which were discussed are self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, choice model, performance model and interest model. Furthermore, the goals of counselling from a social cognitive theory perspective were discussed. Here the focus was on aspects such as identifying foreclosed options, re-evaluate and modify efficacy beliefs and identifying barriers and support.

The third and final theory discussed was the chaos theory of careers. The theory's main theoretical assumptions were discussed. In this respect I mentioned notions such as chance events, living with uncertainty, complexity, and preparing for opportunities.

The three theories were included because they provide a framework for how I try to anchor career counselling in the Unisa context. I will develop this thought further in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4
Presentation of the research participants' stories

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the stories of how six research participants in the Directorate for Career Counselling and Development (DCCD) at Unisa became career counsellors and how they ply their trade. In this presentation I will focus on their biographies as well as on their academic and professional training, the theoretical frameworks that they use in career counselling, as well as on their successes and disappointments.

4.2 Betty: Maintaining humility and commitment as a career counsellor

Betty's journey in counselling began in 1989 when the unit was then referred to as the Bureau of Student Services. She worked as a "mouth piece" for the counsellors since her role was to deliver counselling related content on the Unisa radio station which had an agreement or partnership with Radio 2000 to broadcast information about career development, study skills and other guidelines to Unisa students. Betty believes she was a suitable candidate for this role because of her qualification which is an Honours degree in Communication Science and being fluent in Afrikaans and English. In addition, Betty points out that, "*I suppose having a radio personality helped".* There might be some truth in this as I have experienced her as a very sincere, open and inviting person with whom I find it easy to share my own viewpoints and feelings. Betty's tone of voice and expression of words captures my attention even when we are having a telephone conversation. She is also quite eloquent and audible when she speaks which reflects not only the "radio personality" but also a personality of a counsellor.

4.2.1 A sudden change and feelings of inadequacy

In 1995 Betty had to abruptly relinquish her role at the Unisa radio broadcast due to the changes in the University and the country. The relationship between Radio Unisa and

Radio 2000 was suspended. This was however the beginning of a new chapter for Betty since she assumed her new role as a counsellor. This new role also coincided with the changes in her personal life. She tells it as follows:

"My husband relocated to Cape Town and I was fortunate enough to be offered a secondment for two years, which after two years became permanent."

Betty found herself under pressure when she recognised that the other staff members at the counselling unit were psychologists. She started feeling quite lonely and unsettled since she was left on her own to practise as a counsellor without the necessary training. I can understand this might have been quite challenging for Betty since I experience her as a person who always wants to engage with others where she feels that she will learn something while she will also contribute to others. This is how she describes her experiences:

"I think the previous years I relied very much on observational learning being in the student services environment with very empathetic leadership. I really had good mentors and people to imitate. But when I was left alone in Cape Town on my own it was rather a different case."

While Betty was still finding her feet, she had to respond to students and prospective students who were in need of career counselling. The scope of problems and the type of students that visited Betty seem to have been overwhelming. She felt that the location of their offices had some influence on the presenting problems that they had to deal with. Betty explains:

"The Unisa offices were in the Cape Town city itself, at the time, and we really had the strangest people literally walking in off the streets. If I had the vocabulary at the time, I would have been able to identify some really strange behavioural issues, pathologies if you like."

4.2.2 Developing through training

Betty's struggles and challenges of practising as a counsellor while feeling inadequate for the task were short lived. The peer help programme was introduced at Unisa to train counsellors first before they themselves had to train volunteers. Betty states it as follows:

> "*When the Peer Help Programme kicked in I was really grateful because that was my first formal experience of being taught how to counsel. The peer role came in the nick of time.*"

The skills and preparation to counselling learned from the Peer Help Programme was not the end goal for Betty but the beginning of her career as a professional counsellor. Betty was motivated to pursue her studies in Psychology at undergraduate level. On completion, she then registered for her Honours degree in Psychology since her ultimate goal was to become a professional counsellor. Betty was fortunate to be allowed to complete her internship for career counselling at her workplace which led to her registration as a counsellor with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). The internship had an impact on Betty's thinking about her role as a counsellor at Unisa and her practise as a career counsellor in training. Her reflections and exposure to different theories and literature led to the development of different career resources. The resources became available in different platforms and formats to be used by both students and staff members. Betty contributed immensely to the development, training and application of all these resources in counselling. Betty mentions that

> "*It was in the internship for career counselling that I latched onto the idea of building what became 'my Career Choice @ Unisa'* [2] *and all the permutations of that. After the completion of the internship we needed people to do something more substantial. It was the direct feedback from students that made us realise that we were on a good thing.*"

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[2] This is a brochure that Betty helped to develop to help Unisa students in their career choice.

4.2.3 Searching for an identity as a career counsellor

Despite the fact that Betty had a sense that she has a framework represented in the resources that could be applied in the facilitation of the career counselling process, she was disappointed with the fact that there is a lack of clarity regarding the identity of career counsellors. Betty articulates her disappointment as follows:

"What does it mean to be a student counsellor at an open distance learning practise? We come from different backgrounds, clinical, research, educational or Industrial. But what is a unifying factor when we work in a massive open distance learning institution with its fabulousness and desperateness? What is the glue that holds this together? For me, it is the identity of the student counsellor in open distance learning. During my internship, identity wasn't the foremost thing in my head."

Betty was disappointed because of the lack of a written framework for counsellors at the DCCD. She therefore did not identify with all the counsellors in the Directorate, which I experienced as her feeling of disappointment in the fact that there was no unifying identity for us. She further feels that there is no unity in the DCCD with regard to how to help students with their different career decisions and also those students who have unrealistic expectations, which impacted on their effectiveness as counsellors. Betty further relates this to the career challenges that confront Psychology students:

"The complexities that you deal with as student counsellors in open distance learning are a bit more intense than human interactions. It is all the technology stuff, it is all the University processes and university complexities. That also creates lots of tension for people and it erodes their motivation and when their motivation is eroded their career aspirations suffer. When I look at that and think about myself as a student counsellor and how I address these complexities in an open distance learning institution and then there is a changing nature of higher education. Then looking at how we operate as counsellors the only thing we have in common is somewhere along the line we have similar training at undergraduate level and then more diverse training at postgraduate level. But when functioning together across the country, each part of the country with its complexities. There is no unifying factor among us."

4.2.4 University changes' impact on counselling

Betty feels strongly about how Unisa implemented changes in the counselling format**:**

"Changes in the University happened when the University management decided to use the 'My career choice at Unisa' brochure which was meant to be specifically a counselling resource, to become a University information brochure. Unfortunately, this impacted on the content of the career information in the brochure since certain information which was important for career counselling was not included. The evaluation form which students could fill in and send in to the DCCD was excluded."

All this happened while Betty was celebrating that she has been contributing to a counselling resource wherein she could have direct access to students' feedback. These changes led to a sense of loss and disappointment to her. Betty expresses her experience of loss when she shares the void left by not having access to students' feedback since the evaluation form which prompted students to provide feedback was no longer part of the brochure:

"There was a publication that just belonged to counselling where in my view we could do things thoroughly. Due to integration with the application information in this brochure, counselling had to shrink their input. I think the lesson I learned from that I have to admit, years of resentment, because our pure intervention was diluted."

My sense was that Betty experienced loss when she could not receive feedback from students. Since reading through the feedback and making notes was an important ritual for her in the process of revising or developing career resources. She once requested me to analyse the feedback on condition that on completion I would return them to her. She treasured the comments and letters that students from different backgrounds wrote to her, sharing their experiences as she points out below:

"We had our golden years where students could fill in the evaluation form and send it back to us. I miss the sense of their own voices. I could hear how they were talking to us. It deprived us of immediate feedback in terms of how people experienced it when

it mattered while they are making a choice. I think it actually impoverishes our

decision making in terms of adjusting a booklet."

The fact that she treasured students' comments shows her commitment and interest in them and that she valued their contribution in shaping the career counselling process. It also implies that she believes in the necessity of student feedback during counselling.

4.2.5 Contributions and implementing theories

From the many conversations I had with Betty, I always got a sense that she was also driven by her awareness that there is a lack of career resources and career information that people can use without necessarily consulting with a professional counsellor. The brochure "*my Career Choice @ Unisa"* was Betty's attempt to contribute towards the principles of social justice and fairness because it was made available to all students. It was clear to me through my contact with her, that these two mentioned principles are embodied in her.

Betty articulates her journey to her theoretical groundings in the extract below. I describe it as a journey because it was a trial and error process where she had experimented with different theories until she integrated the theories below which became her frame of reference in counselling. Betty was exposed to a diversity of theoretical points of view which she integrated in her framework.

"During the internship I had the freedom to choose the theoretical approach that

works best for me. The social cognitive career theory was my preferred point of

departure during my internship. The thing that struck me there was agency and

barriers to learning. How to overcome barriers to learning. This has evolved into

taking cognisance of the chaos theory in the sense that there are always shifts

happening in the person's life and in the bigger community. The person's goals and

their abilities in terms of executing those goals plus how that fit in with the greater

picture. So when I sit with a student or communicate via e-mail, I am interested to

hear or read the person's story. How does that narrative start? Wherever that

narrative starts it will slot into aspects of the social cognitive theory or the chaos
theory of careers. The shifts and the strange indicators and the perturbations. It's
however just a plain and simple story. I also just respond to a story. I can think that
years of experience has given me a richer palette from which to pick colours to colour
the story and in the way that they see is possible and probable. So quite simply my
job is about hearing a story responding in such a manner that the client can take the
story and live it."

Even though Betty did not point to any specific theory in her explanation below on how she approaches counselling, it seems to be linked to Roger's (1961) client-centred approach. The way in which Betty describes how she relates to clients, captures the main assumptions of the theory. She portrays the basic principles of being congruent (genuine) and accepting the person (unconditional positive regard). She is also interested in the person in front of her and shows some of the features of empathy (Rogers, 1961). Betty seems to have now internalised this framework as her behavioural or attitudinal guide on how she interacts with and thinks about students:

"In a way all the knowledge I have doesn't really matter because it gets tested every
time I enter a relationship with a student. So I think in some way every day is like that
first month in 1989. I don't know who this person is in front of me, I don't know who
this person will become, all I can do is to be as authentic as I can in the relationship
because in many ways I really don't know…. I am grateful that it seems that in my
ignorance and perhaps sometimes not doing well that I continued with the right thing
that worked for people…. Yes, there are things that I know more and better about the
University but I will never know who sits in front of me and I will never know the
potential of that person so I hope that I maintain the humility and interest in
connecting with that person."

Betty's journey as a counsellor started when she worked in the counselling office without a specific career counselling framework. The exposure to career theories provided her with a frame of reference to develop career resources that act as a

framework for facilitating career counselling. What Betty describes as a framework is the practical application of the career theories in these resources. The framework is represented in career resources that counsellors can use when facilitating career conversations with students. This is done in such a way that the counselling process can flow naturally and the counsellor can respond spontaneously without really referring to the theory or a framework. Furthermore, her basic approach to be client-centred, contributes to her forming a relationship with the student she counsels.

Since part of her responsibilities involved training and supervising volunteer peer helpers and assistant student counsellors, it was important for her to have a particular framework for counselling and training to be able to train others and even to standardise the process of counselling. The development of resources that form part of the framework for counselling to her is one of the achievements she celebrates as her success in her role as a student counsellor, trainer, and manager. Betty explains:

"There is truly freedom in structure. If you have a structure where you feel safe and the people you work with feel safe, their feet are rooted but their arms and their minds are free to roam and to touch and to experience and to try out stuff. When they are ready to leave they will transplant. When they are with me they need to be rooted in a framework and I do think it's a great privilege to have worked with assistant student counsellors and peer helpers and interns to really experience what it is like to develop with these people the framework that works in our department, that works with our personalities, that allows people to feel safe and to have a sense of freedom."

It was also interesting to note that beyond the theoretical approaches Betty mentioned above she applies other theories or literature that could empower her to effectively deal with the issue she is confronted with as a professional counsellor in her practise or the challenges that are confronting society. Betty emotionally shared her views and experiences with race and her attempt to work with theories and her colleagues in order to firstly confront and heal her own pain so that she can respond appropriately to others:

"The opportunity to acquire higher education, is very seductive and an addictive pain for me, because it does make a difference and I have been part of making those differences. I am a pragmatist so if I experience in practise the need to have a change I will go and read and find a way through it. It has been on many levels a very painful journey to read deeply about race theory, racism and white privilege. And really battling within myself, what does this mean? In some point this year I felt strung out and incapacitated because white privilege seemed to be such a cage, such a jail that locks you up, because whatever you try to do outside of it, you can't escape your white privilege. So does it mean that that you stay in white privilege and you might become a white hermit? I started collecting lots of articles and having e-mail discussions with friends working respectfully with each other during our conversations. At times backing off when it is too painful but still committed to helping each other."

The extract above also reveals part of Betty's principles that always stood out in most conversations. I experience her as a reflective practitioner who is also conscious about being ethical in her interaction with both her clients and other staff members in the University. Betty ensures that she instils the ethical principles to the peer help helpers and assistant student counsellors. She views this as her way of contribution to the country – to help shape responsible citizens.

4.2.6 Adapting the counselling process
Betty reflects on her contribution with pride that she was part of shaping the career process at Unisa through her contribution in the development of resources which complies with Unisa's Open Distance Learning Policy (University of South Africa, 2008) and international standards and practices in career counselling.

"Where we are now in 2015, working online has become an international trend. It sits well with Unisa's Open Distance Learning Policy model and policies around blended learning. I think we were a bit slow in picking up that at Unisa we have been doing

blended counselling for quite a long time and then we do it so naturally that we
perhaps don't even think about how we describe it."

A blended approach to counselling as described above provides clients with a choice on how they wish to access counselling services. This multi-modal approach to counselling could include digital platforms (e.g. internet and e-mail) as well as off-line services such as individual face-to-face counselling, as opposed to a traditional counselling approach which is only face-to-face. Betty illustrates the application of the blended counselling approach in her practise as follows:

"One on one interaction is always I think the prime point of human relationships. So I think what has really changed for me was to become like breathing. The students, the majority of students that I see these days have made contact with me via e-mail or telephone and they followed it up most likely with an e-mail and then made an appointment. So I think the big changes for me is that I am far more insistent now that students do their homework because that is why we have got resources on-line, and that we have a number of exchanges and then have an appointment. I think what I realise within the University context is that the luxury of seeing 8 to10 students a day doesn't exist. There is time pressure on everybody: on students, prospective students and on myself. There is part of me that has always been a struggle: is it quality or is it quantity or what is the happy balance between quality and quantity?"

Furthermore, Betty acknowledges that there are a lot of changes that have happened that influence how she facilitates career counselling. She describes changes that relate to how clients choose to contact her, how she responds and also on her current circumstances and those of students. Despite the challenges and the pressure in her work, Betty remains committed in assuring that she is ethical and she provides quality services. My experience has been that in most conversations we have about our practice or interaction with students and changes that happen, she will raise her concerns around the impact of quality as well as ethics.

4 2.7 Conclusion

Betty's journey started as a counsellor with humility and an open mind. She realised that she was not fully equipped for the task at hand. This open mind enabled her to allow herself to learn counselling skills to be able to assist students. Betty persisted to learn in order to effectively help others.

Betty believes that there is no defined identity for career counsellors and no framework to work from. This may have motivated her to help with the development of a brochure for students and to adapt the counselling process at Unisa by making use of technology, for example, e-mail and internet. She also experiences a loss of contact with students caused by changes in the University when the counselling brochure became the University brochure – this has led to her receiving less direct information from students, about whom she is concerned.

Betty in her role as a counsellor, trainer and supervisor contributed to the development of resources which represents a framework for counselling, training and supervision. The contribution Betty made in the development of the counselling framework is part of her success in the counselling unit. Betty is proud of this achievement since she has experienced that it creates structure and certainty for other counsellors.

Betty experimented with different theories such as the narrative theory, Holland's theory, the social cognitive theory and the chaos theory in order to find a theoretical framework for counselling in a distance learning context. Betty found the integration of these theories applicable in her practise. These theories are therefore the frame of reference for Betty when she developed a framework for counselling that is represented in the resources she developed. In addition, in counselling, Betty applies the client-centred principles in order to allow students to share their stories. As part of her humility in helping others she acknowledges that clients must be encouraged to create their own life stories.

4.3 Sarah: Contributing to the use of technology in counselling

4.3.1 The silent participant in counselling

Sarah started her journey of becoming a career counsellor in 1995 as a contract worker at the Bureau for Student Counselling of Unisa (which later became the Directorate for Counselling and Career Development – DCCD). She was assisting with administrative tasks until January 1997 when she was permanently appointed as an Administrative Assistant in a regional office of Unisa. Due to the fact that Sarah shared an office with a counsellor, she was a witness to all the counselling conversations the counsellor had with students. She describes the situation as follows:

> *"We were in a small office, and there was only one counsellor so I used to sit in on interviews that she had with students, and also especially during registration I would like handle enquiries. So I wouldn't say I was really doing counselling at that stage."*

4.3.2 Venturing into new territory in counselling with technology

Sarah began thinking about different ways and modes of assisting students or interacting with them. It seems that the exposure to the counselling environment stimulated Sarah's creativity and curiosity. This led to her contribution to the introduction of technology into the counselling process within the distance counselling context. This is how she described the ground breaking process of introducing technology to counselling at Unisa:

> *"Because of my degree which was a combination of Psychology, Computer Science and Information Science, I became very curious or interested in how one can use the internet to also help students. At that stage, I remember when Unisa started using e-mails every day in the office which was 1994 when I started working. In 1997 Unisa also implemented the website in full scale. At that stage due to my interest and also my studies, I was basically allowed to develop the website for the Directorate for Counselling and Career Development. And that is basically where I started working on how can we use on-line resources for career development."*

Sarah's innovation in the use of technology to enhance counselling continued. I witnessed how she introduced podcasts on the website – placing audio information on the website for students to listen to in their own time, helping them with planning their careers. My experience when interacting with Sarah is that she wants to ensure that whatever services are rendered to students or clients who visit a counsellor (or the DCCD) in-person, could proactively be made available to other students who cannot visit a counsellor in-person, by using technology. Through my interactions with her, I realised that an outstanding characteristic of Sarah is that she wanted to explore and experiment with technology in order to use it to render counselling services and to enhance existing counselling services.

4.3.3 Training to become a counsellor – theoretical grounding

Sarah became interested in pursuing her career in Psychology by completing her Honours degree in Psychology. After doing so she then started her career counselling internship which she regards as a life changing experience. It seems that the career counselling internship created an opportunity for her to begin to understand how to engage with students about their careers:

> *"Things really changed when I started doing my internship for career counselling, or career counsellor designation in 2005. I was exposed to different career theories, and really started to understand the process of helping others with career choices. Before that, there was interaction with students but it was more like maybe on the curriculum level and basic career guidance."*

Sarah further explains how she started applying different theories in the development of career resources to assist students in their career decision making process. I realised that at this stage Sarah started to apply career theories in her work as a frame of reference. She however integrated theories that allowed her to apply them quantitatively and qualitatively:

> *"At the beginning maybe we experimented a lot with different approaches, one could say from a very like, can we say quantitative approach, let people tick things that help*

76

them decide versus a very open ended qualitative approach, you ask a lot of
reflective questions."

Holland's theory was among the theories that she started using and it still impacts on her work. She points out in the extract below how the theory informs her approach while facilitating the career counselling process. Holland's theory is the theory that Sarah seems to have been able to apply qualitatively to assist clients to understand who they are in terms of their personality and interest. In addition, to help them to understand the type of work environment where they could fit in better as she explained:

"One of the career theories that I would say shaped the most of my thinking in my
work was obviously the Holland theory in terms of the interest. Qualitatively and
narratively, so with the Holland for example it provides me with a framework to know
that if someone is interested in a, b, c, then most likely then they would begin the
process of exploring careers in these fields. The Holland theory helps to narrow
careers without limiting them. Even helping clients to think about themselves and
their choices. In terms of current work environment, why are some things working
and why are some things not working? I can do all those things without going into
detail of doing the self-directed search assessment, it just helps them to orient
themselves in terms of their interests and it influences their career choices."

The social cognitive career theory of the recognition of barriers in one's career journey, also resonates with Sarah's thinking. Sarah felt that the concept of barriers in one's career journey needs to be discussed during career counselling. Doing so prepares clients to overcome barriers, as she explained:

"You know with the social cognitive theory, the one thing that stands out there for me
is thinking about barriers, you know to their career, to learning. How can one tap into
clients' resources to manage those barriers? How does this counselling process
allow people to utilise their own resources to overcome barriers to learning? Thinking
more creatively about the realisation that there are challenges, but how do I

overcome this? But also the philosophical undertone that I have the belief that people have potential and how one can tap into that despite challenges?"

Sarah does not allow herself to be overwhelmed by challenges. Somehow she embodies the assumptions of the theories in her belief that she has resources and the potential to overcome challenges. When sharing your challenges with her, she takes time to encourage you to explore the resources available to overcome the challenges. Sarah has embraced helping others to overcome challenges as part of her work ethos.

The cognitive information processing approach provides Sarah with the theoretical grounding on the presentation of career information in the website. The website is designed to take into consideration that when making a career decision, the individual needs to be ready. Readiness is informed by both the self-knowledge and information about occupations. When placing information on the website, Sarah made sure that other factors in students' lives would also be taken into account, for example factors such as family, social, economic and organisational factors that play a role in the career decision making process. She told me the following:

"I used the cognitive information approach from Florida State University. It was the theory behind the development of our career website. I think over the years the activities have evolved and they are shaped by reading about the theory."

The chaos theory of careers (Pryor & Bright, 2003a) with its concepts of complexity and uncertainties in careers are some of the concepts Sarah felt she could integrate as part of her framework since they are applicable to students' careers. Students need to be aware that their career journey is a complex journey which is characterised by uncertainties. However, the chaos theory assists Sarah to further help students to know how to plan within the uncertainties in order to prepare for opportunities:

"When I started reading about the theory it had a very huge impact on me on the whole concept of preparing for opportunities. The chaos theory for me is very new but one thing I take from it is that I can use the theory to explain to clients that the career

process isn't linear. That even though they may have all these experiences, if they start thinking about it, all link together. Furthermore, I want to help clients to realise that they can do some planning despite the fact that they have to manage the uncertainty in their career journey. But also to some extent I have been shaped by the realities of being part of the system."

4.3.4 Development of resources and understanding students' career needs

Sarah continued to work in her administrative role with more responsibilities after completing her internship because there was no vacant post for a counsellor in the Directorate at that stage. Her curiosity however continued as she continuously thought about the counselling process and different ways of interacting with students. Sarah was quite instrumental in developing a brochure together with Betty. Both of them were influenced by their internship in career counselling that motivated them to provide students with more substantial resources to plan their careers.

The development of the brochure "*my Choice @ Unisa*" was a deliberate effort to achieve their goals. Sarah explained her thinking and views about how the process has evolved. She also describes the role of the feedback from students in shaping the process follows:

> "*I think in the early years before the application process became compulsory in the 'my Choice' brochure, we actually asked people to give us feedback. From the feedback, we got a sense of how people actually understood this whole process. How did the career counselling we set out in 'my Choice @ Unisa'[3] make sense or help them to make a choice? The feedback from students helped us to institutionalise the career counselling process for applicants. Institutionalise meaning that the career counselling process for applicants became an official part of the application process."*

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[3] The brochure's name has changed over time and has had the following names: "*Become one of us*", "*Unisa: your career choice*", "*your Choice @ Unisa*" and "*my Choice @ Unisa*".

Sarah gathers information about the career needs of students in her day to day interaction with them. This informs her in the development of the career resources. Sarah feels that gathering needs in her day to day interaction with clients is an effective way of understanding the career needs.

Sarah articulated her own process of making sense of the career needs of students to ensure that students can connect to the resources:

"Just from individual e-mails that I personally responded to and also seeing other e-mails helped me to understand that in, you know, you always have an idea of how this thing will work, how people will take it and you trust that due to you using different theories, and effective practices, that it will have an impact but it is not until you engage with applicants or you get feedback from them that you really sense, you know, this thing is working."

Furthermore, Sarah also explained how she takes cognisance of the individual stories and individual career needs of every client. She further described how she finds themes and patterns that can be connected within individuals' stories:

"*Each person's story would be different, but there are common themes among individuals' career stories. When I engage with people on different levels, whether it be phone calls, e-mail throughout the year, during the workshops and as I talk to colleagues, I get the sense of the themes. Those themes could then link to the individual story."*

This continuous process of linking themes to individual stories is done to ensure that there is a balance between addressing the career needs of individuals and the masses. Through my years of interaction with Sarah, I regard Sarah as an ambassador of the principles of fairness and equal access to career counselling services. The extract below reflects how Sarah had an issue with, or struggled with balancing her services to individuals versus servicing the masses because of her principle of fairness and equal

access. The extract below reflects how she integrates this principle in her day to day practise in striving to address the career needs of individuals and those of the masses:

"If you look at the whole process of 'my Choice @ Unisa', the workshops, anything that I do with applicants, it is informed by the theory. It's got the basis that individuals' stories are honoured. I constantly have to think when I work with large groups that there is the individual, but how can I help more people? There is this balance for me between honouring the individual story versus the huge need for career services. How can I do it responsibly? How can I relate to the individual stories when there is constantly this tension?"

While interacting with students and prospective students and having conversations with other colleagues, Sarah understands the main needs of students which helps her in addressing the tension between the individual's career needs and the group's needs. From her understanding of career needs, Sarah described different types of people who seek career counselling and what their career needs are, as follows:

"One large group that we work with are the school leavers, people still at the level that they need to make an initial career choice, really the basics of exploring as widely as possible and helping them to narrow down the different options. The concern is that they don't have enough exposure to different types of careers so it actually limits their choices. The whole career counselling process is to get them expand that frame of reference but not throwing it so open that they get overwhelmed. Then another large group would be people already working. They have in some sense started with their career development but now they would want to change or they would want to progress with a certain career path."

4.3.5 Crafting her career with successes and disappointments

Sarah's contribution to counselling on-line also shaped her career since in 2008 she was appointed as a senior student counsellor. Sarah crafted her position since it was her involvement in technology that led to recognition that there is a need for a dedicated counsellor whose role is to implement technology to enhance counselling in both on-line

and off-line platforms. Sarah continued with her studies and then completed her Master of Arts in Psychology with specialisation in Research Consultation where her research also focussed on students' experiences of e-counselling. Sarah is currently registered for a doctoral degree in Psychology.

Sarah experienced challenges in her journey as a supervisor, senior student counsellor and trainer. She experienced disappointments and uncertainties because assistant counsellors and peer helpers had career conversations with students without having a framework on how to facilitate these conversations. The introduction of the "*my Choice @ Unisa*" brochure was a solution to remedy the concerns and the dilemmas that confronted her:

> *"At some stage I was struggling with the let's call it quality control, quality assurance. The concerns that I have about working with peer helpers and assistant student counsellors was whether we are talking from the same book with students. So we thought that 'my Choice @ Unisa', or 'my Career' whatever it was called, is actually a good kind of structure in terms of how we do career counselling at Unisa. The theory informed the development of the brochure 'my Choice @ Unisa' but it was not in the brochure."*

She continues:

> "*Just thinking now of the assistant student counsellors, one of the concerns is always, you know, what level of service are students getting from them versus let's say a professionally trained counsellor. So having this kind of structure also creates a sense that students are getting at least similar conversations and maybe just at different levels."*

The brochure "*my Choice @ Unisa*" was designed to provide assistant student counsellors and peer helpers with structure on aspects they could explore with students when facilitating career conversations and also it gives career information.

"*I spoke about the challenge of the counsellors at all levels not having a shared framework of career counselling, specifically with applicants. In my opinion, one of the roles of 'my Choice @ Unisa' was also to provide such structure for all counsellors on all levels. In theory, the ideal was that each person, before they applied, needed to have a conversation with a career counsellor about their career and linked study choice(s). In practise, this was not possible due to limited resources. It is for this reason that the 'tone' of 'my Choice @ Unisa' had to be as if a counsellor is having a conversation with an applicant to help them select an appropriate qualification.*"

The disappointments that Sarah experienced with the lack of framework and concerns about the quality of the career counselling services also allowed her to creatively think about how she can overcome the barriers in counselling created by the lack of structure. This illustrates how Sarah internalises the theory in her practise not only to assist others but also for her own development. Due the fact that the DCCD did not have a written framework for counselling, Sarah's and Betty's intention of developing the brochure "*my Choice @ Unisa*" was to have a resource that represents a framework for career conversations. As she stated earlier, the brochure was informed by the different career theories. However, they deliberately presented it in such a way that it is practical to implement it in counselling as a framework which determines how conversations can be facilitated.

Sarah is of the view that the facilitation of the career counselling process is now integrated with the framework for counsellors. This seems to comfort Sarah since she has the confidence that there is consistency and continuity in the process. The difference could only be in the depth of the counselling process as determined by the scope of practise among different levels of counsellors. I attribute the integration of the development of the framework represented in the brochure to Sarah's commitment, hard work and creativity in developing both on-line and off-line resources which represent a framework on how to facilitate counselling. However, I experience Sarah as

very modest as she comments below on this achievement and the development of the framework. This is part of her success since this process was her brain child. I do however understand that Sarah is humble about her achievements and outputs and will not blow her own horn. This is how she described it:

"*I think previously for me it was very much kind of like each to his own so there were so many different approaches or frameworks that one can choose from. I experienced that people just kind of chose things as it suited them. Whereas now with this process, most applicants are helped with a particular process. It is more structured, it's more focussed in terms of, you know, how we can approach particular kind of clients and it's also more integrated for me. Over the years I feel we have integrated much more of the on-line plus then face-to-face consultations, so integrating those two aspects and now moving forward where we are now almost fully on-line. So that is basically changed but the process itself has become more structured and I guess it creates comfort in some sense not saying that you can't think about renewing your practise based on the client.*"

The changes that Sarah pointed out above also seem to be positively impacting on the counselling process. Sarah explained:

"*You know with 'my Choice @ Unisa', even with other resources we have, related to career resources, it actually changes the kind of conversations that I have with clients. Instead of spending a lot of time on this kind of procedural or detailed information, you can now really talk about, you know their thinking about their career or how they feel instead of focussing on content. So having all these resources available and knowing how to integrate it with the counselling process is helpful in that it deepens your discussion with the client. Within a relatively short space, it is not that you will need, you know five hours to talk to that person. Because there is lot of things they can and should do for themselves. You don't have to explain the whole thing.*"

Sarah shares how she approaches the counselling with clients in practise by illustrating the integration of resources. The extract below also illustrates the impact of the resources on the counselling process as well as on students. Especially students who will invest in using the resources suggested by the counsellor:

"*I will get a phone call, or e-mail or someone would come in, I would explore what is the need of this person, why are they here, and then I think of the resources available to allow this person to take some time to work through the resource. And once they are done, I can always see if I have given a person something to work through in their feedback. The kind of questions that they ask, the kind of deeper reflections from somebody who maybe didn't take time to work through that resource. So for me it's more empowering for this person because they could ask different kinds of questions and it prepares them also to have conversations with other people in the University. So it also helps with how I refer clients to other sections in the University. And obviously I and the person will decide if they need to follow up. Part of the individual discussion would be to get a sense of how comfortable would this person be to read something on-line and how they come back. If they haven't worked through the resource I can normally deduct you know something like either the person is very anxious, so how they deal with homework also tells you how to proceed with the client.*"

Another important thing that Sarah shared above is the awareness that emotions impact on students' career decision making process. It is interesting to see how Sarah shares that failure to complete a task already signals the emotional impact and that it would seem that she will have to take time to acknowledge and support the student with that before proceeding with the facilitation of the career decision making process.

4.3.6 Conclusion

Sarah's journey as a career counsellor started as an administrative assistant in the DCCD. Due to a shortage of office space, Sarah had to share the office with a counsellor which led her to become a silent witness of the counselling process. She

might have just been a silent witness to those who observed her, but within herself she was an active participant. Due to her background in Computer Science Sarah became curious about how she could implement technology in counselling. Sarah then ventured into new territory since she made a big contribution to the development of technology to counselling at Unisa. Because of her abilities and interest in technology, Sarah was trusted with the development of the counselling website of the DCCD.

Sarah continued with her career by completing the internship for career counselling. This allowed her to experiment with career counselling theories. Sarah found that she could apply the principles of Holland's career theory in her counselling with students – that their interest and self-knowledge could lead to choosing the work environment that fits with their personality. In addition, she also applied the social cognitive career theory's assumptions regarding barriers and how to overcome barriers as well as the chaos theory of career's concepts of uncertainty and planning. Sarah used the cognitive processing approach as a framework to develop the website.

Sarah then integrated the theories to develop career resources that represent a framework for counselling. The development of the resources was due to Sarah's concern and disappointments due to a lack of structure for counsellors. Sarah is now confident with the framework in place and she celebrates her success in a modest way due to her humble personality.

Sarah shared how she integrates the resources in counselling and the impact it has on students and the counselling process. She was concerned with balancing her services to individuals versus servicing the masses because of her principles of fairness and equal access to all.

4.4 Mary: The journey from being a volunteer to a counsellor

4.4.1 The metamorphosis of becoming a counsellor through training

Mary searched for an environment where she could practise the skills that she was learning in her undergraduate degree in Psychology. When she realised that the DCCD offers such an opportunity, it was the obvious choice for her since she felt that she would be practising her skills in the institution where she was learning. This is how she explains the beginning of her journey:

> "I applied for the Peer Help Volunteer Programme in 2005. I went through the selection process and I was selected. I started working as a peer helper in 2005 from June to December, and progressed to become an Assistant Student Counsellor from December 2005 to October 2008."

Mary's journey reminds me of the metamorphosis of a butterfly through the life cycle from larva to caterpillar and finally to a butterfly. All these stages are necessary for the transformation to become an adult butterfly. This also happened with Mary as she has occupied different positions in the Directorate ranging from a peer helper to an Assistant Student Counsellor (ASC). Eventually she was placed in an internship position when she trained to become a career counsellor and finally she became a counsellor. Being in the DCCD and as she progressed with her studies, she had the opportunity to grow academically as well as becoming a professional counsellor. Mary had an opportunity not only to apply what she learned from books (theory) but also to learn from her own process. Mary's reflection on her growth illustrates her insight in her own process and how she has developed:

> "I think the way in which I use the Unisa resources has definitely changed over time. I don't think that when I was working as an ASC that my skills in terms of using resources was that well developed."

Mary had an opportunity of developing her skills through training as an intern career counsellor after completing her Honours degree in Psychology. On completion of her training and registration as a counsellor she was then offered a one-year full time

contract position as a student counsellor. Mary left at the end of her contract to work as a Post-Graduate Research Administrator at another institution of higher learning where she was also busy with her Master's degree in Social Science Psychology. In 2013, she returned to Unisa's DCCD after being offered a contract position. Mary was subsequently appointed permanently as a career counsellor. She further explained that it's not only her skills that have advanced. She has noticed that there are more resources compared to when she started working in her previous positions. These resources enabled her to have systematic and logical conversations with students while using them as a frame of reference when facilitating career conversations with students as she pointed out:

"At that stage there may have been the 'my Choice' brochure, I can't really remember well. But since I have returned to Unisa there are much more resources in place, and they help to have systematic and logical flowing career conversations with students."

4.4.2 Theoretical grounding for counselling

Mary relates the theoretical foundation which guides her day-to-day interactions with clients to Rogers' (1961) client-centred theory even though she does not mention the theory by name. Mary's attitude and behaviour towards the students is that of accepting the person and his or her needs as important in the conversation (unconditional positive regard), being congruent (genuine) and being interested in understanding the students' needs (empathy):

"*The foundation theory for me is, unconditional, non-judgemental, accepting the students and working with the students' needs."*

I concur with Mary when she describes Roger's client-centred theory as her foundation since she does not only apply the theory in counselling but also in her interaction with others outside counselling. I experience Mary as accepting and understanding. I also sense that she is warm and spontaneous in her interactions. Mary is passionate in assisting students and invests her time in ensuring that she addresses their needs.

Mary described Unisa as a complex system which is influenced by other systems. She seems to have applied the chaos theory of careers in helping herself to describe and understand the Unisa systems. This seems to make it easier for her to help students to understand and to prepare them for this complex system with changing rules. Furthermore, Mary assists students to understand their own career process by using the theory since their career journey is also characterised by uncertainty, complexity and is also influenced by other systems including their family. It is therefore befitting that Mary applies the chaos theory of careers as her frame of reference in counselling to help students to understand and prepare themselves for the uncertainties and opportunities in their career journey. Mary explained the relevance of the theory in the extract that follows:

"The chaos theory of careers is relevant when working with the Unisa system and the rules that keep on changing every year. Unisa is part of the chaotic system, with external bodies that have a say on what clearly we are able to offer which creates more chaos within the chaotic system. I then use the theory in assisting students to then be able to prepare for career opportunities and helping them understand that there may not be a clear path to their future career. But you also may need at some point to consider not just a job that will link your qualification to your career but also look at survival jobs in the interim. Students need to be prepared to think out of the box and work with chaos instead of trying to work against it."

Mary integrates the principles of the client-centred theory and the chaos theory even when developing career resources. This is to ensure that when prospective students work on the resources they are also thinking about plans on how to prepare for their career opportunities despite the uncertainties and the changes that could happen in their career journey.

"Also while working on resources for prospective students, those would be the two dominant. Now I think on the resources that we have developed, the major focus is on providing information so students can manage the chaos and the changes and still getting them to connect with their careers and how to plan for opportunities."

Mary described her approach when facilitating career counselling with students and how she incorporates the resources. Mary's approach illustrates how the resources provide the framework for facilitating the career counselling process in order to have a systematic and logical way as she indicated earlier:

"Firstly, what is important, is to work through the 'my Choice @ Unisa' brochure with them. And now there's student readiness on-line assessment[4] that can assess whether they are ready to study through distance learning. But also the nice thing about the student readiness tool, it's not just an assessment, as they work through the questions that are being asked, they automatically also get feedback and information as to what ODL entails. The online assessment tool also addresses the misconceptions that they may have and also prepare them effectively to be successful distance learners."

Mary uses the resources in a harmonious way to avoid the disintegration in the process. It seems to me that she understands the resources that effectively address the specific needs in different modes of counselling as mentioned below. I can imagine that she could also be able to map out this process easily for the student to have an understanding of the process since she articulates a clear map of the process which fits with her description of the process being logical and systematic:

"The student readiness tool I find becoming much more useful in e-counselling and face to face conversations with students. In the 'my Choice @ Unisa brochure', they find the career questionnaire section on choosing the career. Also there's the questionnaire: 'Is the Unisa journey for me?'. So currently what I am using is the student on-line readiness tool, and also on the new application process there is a section that asks them to reflect on their career choice using that for the students to identify a suitable career and suitable qualifications. So, step one application, the

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[4] The *"my Choice @ Unisa"* brochure is integrated with application steps on the Unisa website and is part of the activities that are incorporated in the on-line assessment on student readiness.

new application process on the website, is the 'Open Distance Learning at Unisa for you', and then step 2, 'Are you certain about your career?' Those two are the most important in working with prospective students."

Mary's approach is purposefully linked to students' career needs. Her approach is evidence of the client-centred approach theory as the foundation of her practise. It seems that Mary understands individual students' career needs and that she is able to know how to approach the career counselling conversations in such a way that their needs are effectively addressed as she pointed out below:

"In my experience, the career needs of prospective students are firstly understanding of registered learning and what it will mean for them. Because a lot of students have some misconceptions about what being an open distance learner entails, especially coming from high school, classroom setup or from a residential campus. There are a lot of things that they haven't considered that you need to make them aware of. So, for me firstly it's the open distance learning adjustment conversation that you need to have with them. If they decide that Unisa is for them then identifying a suitable programme that meets their needs and also that fits their long term goals in terms of their career. The majority of students come in for assistance with choosing a career or qualification. A lot of conversation focusses on career planning and how to plan for future careers, how to prepare themselves for opportunities in the fields that they are looking to work, for me those are the main needs."

Mary understands that the career conversations she has with students must help those who choose to study through Unisa. They must know how to cope with Unisa as a distance learning institution. Her role is further to help students to choose careers and qualifications as well as how to prepare for opportunities.

4.4.3 Self-confidence – human beings as social creatures
Working within a career counselling framework is important for Mary's self-confidence as a counsellor. I sense that when working within the framework, Mary feels confident to

be creative and take risks as a counsellor when facilitating the counselling process. There is a sense of being grounded as a professional counsellor which therefore creates a confidence in herself and the process as she pointed out below:

"As long as the framework is there for you to fall back on there, it gives me a sense of assurance and confidence because a framework is sort of your safety net. There will be a small component along the different conversations that will remain the same. Identifying the main concern, reflecting on feelings, what are the resources that can assist the student to resolve any career issues that they may have, being very in touch with the new developments in terms of the resources available and also the changes. Being aware of those and how it impacts on students and the conversations that you will have with them is very important."

Mary has reservations regarding the changes which seem to prevent counsellors from having interactions with students in-person due to the commencement of on-line interactions. Despite the fact that Mary comes across as someone who is flexible and who has found a way to work within the open distance learning environment, she is disappointed about the changes that caused that all the interactions are on-line which she experiences as too structured as illustrated in the extract below:

"You know, with our shift towards moving online and more focus on e-counselling it doesn't really work with all students. And also one format of e-counselling doesn't work for all students, uhm, so what works for one student another student will ask you that they don't see logic or understanding of why you are asking certain questions. So for some maybe they want more information, and for others it simply doesn't work."

Furthermore, Mary's disappointments also emanate from her perception that students prefer human interaction. It seems to me that the conflict in Mary is exacerbated by her principles as a client-centred practitioner wherein the needs of the clients are important, the more so within the changing University context. Mary is in a paradox since she understands the university as a chaotic system with rules changing however currently

the changing rules are at odds with her fundamental principles since she feels that the changes are not taking students' needs into consideration, especially, that they need human interaction:

"A lot of students still prefer the face-to-face interaction, the human interaction. Because of Unisa going on-line, everything is done on-line, you apply on-line, you register on-line, there is no need to have a human interaction and that is what students crave. I mean humans are social creatures, we still crave that personal contact and seeing a face and putting a face to a name."

In order to manage the disappointment and challenges in her practice imposed by the changes of working on-line, Mary finds solace in her two theoretical frameworks on how to remain being client-centred but most importantly for her to manage the uncertainties in her work as she shared below:

"So I need to be adaptable in terms of my approach and if one of them is not working, to try another. Until I negotiate with the student and check in with them: Is this a possibility and does this feel like a better fit? Or do you feel this is working more effectively, is this working for us actually? So checking in with a student always just keeps that connection, that connecting point. Because once you lose them and they are lost and then you struggle to reconnect with them. Then it's needing to work through all sorts of road blocks and strategies."

Mary's manoeuvres to remain client-centred while adjusting to the changing systems by understanding that she needs to continuously negotiate with students, reflect and check-in with students on their preferred mode of counselling, are illustrated in the following words:

"You need to gauge whether the activities and the homework that you are giving to students are effective, and that the format that you are giving it is effective. So, if in a sense you feel you are getting stuck with a client or they give you feedback that it is not working, you need to change your approach. So then either do a telephone counselling career conversation with them or invite them in to meet face-to-face."

4.4.4 Training of counsellors and a community of career counsellors

Mary is also concerned about the instability caused by a shortage of well-trained counsellors in the DCCD. She hopes they can have stability and continuity by having enough competent counsellors. She fears that the long term impact of the changes in labour relations which will result in the contract of counsellors not being renewed (as the University complies with new rules), will result with them not having enough trained and competent counsellors in the DCCD which might negatively impact on the services due to lack of capacity. This will further add strains to the permanent counsellors. This is due to the fact that the majority of counsellors who assist students are peer helper volunteers who have to undergo rigorous training and assessment to determine their application of counselling skills. Another category is the ASC who work on a contract basis and their contracts have to comply with the labour rules of the University and the country. This is a challenge since it takes time to prepare and train a volunteer to the level where they can practise as an ASC as she explained below:

> "*The things that I hope for I know are unrealistic, but in an ideal world I hope for having a stable staff component that assists in the services that we are able to provide to students. So for me in my experience, counselling units have a small pool of students to select from and from selection the pool goes even smaller. At the point where we give the training, we will train about five or six peer helpers. And within that process half of them may make it through the selection process, interview process or pass so then you end up with two or three which then makes it a bit more challenging. Also with the changes to the Labour Relations Act that has complicated matters further. So how those changes will continue to unfold and impact on our ability to deliver the kind of service we envisage to our clients is still unfolding.*"

Mary celebrates being part of the community of practice with other counsellors. She regards this as an opportunity to have conversations with other career counsellors who also work for Unisa, but in different departments and regions. Mary has the need to share with others what she is experiencing in her offices and to get to know how others

are handling a specific problem. When sharing, she is also receptive for feedback or different views that contribute to her practise. Furthermore, this is also a platform for Mary to receive feedback on resources as she explained below:

> "*My experience of what works for me I think of Unisa communities of practise is being able to work with colleagues from other regions on the resources that will inform the career counselling practise. I can't really recall recently attending any community of practise meetings but what does remain constant is the e-mail conversations between myself and the counsellors from other regions in terms of the resources I am working on. Kindly have a look at it and give me feedback, what is working, what is not working. So that for me is a big strength in terms of communities of practice. It's the knowledge sharing.*"

4.4.5 Conclusion

Mary's journey at the DCCD started when she applied for a Peer Help Programme. She moved to the position of the ASC on completion of her volunteer programme. This was followed by internship training as a career counsellor. She currently occupies the position of a counsellor.

Mary describes Rogers' (1961) client-centred theory as her foundation theory in her interactions with students. In addition, she also applies the principles of the chaos theory of careers when facilitating career counselling. She explained that the chaos theory of careers helps her to explain Unisa as a complex system to students and also to help students to prepare for career opportunities.

The resources "*my Choice @ Unisa*" and the student readiness on-line assessment represents Mary's framework for counselling. She integrates the two resources in a harmonious way when facilitating career counselling. Mary pointed out that the increase in resources at Unisa gives her confidence and assurance in herself and the counselling process.

Mary is disappointed about the University's new policy – that they want to change to a situation where most interactions with students, including counselling, have to be done on-line. These changes deprive students of their needs to interact with counsellors in-person. She feels that students are social beings who need human interaction. Mary, however, has managed to find a way to meet students' needs should they require human interaction by continuously checking with students when they interact by using on-line counselling if it suits them or if they prefer in-person counselling.

Mary is concerned about the unstable staff component at the counselling services of Unisa: the shortage of counsellors and their training which takes time. She however appreciates the community of practise which provides her with the opportunity to interact with other counsellors.

4.5 Piet: Transforming the counsellor to transform others
4.5.1 Training to be transformed.
Piet's journey of transformation started when he joined the peer help volunteer programme when doing his undergraduate degree in Psychology. On completion, he was offered an ASC position which was later followed by the position of the Intern Career Guidance Practitioner position, later known as Trainee Career Guidance Practitioner. This position as a career guidance practitioner does not lead to professional registration with a professional body such as the Health Professions Council. Piet has moved from being an undergraduate student to an Honours degree in Psychology while working in the DCCD. This is how he described his journey and training:

"I started working here with the peer helper volunteer programme in 2012, where it lasted about six to eight months. I was then busy with my undergraduate degree in Psychology which I completed at the end of the same year. I moved to the position of Assistant Student Counsellor from November 2012 to December 2014 where my role was then to work more independently and offer basic career guidance to students. I

also managed to proceed with my studies and completed my Honours in Psychology. In January 2015, I was offered an intern career guidance position."

Piet's transformation was not only about the different positions that he occupied and his academic progression, but it was also related to the responsibilities that accompany each position. The changes however provided Piet with an opportunity to grow. He regards this as a transformation in his life which he has transferred to others.

I have had an opportunity to interact with Piet and I can attest to the transformation he has described. Piet transformed from an energetic, many-sided person trying to experiment with different activities to a focussed, disciplined and future oriented person who is clearly determined to achieve his career goals. I could also observe the transformation in how Piet presents himself where he changed his attire from sneakers with untied shoe laces and a tracksuit to formal trousers or denims with shirts. Piet shared his own reflection of his journey as follows:

"I am exposed to more responsibilities. I did more research and mentoring of other career counsellors as well. For me, this has been a transformation process. Transforming my career and transferring the transformation to others. Transforming my life and relationship with people. This environment has really taught me to spend a lot of time within me before I can try to help others. I have even used this platform to also work on my self-confidence as a counsellor and also working with others. I have learnt more of how to take a healthy risk, how to take constructive feedback and also being honest with myself, not putting pressure on myself."

Piet relates the transformation that has occurred to the fact that he started to gain self-confidence. I would agree with him since it was as if he started to believe that he could make it if he committed to his studies and his career. He transformed himself by nurturing his potential to blossom. Piet points out that training, supervision and the activities and tasks he was expected to complete in his roles as a peer helper and ASC, contributed to his growth. He explained:

"One of the things that has facilitated my growth in supervision is working under supervision and getting feedback and also working on information assessment. I think that had really challenged me, pushed me actually to know the resources when dealing with clients."

Piet's transformation and my experiences with him evoke a picture of a sunflower that just needs nurturing in order to blossom.

4.5.2 Theoretical grounding: more understanding than being an expert

Piet does not recall the specific career theories that inform his career counselling. However, what he could easily articulate was how he defines his relationship with his clients. He clearly communicated how he would like students to experience him and how he aims to create a counselling environment where students could feel respected and understood. Piet articulated Rogers' (1961) client-centred (or person-centred) theory's core principles that are part of how he relates to students. These principles are unconditional positive regard (being non-judgemental and valuing students) and empathy (striving to understand the students' experiences). He described it as follows:

"I cannot remember our core specific theories. I think what comes to mind is the person-centred approach. Understanding that the client knows their problem much better than what you can think. And not being judgemental to the client, understanding that this is how the client is telling their story and you have to really appreciate that. Help them even to tell or strengthen their story, acknowledging the person's strength, not being judgemental and treating them with respect showing positive regard. The most important thing also comes from the person-centred understanding that has something that they have brought in."

Piet also incorporates the second order cybernetics view in his approach when working with the students since his stance is that of "not-knowing" (Anderson & Goolishan, 1992). By taking this stance from the second order cybernetics, Piet complements his client-centred way of defining a relationship since with this attitude he further creates an

atmosphere of curiosity, openness and respect. From the cybernetics' perspective, he can only succeed with curiosity if he displays understanding towards what the students bring to him. Piet shares below how the second-order cybernetics' views influence his role when interacting with students:

"I try to shy away from an expert position understanding that the client brings in, they already have something, there is not a clean slate or some kind of blank sheet, but they are bringing something. It means that your role as a counsellor is just to provoke some thinking and bring another perspective that could challenge even the way of thinking without imposing your views."

Piet seems to be integrating the above mentioned two different theoretical approaches (the client-centred theory and second order cybernetics), and it further seems to me that he has an understanding of how the two theories complement each other in his work. I realised that one can easily use these principles in practise from either a second order cybernetics stance or a client-centred stance. The principles of these two theories fit with how I experience Piet's personality of being humble towards others while being interested to know and understand others.

In addition, Piet applies Bandura's (1961) social learning theory in helping students to understand effective ways of learning with a specific focus on time management through completing certain tasks such as listening to the podcast as he pointed out:

"I have been looking at home work – Bandura's social learning theory has also informed me in terms of time management, giving clients time to listen to podcasts, doing homework at home."

Even though the theories provide Piet with a theoretical framework on how to approach counselling, it seems that the natural interaction between him and the students is important. I now understand the difficulty he had at the beginning of thinking about a specific theory when starting to relate his theoretical grounding since the client's needs seems to be at the forefront of his counselling process.

Piet shared how he practically engages with students during counselling to illustrate his frame of reference which illustrates the integration of the client-centred theory, cybernetics and Bandura's social learning theory below:

"From facilitating a career conversation, it's about first understanding what they know especially looking at research, have they been talking to people, what is that they know about their field? From then it's also about also bringing practical things from what they know, how can they use that in order to get what they want. The main thing is not imposing my views on the client or to say this is much better, working from their strength and to say this is how you can use what you know to get what you want."

Piet's approach in facilitating counselling as articulated above seems to have been influenced by his understanding of the students' needs. From his interactions with students, Piet seems to have developed an understanding of students' career needs. This has further helped him to clarify his role in order to effectively facilitate a process where they could be empowered to address their career needs as he described below:

"What I have encountered is that there is a need for more research in terms of career guidance to students. My role as a counsellor is to facilitate the process so that students can address the gaps. I realise that a lot of students don't really have sufficient information to make a decision. A lot of them know what to do but it is because there are still gaps that they still need to fill, that they come for counselling. There are also issues around support since there are pressures on them that they must choose certain careers from their family."

4.5.3 Changes in the counselling process: from mechanical to natural

Piet celebrates the fact that he feels empowered as a counsellor and positive about the counselling process. This feeling has been brought on by his reflections and shifts from feeling ineffective in his role as a counsellor and his realisation of what needs to happen in the counselling process as he explains below:

"I feel more empowered now. I feel positive about the process because when I reflect back as a peer helper and as an Assistant Student Counsellor you know it was all about getting things right and that hindered the process of asking effective questions. I was not really allowing the process and conversation to flow."

The results of the shift in Piet's perceptions of counselling and his role is that he now feels that he is engaging in a natural spontaneous process with the client. It would seem that Piet is comfortable in his position as a counsellor to allow the counselling process to flow without feeling the pressure to perform by asking the right questions or for students to be at a particular career stage at the end of the career counselling process as it comes out from the following extract:

"What I have learned recently is that I have made counselling to be more of a conversation rather than a back and forward information interaction. I have learned to be more natural, allowing the process, staying with the process and not rushing the client. That's something that has changed moving from a peer helper to an intern career guidance practitioner. Understanding that each person has a process, not to say you want them here. One of my colleagues would say this is more like a dance so one step at a time and not dancing more than the client actually."

Piet seems to further recognise and trust students' ability to transfer the career process that he would have started with them in the outside world, in order for them to resolve their career problems. This understanding allows him to be quite patient in the career conversations since he is not under pressure to reach a particular goal with the student. The shift in his own responses to counselling seems surprising to him as he reflected as follows on his practice and the changes that happened:

"In the beginning, it was always about the clients who should find an answer before they leave the session. But what is more amazing and that has shocked me sometimes, I have learnt to be more patient in terms of how I facilitate the conversation to say counselling actually happens outside."

Furthermore, the shift in his approach to the counselling process allows Piet to acknowledge clients' feelings of being overwhelmed and confused that resurface when having career conversations. As part of the natural spontaneous process Piet allows students space to work through their emotions. In showing an understanding of students' position, Piet articulates the clients' feelings and gives them an assurance that they are a normal part of the career decision making process. His explanation below indicates maturity in holding clients' emotions while allowing them to experience their process without the urge from him to rescue them and rob them of the opportunity to work through their process:

"And it is one of the things that I would also have a conversation with my client to say, I can imagine maybe now you feel overwhelmed. But you will see the more time that you take to reflect, the more you think about this, the more things will become clearer in terms of what you still need to do. For me, this is a more natural touch in counselling, you have to allow them to experience that, if they are confused it means that they are in process. It does not mean you should panic, it does not mean you should find an answer for them, it means that they are working through it themselves."

4.5.4 Autonomy of the counsellor within the structure of counselling

The structure provided by resources such as "*my Choice @ Unisa*" embodies a framework for counselling and the different career conversation sheets provide Piet with the structure when facilitating career conversations. However, Piet experiences that he has the autonomy to have natural and spontaneous conversations with the students. This benefits clients during counselling since it helps them to feel that they are in a natural conversation which is skilfully facilitated since it brings new perspectives which help them in their career decision making process. Piet explains it as follows:

"I think when we are looking to the framework, it provided some kind of structure but it did not take away the natural interaction. It provided the structure to say this is what you need to talk about for the conversations to be fruitful, we need to cover these aspects."

Piet appreciates working in a context where there is a framework since he feels that having a framework helps him to stay out of trouble. Since the framework ensures that he can use it to check on his own process of counselling and his stance towards the client, Piet believes strongly in the necessity of a framework in order to be effective as a counsellor:

"A framework helps because it informs your practise. It helps you to see carefully. Some kind of an eye of how you should look at things in counselling. If I was not given a framework, it would have been very messy. I will be in an expert position where I tell clients what to do which will be in contradiction to the client-centred approach. Having a framework also helped me to deal with preconceived ideas to say I really need to take them out of counselling."

Piet connects his experiences of the supervision to how he facilitates counselling. His observation is that there is consistency in the application of the framework in supervision and counselling. This has led him to conclude that he needs to manage his supervision process and development as a counsellor in the same way he facilitates the career counselling process with students. He explained it as follows:

"I think I would relate supervision and how we normally facilitate the counselling sessions as one step at a time. You never do everything at once but you need to start somewhere. Changing things but I cannot change everything. I need to start with one thing I can control, and that will have an impact on my whole life. So that's the principle of supervision and training. Looking at specific things that I need to work on. Things that I feel are urgent. Same thing as clients, what is one thing that you feel we can talk about today? So that is how I make sense of the supervision and dealing with clients as well."

Piet further applies the principles of being client-centred and the second order cybernetics approach when mentoring other peers. He strives to empower both the mentee and the students when having mentoring conversations instead of playing an

expert role. Piet attempts to understand the client's concern as well as how the mentee understands the client in order to give both a voice and still finds a way of contributing to their process without imposing his views or way of facilitating the process:

> "*Relating to the new role of mentoring and looking at the framework, it's not about what I think is right but it's about how they also understand the client's concern. Giving them space to also articulate what they would want to tell the client. But if I were in a position to say this is what you do, you should send an e-mail like this. I also take time to reflect to say did I empower the client; did I empower the person I was mentoring or supervising.*"

4.5.5 Development of a career identity as a counsellor with successes and disappointments

The fact that Piet had the autonomy to work within the framework without being restricted allowed him to develop his career identity as a counsellor. The supervision and mentoring process allowed him to integrate his own style preference within the structure provided through resources in order to develop his own career identity. Piet appreciates that working at the DCCD further provided him the opportunity to shape his own person. In the process of developing an identity as a counsellor he became the person that he wants to be as he articulated below:

> "*When I was being supervised and being mentored, there was a structure of this in how effective counselling can be done. This is how you can effectively address the clients concerned but my way of thinking was not being taken away. It was about integration and I think that helped me to also not lose my identity in the process. This even makes work to be enjoyable to say this is how I relate to clients. I was also given platform. I was given a chance to show my uniqueness but being moulded.*"

I sense that Piet is being humbled and honoured by having the opportunity provided to him. He shared his reflections of being able to build his identity and self-confidence as part of his success in his career journey. This was possible because he had the

opportunity to transform as a person and discover himself through his involvement with different tasks:

"If I were not in this environment, I know I will be very fake. But I think the process of reflecting and supervision helped me to develop some kind of identity, a voice. The interaction I had in counselling and outside counselling helped me to have an identity and self-confidence. I was given a platform and opportunity to do other things."

The gaps that exist with regard to career counselling and lack of career information are a disappointment for Piet. He is concerned that there are no sufficient career interventions at a community level that could address the gaps that exist. He also feels that the regulation of the profession exacerbates the situation since in order to intervene in the communities, practitioners need professional recognition. Piet however suggested that the model applied by the DCCD of training Psychology students as counsellors could be duplicated in the communities to address the gap in career information:

"I think more could be done in terms of counselling in South Africa. There have to be more interventions at community level. There are issues around regulations impacting on community interventions. Because in order for you to go to communities, you need some kind of professional recognition. But if you were to take what this Directorate is doing, take Psychology graduates and put them in the community. That could really close the gap and impact on even the educational system."

Piet's disappointment illustrates his commitment and dedication to empower others through career information and further training. Furthermore, it illustrates the principle of access to resources and good citizenship which has been embroiled in him through the training as a counsellor.

4.5.6 Conclusion

Piet's journey of transformation as a counsellor started when he joined the peer-help volunteer programme. The peer-help training was like a rite of passage for him from

being a student to become a counsellor. On completion of the programme, Piet became an ASC and then later occupied the position of the Intern Career Guidance Practitioner. The transformation in his career transformed Piet as a person wherein he developed his self-confidence through taking healthy risks.

Piet's frame of reference is grounded on both the client-centred theory and second-order cybernetics approach. Piet's stance when doing counselling as influenced by both theories is that of being understanding and respectful towards the client while being curious to the client's story. Piet also applies the "not-knowing" principles when engaging with clients. In addition, Piet implements Bandura's social learning theory to assist students with their learning.

Although Piet has his own theoretical groundings, he appreciates the framework for facilitating career counselling at the DCCD. His experiences are that the framework provides him with structure for facilitating career conversations. He however emphasises the fact that within the structure he has the autonomy to be unique which allowed him to grow his identity and a voice. Piet celebrates the fact that he has a sense of his self-identity and confidence in himself as a success in his career. He also appreciates the opportunity provided in the DCCD. Piet expressed his disappointment about the gap in career services and career information. Piet blames the regulation of the profession by professional regulatory bodies as a contributing factor to the lack of access to career information in communities.

4.6 Joyce: Ploughing back into the community
4.6.1 Growth of the counsellor in the process of giving back to others

Joyce started thinking of giving back to others as an undergraduate student. The Peer Help Volunteer Programme was appropriate since she thought it could be her way of giving back and helping others to overcome the isolation that she was also battling with at a distance learning institution as she explained below:

"I joined the Directorate for Counselling and Career Development as a peer helper where I was volunteering. I was only studying then. When I started as peer helper, my aim was to give back to the community. I felt isolated studying on my own and I wanted to sort of test the theory or put into practice some of the modules that I have already passed. Knowing how it feels to be isolated and confused while studying, I wanted to give back to fellow students. I knew I will not eliminate the feeling of all students but I would touch a few."

Even though Joyce's aim was to give back to others, she however realised that the peer help training prepared her first as a counsellor in order for her to be able to give back effectively. The training provided was like planting seeds in her in order for the fruits to be shared with others as Joyce shared her experience below:

"When I joined the Directorate I went through training and after the training I started working with students on different platforms. I have also received from the DCCD and the career counselling, because most of the time we are using resources. At the same time, you learn from them. Then you give out to students' things that you are also utilising at the same time. I have been told that what you give out to students, you can also use it yourself. To make sure that whatever you are giving out to students it is more meaningful for you to start doing that. When you send them out to read and complete certain tasks, you know what you are talking about, you understand it because you already worked on it."

Joyce's experiences indicate how in the training of peer helpers who are university students, the DCCD is growing its own timbers. The DCCD therefore ensures that it provides the volunteers with the necessary tools to help them to remain motivated by allowing them to gain valuable skills and information that allow them to grow.

4.6.2 The beginning of the journey: thrown in at the deep end

Joyce was thrown in at the deep end with her initial experiences in face-to-face counselling. It was not the giving back that Joyce would have expected as she was

unprepared for the experience. Even though the experiences were overwhelming to Joyce at that time, it prepared her to understand that she will never know what students bring to her and to have an understanding that she will have to deal with more than just giving information. Joyce shared an experience which however prepared her for the journey in her career as a counsellor working with students:

"As I am reflecting what come to my mind was when I was still a peer helper, enthusiastic about counselling real people. Thinking that since I managed few sessions and everything went well I can do it. Little did I know, I had a client who did not meet the requirements. I was used to the process that if a client does not meet requirements, then we explore an alternative. The client at that moment decided to have a personal conversation whereby she said 'I am stressed, I have to go to the police station, he is divorcing me'. I felt my focus must be on her career development and choosing an alternative. I kept on focussing on that rather than on her feelings. She burst into tears, I was so overwhelmed, surprised and blamed myself for her tears. I took her upstairs. After she spoke with the senior counsellor, her need was just to talk. She only needed me to listen then continue looking for an alternative. That experience taught me to understand clients' needs."

I remember some of the conversations I had with Joyce after her interactions with clients who were overwhelmed or presented with personal problems. It was challenging for Joyce to manage them especially even when they started crying. I however observed how over time Joyce managed to have conversations with these clients and still act appropriately. Joyce believes her earlier experiences in face-to-face counselling prepared her as she explained below:

"Working on face-to-face counselling has taught me to expect anything, as whatever unfolds happen there before me. It made me to think out of the box as I would be presented with students who are confused, doubtful and frustrated or overwhelmed."

4.6.3 Diversity of clients and their needs

Joyce mentioned earlier that while working face-to-face with students as a peer helper prepared her to understand her clients' career needs. Furthermore, she mentioned that she has been presented with students with diverse emotions that she had to assist in counselling. Joyce described the diversity of clients and their needs that she had interacted with in career counselling:

"Let me start by saying that with counselling, you come across different people or I could say people from different walks of life. You get students who are going to start secondary school or high school whereby they need guidance on which subjects to take, that will link to the qualification that they would like to see themselves in, or you get students from high school who don't know which career and qualification to choose."

The group Joyce described above seem to be still uncertain about which subjects and careers to choose. They seem to require an understanding of how to choose a career. This begins by choosing subjects at school and after this choosing a career and qualification to pursue. The next category seems to have been exposed to the career or qualifications; however, they have a need to explore other qualifications or careers:

"Other categories of people would be those who have been maybe studying with Unisa, however due to some career development they feel that they want to do something related to their current work or position.

Others have lost interest in their current qualification so they want to explore other fields. There are other ones that have been working for a certain number of years. They feel maybe bored or they want to try something new. They would need somebody to sit with and then have a conversation or even by e-mail or telephone just to have a conversation with somebody who will assist them to know which career fields they can choose.

Others are those that would say that they have been working in a certain position or company without qualifications so they need guidance to choose a qualification so that they can have formal qualifications."

Despite the fact that the groups are different with specific careers or levels of maturity in terms of their careers, they all need assistance from the counsellor regarding the making of a career decision appropriate to their situation.

4.6.4 Clients set the agenda for the career counselling process

Joyce's explanation of her approach during career counselling seems to me to be grounded in Roger's (1961) client-centred approach. Joyce's focus is on addressing the career needs of students while ensuring that she remains non-judgemental. The fact that in her approach when facilitating career counselling, Joyce allows the career needs of students to set the agenda of the career counselling process while she maintains a non-judgemental and accepting attitude towards the client, indicates that she embraces the core principles of the theory as she explained below:

"When starting with a session, I don't have to be judgemental or maybe have planned everything. I let the client to express whatever they have on the table and then from there I can use my listening skills. Listening to whatever the client is bringing and being able to integrate to have an effective conversation. Then from there I manage the process by helping the client to understand themselves better and to have information about their careers in order to make an informed decision rather than just deciding on their own having less information."

In addition, Joyce has realised that in her career counselling conversations, clients' emotions cannot be ignored which also relates to her framework that clients' needs set the agenda. Her approach is that she needs to respond appropriately to what seems to be the needs of the students at that specific time. If the need is related to career choice, she will introduce relevant activities; however, should the need be a client who is

overwhelmed, she will contain the client and explore the appropriate interventions as described below:

"My framework is informed by the kind of enquiry that the client is bringing to me. Looking at how the clients bring their needs helps me to think okay, this one is for career counselling. I am going to approach it by doing activities on making a career decision.

The clients' feelings are also important, or how they are presenting whatever that matters on the table. Let's say maybe someone is emotional, I wouldn't force them to focus on making a career choice. I need to explore all those feelings and also try to contain that and then check if we can continue with them or should we make other arrangements."

Joyce understood that students' emotional state impact on their career decision. When she refers to other arrangements, it reminded me of the referrals that she had made to me so that I could assist with psychotherapy after she had contained the students. In most of the cases Joyce would have explored the problem to be beyond choosing a career and had felt that she could not assist beyond just containing the emotions.

Joyce's role as a career counsellor seemed to be focussed on creating a context where students can explore career options. She taps into students' imagery of their future careers in order to align the conversations and their career needs to who they want to become. What is important though is that Joyce also tries to understand their expectations of the counselling session as she pointed out below:

"I like having a conversation whereby a client will open up and then share with me where do they see themselves in future years or what they imagine should come out from the conversation and we will take it from there whereby I will assist them depending on their needs."

Joyce has trust in her approach when facilitating the students' career needs as she shared in the extract above. She, however, has to negotiate with students so that students can understand the value of the homework she prescribes. Joyce shared her interaction with students wherein she had to explain to the client the importance of completing certain activities:

"I remember I had a client, he was a manager at one of the retail stores. He wanted to change his qualification but he was not sure what to change to. Then I was working with him on activities of making a career choice but he wasn't convinced that those activities can assist him to know what he can do. But then after explaining with him and then after exploring, he then agreed to go and do the activities. The next day, luckily I was working downstairs, I saw him while he was in the queue. I was wondering what it is going to be all about but I allowed him to come in. Immediately when it was his turn to get into the office he was so excited like looking forward to shake my hand. Then he was like, I didn't believe the activities will help me, now I trust you, now I believe you. So now that sense of somebody saying I trust you and the things that you gave me help and add to my growth as a counsellor."

It would seem the client has specific expectations on how the counselling could be facilitated in order to help with changing a qualification. Joyce had to negotiate with the client since the client seems to be resistant to the process while in pursuit of answers regarding his career. Joyce further explained how she managed the process further which to me indicates Joyce's character of being respectful and understanding whilst being assertive and firm. It is challenging to manage the student's expectations especially where the student is anxiously and impatiently looking for the answers from the counselling process like in this case, but being resistant to the process.

In the activities, Joyce's frame of reference on the aspects to be explored during career counselling is influenced by Parsons' (1909) theory by incorporating his assumptions qualitatively to help clients to understand themselves and learn more about their environment as they make career decisions as she pointed out below:

"Parsons' theory in which you analyse skills that clients have, looking at their values, interest and personality and then help clients match these with jobs where they can use them. This also helps them to reflect and think about the career they may follow."

Joyce's experiences with this particular client mentioned above points out the importance of clients' feedback for the counsellor's growth and self-confidence in her abilities as a career counsellor. Furthermore, the client's feedback acts as a reaffirmation to both the client and the counsellor as to the effectiveness of the counselling process. This also includes the resources that form part of the process. Joyce appreciates feedback since it helps her to grow as a counsellor especially where the client's needs and expectations were not met since she regards the situation as an opportunity to reflect on what she can do differently in the future to satisfy clients' needs as she pointed out below:

"Clients' responses to the counselling process are important for me. It grows my self-confidence and it also makes me to work harder. To know that at least I can help people. How about if I can work more so that I can increase the quality of my work? It also makes me think about those who were not happy even if most of the time they are few. If I have those who expressed dissatisfaction with my counselling, I reflect on what can I do differently to make them feel the same as others that I have worked with. It is rewarding but at the same time challenging for me to make sure that I help everybody so that they are all satisfied with the career counselling process."

Joyce always wants to ensure that her clients are satisfied. She works hard and is very principled and committed to her work. I am not surprised that she appreciated negative feedback as an opportunity to grow since she prefers to be challenged.

4.6.5 A journey to discover herself while helping others

While Joyce was engaging with clients in career counselling, it was an opportunity for self-discovery as a career counsellor. It opened the unknown as described in the Johari window (Luft & Ingham, 1955) as she mentioned below:

> *"On who I am as a counsellor, I have realised that I enjoy engaging with other people. I enjoy helping them. I have realised that is one of the things that I didn't know I had. I thought I am impatient but then I have realised that I like working with different kinds of people."*

Joyce did not only discover her interests while working with students. She also discovered and further developed the necessary skills and shaped her personality traits to fit her role as a counsellor who work with different people who also present differently. Joyce's best teachers seem to be students with intense unpleasant emotions since they help her to discover that she is capable of continuing with them as a counsellor and contain their emotions as she has described below:

> *"Sometimes you get those students who are frustrated at that moment, some are short tempered. But then it made me realise that I could manage whereby I would be on another level. I would not to maybe fight back or be like them. I would try and understand what their needs are, contain them to be calm so that we continue with the conversation and try to help them."*

The client-centred theory seems to have shaped and contributed to the discovery of Joyce's strengths in a different way of relating to others as evidenced in the extract below:

> *"Another thing I have realised about myself is that I learned to be patient because sometimes you will get clients who would ask you maybe something two or three times whereby you have to repeat yourself. Before I wouldn't have the heart to repeat or try to help them understand. I would feel like I have told them once, if they don't understand me then they should go somewhere else to get help. But now, I will be patient with them, try to explain to them and maybe even ask them to relate or to say*

whatever I am saying and then also to write because I think when they write they
could also make sense of things we are discussing."

The counselling context impacted on her perception of the career counselling process
and what she initially thought her role as a counsellor was. As she mentioned below her
main intention of coming to counselling was to plough back to the community:
"When I started, I thought it would be about counselling which is just giving out and
giving out to others. I realised that it's not only about giving out, you also learn and
grow from counselling."

While doing counselling she started to realise that each individual client is unique and
therefore the counselling process with each individual client is unique. Joyce explained
her experiences of the uniqueness and the fluidity of the counselling process as she
interacts with different clients:
"Every day you come across different kinds of people. You have to understand how
can you manage decisions and then to understand what is it that those people need
and then how are you going to produce it to them. Every session that one
encounters is different since you are working with a different person and you have
to manage it as such. So for me, every time the counselling process is changing
and I think from my experience the more I have been doing the work, the skills and
my frame of reference is different compared to when I started. I feel I know better,
and when clients present their needs, it is easier to deal with them since I would
have done it before. Even though I know the process will be facilitated differently. I
reflect after every session so that I know how I can do things differently."

It seems to me that Joyce uses reflections as a way to discover herself and to monitor
her growth and further development as a counsellor. She further reflects on her
processes with clients and how she has been facilitating the process and what she can
do differently after each session. Joyce's practises of reflection on herself and the
process portrays an ethical practitioner who is also responsible in her practise. The

practise of continuous reflections is not an easy process since it takes dedication and willingness and commitment to the process.

4.6.6 Growing its own timbers and creating hope in clients' careers

Joyce believes that the DCCD plays an important role in growing its own timbers by developing the attributes of trainees by providing them with space to integrate theory and practise. Joyce shared how she appreciates the opportunity afforded to her:

"I appreciate that as a Unisa student, I was only exposed to theory but then coming to the Directorate made me have like practical skills. The first thing was that I was exposed to the formal work environment where I started interacting with people, helping them. Helping them to know what to study, thinking differently or knowing how to develop their career development and their challenges. On a personal level I have also gained a lot of skills whereby I will be able to utilise outside the Directorate. The skills I have gained here it's not only about counselling. I have learnt how to do things on my own whereby I will do my own research. In the past I would expect somebody to get information for me or to explain things rather than for me to find out on my own."

Joyce's description of how she has developed as a person also displays some of the attributes or attitudes that are important for a counsellor such as being pro-active, and being resourceful.

Joyce celebrates her success as being a counsellor. She has been bestowed with the trust and opportunity of developing resources to be used by other counsellors and students in the career counselling process:

"It was like a cherry on top being given the experience or the chance to develop the resources. It is one of the experiences I enjoyed because we have been given the resources. However, you don't really understand where they come from but then being exposed to starting to read articles, finding more information and developing

resources made a mark to me. I feel I understand and I have like ownership to what I am giving out to the client."

This was an important contribution to Joyce since she appreciates the importance of resources in career counselling. Joyce explained that resources provide structure, continuity in the counselling process and allow the client to reflect:

"Using resources, for example using the conversation sheets helps one to maintain structure for counselling whereby you know exactly what can you talk about to the client and then you also know your next step – what can you ask the client to do. And then also, should they come back, you have a frame of reference whereby you know, even if it's another counsellor they can see from the conversation sheet what was discussed. The client can also be able to reflect about things that we spoke about and when they come back they also know this is what I spoke about with the previous counsellor and this is what I have done and they can indicate where they are and what they need."

In addition, Joyce believes that the counselling provided at the DCCD creates a context for clients to explore options and this creates a sense of hope to her about her future career:

"Being able to assist somebody to know or to think about what is that they like or how they imagine themselves in the future. Having an effective conversation whereby whatever choice they have spoken to somebody and that they have been informed rather than choosing a qualification. So what stood out for me is to help somebody to acknowledge or think whether this is the right qualification for me, this is the right career path for me that I would like to see myself in."

Joyce is encouraged by clients who come back and have made progress in their careers and they seem hopeful for what they want to do and where they want to be in the future. When these students give Joyce feedback, they inspire her to have trust in herself and to have self-confidence as a career counsellor:

"These experiences make me happy and encourage me to read more. Reading more articles, getting more information about the career counselling. Since I have been here for about four years, clients would come back and say look I came here three years ago not knowing what to study. You helped me to understand how to make a choice and I have been studying this qualification in this career and I have made progress. I am working or I am about to complete the qualification and I know from here where I am going. At least it makes me happy and then also it encourages me to know that I am on the right track and I can also assist others who are coming in the future."

Joyce is disappointed that the DCCD cannot offer the majority of Unisa students the opportunity she had as she explained below:

"*I wish the Directorate could grow whereby they can accommodate a high number of students so that they can be exposed to the working environment and gain skills. Even if it is not only for maybe to be paid, just to gain skills. If there was a way that they can create for students, even if it is not only for humanities studies since all students can benefit. Just because those skills as I have mentioned earlier are not for counselling only but will help them through their whole life. So I wish students can get those skills so that they can be able to utilise them. It's not possible because we have a high number of Unisa students but then I wish the Directorate could grow."*

4.6.7 Conclusion

Joyce joined the Peer Help Programme with the intention of giving back to the community. She however realised during the peer help training programme that she needed to be prepared for her endeavour of giving back. In this preparation she appreciated the impact of the preparation to her as a counsellor and a person. She learnt that the resources that she will be utilising during counselling will not be effective if they are not meaningful to her.

Joyce was thrown in at the deep end with her first encounters with clients. She had a client who was presenting with personal matters which was not only unexpected to her but she was also unprepared. Joyce however appreciates the experiences she had in face-to-face counselling especially with clients who were overwhelmed since they prepared her for counselling and changed her perception about her role as a counsellor.

When interacting with clients, Joyce realised the diversity of clients and their needs. In order to acknowledge the diversity, Joyce experienced that each client's process is unique. When facilitating career counselling, her approach is grounded on Roger's client-centred theory. When using this approach Joyce's principles are that the client sets the agenda for counselling while she ensures she is understanding and being non-judgemental towards the client.

The interactions with clients were also a journey for self-discovery. The opportunity to work with others opened the Johari window of the unknown. She discovered that she has the passion and patience for working with others.

Joyce believes that the Directorate is playing a crucial role of growing its own timbers and creating hope in students' careers. Joyce's main disappointment is that other students cannot have the opportunity and she wishes the Directorate could grow to accommodate more students.

4.7 Grace: "My life is like a story with a happy ending"
4.7.1 The counsellor in need of career counselling
Grace grew up in a village where the language medium was an African language even at school. She mentioned that this African language was even used during teaching lessons for subjects like Biology and Physics. Grace was uncertain about her career after completing her matric. She tells the story of how she chose Unisa:

> *"In 2004, I matriculated but I had no clue what a university is, then my brother held my hand and took me to Unisa to register. He asked 'what do you want to be?' I*

*answered, 'A social worker'. To be honest I did not know what a social worker did
except dealing with people's problems. I registered for the Social Work Access
Programme."*

Grace related how she became involved with the Peer Help Programme:
*"During my second year of degree studies I received an invitation twice from the
Directorate for Counselling and Career Development to apply for the Peer Help
Programme. I was not interested; I just threw the invitations away. My brother was
studying BA Psychological Counselling and he was an Assistant Student Counsellor.
He told me about the programme and skills that I could acquire through the
programme.*

*What caught my interest was the fact that he was earning an income during
registration periods, then I decided to apply, went for the interview and was selected.
End of February 2009 I attended the peer help training then from March I was a peer
helper, volunteering and shadowing in. I just fit in the environment, it was like my
home. I just dedicated my time, energy and life to the DCCD, it became an important
aspect of my life. I worked as an Assistant Student Counsellor and then later I was
appointed as an Intern Career Guidance Practitioner."*

Even though Grace was working as a Peer Helper and ASC, assisting students with
making career choices and career decisions, she was in need of career counselling
herself. It seems to me while working as a career counsellor she understood the
process of making a right career choice which became helpful for herself. She also
discovered the career she wanted to pursue and decided to change. This decision had
implications financially and academically. However, she was quite determined to pursue
the career that suited her as she pointed out below:
"*Then I figured social work is not the correct career for me, I changed to Psychology.
I lost a number of credits but I did not care. The main goal was to become a
psychologist. Even though I was working in a counselling department with*

psychologists, it took me years to learn more about the psychology industry, career
opportunities and the labour market. I enjoyed Criminology modules and changed my
second major, Public Administration, to Criminology. I realised that I am more
interested in working with offenders and victims of crime. It is then that I decided to
do more research about the relationship between the two social sciences and I
decided Criminology is the right career for me and the background of Psychology and
practical exposure of being a counsellor helped me to make an effective career
choice."

4.7.2 Challenges in the journey as a counsellor
Grace shared the challenges she had experienced in her journey as a counsellor. Her
work at DCCD was her first exposure to the formal work environment, and she had to
adjust to this. The biggest challenge was to manage her self-confidence as she
indicated below:

"My low self-confidence impacted negatively on the interactions I had with students. I
doubted myself, I wanted students to leave the office satisfied with the conversation
and provided all the information I could, without empowering them. I wanted to look
good and be trusted by students and I realised later that I robbed students of the
opportunity to reflect, make effective choices and grow."

Due to the low self-confidence, Grace was ambivalent about being in the DCCD since
she was battling with the demands of being in this formal environment and being
introduced to the new culture of ethics and having to manage interacting with diverse
people. On the other hand, she appreciated the learning opportunity as she pointed out:

"Speaking English was intimidating for me, I doubted my language ability. For the first
time in my life I was empowered to use a computer, the ASC's I shadowed in with for
the first months were friendly and accommodative. They started to teach me how to
switch on/off the PC, how to control the mouse and open documents. It was a
struggle at the beginning but I was enjoying myself. There were days when I would
be anxious and frustrated, there were days when I wanted to pack what is mine and

leave for good. This was because I was not used to a work environment where there are ethics, ground rules and engage with a diversity of people – colleagues and students."

As she grew as a counsellor, she started having other challenges. She realised that she started rushing her clients to make a career decision. She got used to the counselling process and as a result she became desensitised from applying the counselling skills to the extent that at times she did not use the counselling skills she was taught which were important in her work as she explained:

"When I was an Assistant Student Counsellor my challenges were facilitating conversations with clients. As a counsellor I forgot the importance of basic counselling skills and this contributed to me rushing the counselling processes. I did not provide room and space for students to reflect. What mattered to me was the quantity of clients, not the quality services I was employed to offer to students."

Grace further struggled with reflections and receiving feedback especially negative feedback where she would feel personally attacked. She however took time to reflect on her difficulties with feedback and took it as an opportunity for growth. This shift was a turning point in her development as a counsellor:

"I hated reflecting, it did not make sense to me why I had to reflect. In most cases my reflections were not real. I just reflected because it was compulsory and managers were supervising them. My reflections were superficial. Feedback was also not for me. I did not receive it well. Every time I received feedback, I would feel like people were against me and attacking me. One day after I got home and reflected about how I can utilise feedback, how can I utilise this thing that I see as negative to enhance my career development. After reviewing conversations with my managers in terms of the feedback that I am receiving, I picked up that the feedback is meant to improve my career development as a counsellor, as negative as it is, I need to think about what I am doing ineffectively that I can do differently next time."

Grace became receptive to feedback after she had redefined the role of feedback in her journey as a counsellor from being a personal attack to a valuable aspect of her career. Presently she will continuously ask for feedback and I always felt her need to receive something substantial. I can engage her in conversations wherein she becomes a reflective practitioner. She changed her reflections from being superficial to being in-depth and personal. I appreciate the fact that she would connect to feedback since she would reflect on her practices in counselling or her relationships with others.

4.7.3 Maturity as a counsellor

Grace shared an interaction with a student which evidenced her development and maturity as a counsellor. It seems as if with time she developed the confidence to know how to manage the conversations within her scope of practise, knowing when to refer appropriately:

"When I was an intern, I had a client who is an ex-offender and just got released from prison. On his record card he wrote that he wanted to have a conversation about personal issues. When I greeted him I started by explaining my position and role and that should there be a need I would refer him to have a conversation with a student counsellor. The student was completing his 3rd level of LLB and was curious if his criminal record would negatively impact on him getting a job especially in the law field since he once violated the law. We started by having a conversation about how he felt and I picked up that he is uncertain if he should continue with his LLB degree or change to another qualification. To be honest should it happen that I had such a client when I was an ASC, I would have referred him to see a senior counsellor without even listening to him."

Grace's confidence in her ability allowed her to facilitate a conversation with the client focussing on his concerns. This was however quite important for this client since he felt not being judged. It was as if, due to his previous experiences, he expected a contrary response to what she gave him which was important for him. On the other hand, Grace was displaying the non-judgemental attitudes expected from a counsellor:

"Even though he did not tell me what he was convicted for, we had a conversation about job application forms, about how they are structured and that most if not all forms would ask one if he has a criminal record. He asked if I am not a senior counsellor and I laughed. I asked him what makes him think that I am a senior counsellor. He said that people judge him due to his criminal record and I am comfortable having a conversation with him in a closed office. He mentioned how he feels relieved after the conversation."

Grace reflected that she feels that she has grown as a counsellor as compared to when she started. She pointed out that her development as counsellor impacted on how she facilitates counselling conversations:

"I think to be honest, the process of facilitating counselling is similar. I think my personal development impacts on how I do things, in terms of how I engage with these clients. It's a different process because in the past I doubted myself that maybe I can't do this. There are skills that are required through the counselling process. I have polished them in terms of understanding how to utilise my skills effectively in counselling now as an Intern Career Guidance Practitioner. I also get to have more conversations in terms of where I am now and what kind of help I need. So also reflecting about different roles that I have played in the Directorate. I also can connect the dots in terms of what I have learned when I got here as a peer helper, as an Assistant Student Counsellor as an Intern Career Guidance Counsellor. So the process is the same but the level of communication with clients now and the level of facilitating the career counselling conversations are different."

4.7.4 Managing students' rush while addressing their needs

Grace was confident that she effectively uses the resources provided to facilitate career conversations with clients during career counselling. She pointed out that she is able to do that because of her change of attitude towards how she views herself and her perception of the counselling process. She explained how she does not let resources replace the counselling process. However, she facilitates the conversation using the

resources to guide her process. The key concept for her is that resources remind her that counselling is a process which helps her not to overwhelm students. She articulated it as follows:

"When I was appointed as an Intern, I started engaging with students on a different level as I was relaxed, empowering, not anxious, giving orders such as homework and inviting students back for further conversations. I provided students with time, space and room to reflect about where they come from, why they are studying and their career goals. Various conversation sheets played an important role in reminding me that counselling is a process and I need to allow students to make informed decisions about their lives instead of overwhelming them with information and confusing them more. I started using conversation sheets more than providing students with resources to read without reflecting first about what they want and many students made follow-up enquiries after reflecting."

In addition, Grace found that the resources were helpful since they also managed the emotions of the students since they felt understood and being listened to by the counsellor. Grace explained:

"What I picked up was that the conversation sheets allowed students to be calm and ensured them that a counsellor is interested in what they are saying and listened with understanding. The procedure also lessened cases where students get overwhelmed with information, even though they could receive the resources to read. Their questions were never answered because there was no reflection to guide the counsellor and the client on aspects to be explored which also assist clients to ask more questions and ensure that questions are answered. As an intern I enjoyed engaging with students a lot, conversation sheets became my life saver and the counselling process was taken slowly and effective."

This approach is important to her since she has realised that prospective students have certain expectations from counselling. However, she also feels that some of their expectations are being unrealistic which results in counselling not meeting their

expectations. Grace has realised that prospective students have certain expectations but her main concern is that they would pressurise themselves to make a decision as she described below:

"Prospective students when they visit us, they have their own expectations. In some cases, their expectations of what they want from career counselling cannot be met. One thing that I have picked up is that they tend to want to rush the process. They want to rush everything and do one thing in a day or in a week of which it becomes challenging for them and also overwhelming. The resources that we have currently are effective in emphasising to students that they need to take one step at a time."

Grace also acknowledges their emotions and accepts it as normal since she realises that making a career choice can be overwhelming and not just to disregard the impact of the process on them as she explained:

"I acknowledge that as prospective students they are overwhelmed; the process could overwhelm them. They might be anxious; they might be under pressure to apply and have to do all these things in a short period of time. When we start having a conversation about taking one step at a time it helps them to understand that at the end they will still achieve their goals in a realistic way."

Grace strongly believes in taking time because making an effective career decision is a process. She articulated her views and thoughts about career counselling and making a career choice as follows:

"Making an effective career choice is a process. It might even take five years for someone to say this is what I am interested in. So career counselling is a process whereby I facilitate conversations with clients in terms of their career choice, interests, values, all the ingredients that they need in terms of making an effective career decision. And during that process the conversations we have are guided by resources. Career counselling is not only career related conversations but also career planning and study planning in terms of their career choice and personal

development. It's broad since a career choice impacts on other aspects of people's lives."

4.7.5 Frame of reference in career counselling.

Grace is influenced by diverse theories of career counselling and a variety of literature which she finds she can easily integrate in her work. Grace's ability to integrate different theories and literature is indicative of her attitude and willingness to learn and develop as a person and as a counsellor. It would also seem that she broadens her framework as she gets exposure to literature that she feels can add value to her conversation with clients. She described how the peer help manual was her framework of reference in the beginning since it provided her with counselling skills:

"When I started as a Peer Helper, we had a Peer Helper Manual which provided information about the basic counselling skills. Those basic counselling skills that one always utilises when you are having conversations with clients."

The Peer Help Manual was developed using Rogers' (1961) client-centred theory as a theoretical reference. The focus of the manual is to help peer helpers and ASCs to understand how to display empathetic listening, and being non-judgemental and being respectful during counselling. Furthermore, they learn the use of questions, ethics and confidentiality and appropriate referrals. As she became exposed to theories of counselling, Grace aligned herself with Parsons' theory (1909) and Super's theory (1953). She applied the assumptions of Parsons' theory qualitatively to help clients understand themselves and their future world of work. She explained how the theories inform and influence the career counselling process with students:

"Parsons' theory is about self-knowledge and understanding, when a person has a better understanding of their personality, interests, values, field of work and career goals, it becomes easier for such a person to relate to certain careers. For example, when a client says I am interested in helping people. This is unclear since a person is not clear on how they want to help people. Because helping people is broad and

most people employed in the world help people with their daily work. It might be directly or indirectly but someone benefits from their work."

When working with students while making a career choice, Grace helps students to move from the broad understanding of specific details regarding the role the client wants to play in their career as she pointed out:

"However, when someone says I want to help sick and injured people, they have identified the field of work they are interested in even though they have not decided on a career title they would want to study towards. I then use Parsons' theory to empower them to reflect about their interests in working with sick people and the specific roles they want to play and how they fit in the work environment when making a career decision."

Super's theory has similarities with Parsons' theory when advocating for the importance of clients' understanding of the work environment when making a career decision. It makes sense that Grace could connect to the two theories since they connect to each other. Grace pointed out below how she applies Super's theory in her career counselling with students. She also shared that the theory impacted on her personally when making her career decisions:

"Super's theory is about having exposure to the work environment. I believe the work environment exposure empowers one to make effective career choices. The effective tool that I used as a counsellor is to empower clients to do more research, network and engage with professionals in the field of work they are interested in, and to conduct information interviews to understand the advantages and disadvantages of the career and work environment as well as shadowing in. I always encourage them to volunteer or be involved in part time work to get the experience of the field and experience the work they intend to do in the future. This theory also played a role in my life, it influenced my career decisions."

Grace further highlighted the impact of her work context as having an influence on how she approaches her work. I concur with Grace's awareness of the role of the counselling environment to her as a counsellor and her frame of reference. Grace articulates the written and unwritten rules and literature discussions that impact on her as a counsellor and her counselling process:

"It is not only about theories but also about the context, the professional context that one is employed in. The ethics that one needs to apply when we are having conversations with clients. The conversations I had with colleagues about books such as 'What colour is your parachute?' And from that I picked up that, you know, there are thousands and thousands of people out there who seek for employment. The principles of the book that is important for me when having conversations with students is for them to think about how will they make sure they are unique; how could they prepare themselves to stand out in their careers."

Grace appreciates the conversations they have as counsellors since they can share the ethical dilemmas and also discuss effective ways of responding to these situations. She feels that these discussions impact positively on counsellors' growth as she explained:

"In a group, when we are having conversations, if a colleague has done something that raises ethical concerns, we have a conversation based on that and using the frame of reference of what are the ethics in the counselling environment. What are the ethics, ethical guidelines in our Directorate when we are having conversations with clients? When we have conversations there are times whereby we have articles that we read and share with one another. When sharing our personal experiences in terms of career counselling or the university as a whole. Even with personal challenges, it helps to know that you have support, peer support and other colleagues and also to manage the process when having conversations with clients."

Grace seems to be disappointed with the fact that at times she has to handle students who are overwhelmed with feelings of anxiety that makes it difficult for her as a

counsellor to facilitate the process or assist them effectively with what they need as she described below:

"The student's anxiety impacts negatively on the career conversations. I would pick up these negative emotions. Some students will also start shouting. In most cases it's about other departments. I remember the other day the student phoned and said to me I am getting stuck with the application process and I have been trying to phone. Then we started having a conversation exploring where does she feel stuck and what is happening and what is the message on the screen. Then the student started accusing me of not listening and telling me she is concerned if I am properly trained. What is interesting is that when people are anxious they can't even hear you. I told the student that I acknowledge you are overwhelmed and you feel stuck because you cannot manage the application process but now you have to take one step at a time and be patient since I am trying to understand where you are in order to support you. Then she told me the system want me to provide a student number. I picked up that she was applying on the wrong application link. So then I explained to her where she needs to click to follow the right link for her."

Grace seems proud that in the DCCD they still make an effort to assist students by minimising the frustrations experienced by the students within the system despite the challenges that they have to overcome when interacting with some of the students. She explained:

"What stands out for me currently in our Directorate is how we manage the process within the University. Since students consult with us via telephone, e-mail, face-to-face regarding all their concerns in the University even if it is not our scope of practise. What stands out on how we have been trained and our processes is that whether it is my scope of practise or not, my role is to listen to what the client presents. If it is not within my scope of practise, I would listen, pick up the feelings and the central concern and then refer to the relevant department."

Furthermore, she appreciates that they have conversations built on the principles of honesty and trust when building the relationships with clients. It seems that she experiences that the counsellors at the DCCD (including herself) behave with integrity when they engage with students as she pointed out:

> *"What I appreciate about the nature of conversations that we have with students is that we are being honest. I am being honest when I facilitate these conversations with clients. I appreciate that, because honesty helps me now to gain trust from the clients."*

4.7.6 Resilience in the face of adversity

Although Grace had experienced trauma in her life, she remained focused and resilient to progress with her career goals. Before sharing her difficult life experiences with me, I always admired how she portrayed herself as a strong person who seemed to be in charge of her life and career. I however realised during the times when she had to face the ghosts of the past and healing the wounds that she has been trying hard not to allow the pain to deter her from achieving her goals and take control of her life as she shared below:

> *"I have been a counsellor for four years and regardless of all personal challenges I faced in life I managed to keep up with them, they did not bother me much or impacted on my studies and work. During my teenage years I was abused and I had no one to help me. My family were aware of the situation however nothing was done to rescue me. The abuse took place for a year and months. For all these years I thought I am brave and strong, I was proud of myself for surviving the trauma and completing my degree regardless of the background I was raised from. In 2014 November when I was appointed as an Intern, my mother started to get sick, and her sickness deteriorated each day. Seeing her suffering bothered me and the situation impacted on my studies and work. I was no longer brave and strong, I told my managers and they referred me to a psychotherapy clinic where I had weekly therapy sessions. Apart from therapy sessions I also had the support of my managers who were available anytime I needed to talk to them. Having to face my skeletons was not*

easy which forced me to take time from work just to have the room and space to reflect and cry without any disturbance.”

Even though the process was difficult for her during psychotherapy when she had to deal with the pain, she celebrates her healing as a success for her as she now feels that the open wounds have closed despite the pain and tears she experienced during the process. She explained:

“I have grown, I have healed and I am relaxed within my body. It is now that I started to enjoy who I am, the reflection on the mirror who has a past that does not inflict pain in my life. My life is like a story with a happy ending, I feel like it is not real. I have achieved beyond my imagination academically, career wise and personal, it is just amazing.

Personal development, when I started with therapy sessions, the experience was difficult for me. Facing the ghosts of my past it was traumatic, I felt like a stranger in my own body, I was emotionally weak, hurting and wanted to run away from the situation. The individual sessions I had with managers, I cried, I did not want to be in that moment and situation. This was how the healing journey began, I actually enjoyed being there even though I was scared. If you ask me what I want to reverse in my life, the answer would be the pain, tears, fears I went through in 2015, but I would not change the experience for anything.”

4.7.7 Conclusion

Being in the Peer Help Programme was Grace's first exposure to the formal work context. She had to manage the challenges of being in a particular culture and to adhere to expectations of how to relate and perform specific duties. Her main challenge was self-confidence, challenges with feedback (from students, peers and supervisors) and reflections on her counselling sessions with students. Moreover, Grace was in need of career counselling herself since she realised that she was not connecting to a career in social work. The knowledge that Grace gained when assisting clients, helped her with

her own career decision. Grace decided to change her qualification from Social Work to Psychology so that she could become a career counsellor and was prepared to experience the financial and academic implications of her decision.

Grace matured in her journey as a counsellor. The most important aspect of her journey of maturity was the confidence she gained in herself in facilitating the career counselling process. Grace's confidence helped her to effectively allow herself to facilitate career conversations within her scope of practice using the resources made available to her at the DCCD. The resources helped her to manage students' unrealistic expectations and the rush to come to a decision due to their feelings of being overwhelmed while acknowledging their emotions. Grace is disappointed that students are sometimes quite overwhelmed which makes it difficult for them to listen to the counsellor while being assisted.

Grace's frame of reference is grounded on diverse theories which include Roger's (1961) client-centred theory, Parsons' (1909) and Super's theory (1953). Apart from the theory she acknowledges the role of the counselling context, discussions with other peers on literature and ethics on how she approaches and views the career counselling process

Grace's resilience assisted her in her journey for recovery during the time when she had to confront her pain from the trauma she experienced in the past. Even though the process of working through her pain during psychotherapy was uncomfortable for her, it helped her to become integrated as a counsellor. This journey was also important for her as counsellor in order to be able to understand and help others through their own pain. The significant part of the story is that from the tears and pain there was a happy ending in her life where she feels contained and healed from the past.

4.8 Conclusion

The information gathered from the semi-structured interviews with the participants was presented in this chapter as each participant's story. Some of my interactions with them and my observations of them were also touched on. I asked each participant to read the story I had written of him or her to verify its content in order to make sure that I present the data as trustworthy as possible. When responding to their captured story, some of the participants shared that they became emotional when reading their story since it reminded them of their journey.

Each of the six participants' stories described above have their unique biographical history in terms of undergraduate qualifications and the reasons why they joined the Directorate, where I came into contact with each of them. I find that each one of the participants has different reasons for being part of the Directorate even if they joined the same programme such as the Peer Help Programme – each participant had their unique intention. However, there are also common themes in their stories which will be presented and discussed in Chapter 5.

In the stories I also highlight their main successes and disappointments, as well as the theories they use as their basic frame of reference that guide their process of counselling with prospective students. While sharing their framework, the counsellors (participants) also shared specific interactions with students to give insight into their practise.

The process of writing up the stories involved reading the transcribed and written reflections of participants about their background, training and their experiences with students in career counselling. In writing the story the intention was to capture their different milestones in their journeys to become career counsellors. The next chapter will present and discus the themes that emanated from the thematic analysis of the stories.

Chapter 5

Becoming and being a career counsellor

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I aim to reflect on the stories of the six counsellors at Unisa's Directorate of Counselling and Career Development (DCCD) who kindly served as the participants for this study. In doing so I hope to do justice to the themes that emanated from their stories (the ethnographical data of this study). I will also present my own story of becoming a career counsellor and psychologist (the auto-ethnographical data of this study). By presenting this data I hope to give a representation of the findings of this study which aimed to explore counsellors' experiences of the counselling process with students.

5.2 Themes and sub-themes of the ethnographical data

The discussion of the themes emanates from the participants' stories that were presented in the previous chapter. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the research participants of this study, who are counsellors at the DCCD. In addition to the interviews, the counsellors wrote me their reflections that capture their experiences of the counselling process with students. I have analysed the data thematically according to Braun and Clarke (2006) and, in order to be as objective and reliable as possible, asked another researcher to validate the themes. This analysis was done in order to ethnographically gauge the counselling culture at Unisa (Creswell, 2013). The process of thematic analysis is discussed in Chapter 2 in more detail.

In presenting the material, I will focus on the following main themes:
1. Counsellors' view of the process
2. Students and their career needs
3. Counsellors' resources
4. Development of career counsellors

The main themes and sub-themes are presented in Table 5.1

Table 5.1

Main themes and sub-themes identified through the thematic analysis

Main Theme	Sub-theme
Counsellors' views of the process	Career counselling is a continuous process Balancing the needs of individuals vs masses Blended counselling
Students and their career needs	Diversity of student population with diverse career needs Need for validation Planning their study route

Counsellors' resources	Diversity of career theories
	    Client-centred approach and second order cybernetics
	    Holland, Parsons and Super
	    Chaos theory
	    Social cognitive career theory
	Literature
	Framework for career counselling: embedded in resources

Development of career counsellors	Career counsellors' identity Self-confidence Counsellors' growth

The central departure of all themes presented in Table 5.1 is the theme of the career counselling process. All the themes are related or emanate from this process. The counsellors' view of the counselling process is that it is continuous and circular while at the same time it responds to the students' diverse needs. The interaction between the counsellor and the students during the counselling process influences other career counselling processes.

Furthermore, the continuous nature of the counselling process has an impact on the development of the identity and self-confidence of the counsellor and further determines the theories that could be used as theoretical grounding for the development and definition of the frame of reference for career counselling. It also impacts on how counselling is facilitated. On the other hand, the counselling process, the theory and feedback from students impact on the development of the career counsellor's identity and self-confidence.

136

5.2.1 Counsellors' view of the process

Three outstanding sub-themes resonated with the theme counsellors' view of the career counselling process. These sub-themes are discussed below.

5.2.1.1 Career counselling is a continuous process

The counsellors agree that career counselling is a continuous process and not a once-off, quick fix solution. This has been covertly and overtly described by all the counsellors when making reference of the career counselling process. Grace articulated this clearly as follows:

"Making an effective career choice is a process. It might even take five years for someone to say this is what I am interested in. So career counselling is a process whereby I facilitate conversations with clients in terms of career choice, interest, values, all the ingredients that they need in terms of making an effective career decision."

The participants' views of counselling as a process seems to be in contrast to clients' expectations when they seek career counselling. Clients seem to expect that they will make a career choice or a career decision immediately. Grace declares that

"*Prospective students when they visit us, they have their own expectations. In some cases, their expectations from career counselling cannot be met. One thing I picked up they tend to want to rush the process. They want to rush everything and do one thing in a day or a week of which it becomes challenging for them and also overwhelming."*

The counsellors have to manage their clients' expectations in order to effectively assist them with their career needs as shared by Joyce when working with a client who was resisting the process of career counselling and the aspects that had to be explored. Since the counsellors firmly believe in career counselling as a process they seem to be able to manage students' expectations of wanting to impulsively choose a qualification

through exploring the career problem and then helping students to understand that the career counselling process can only help them if they work through the process as shared by Joyce below:

> "*I remember I had a client, he was a manager at one of the retail stores. He wanted to change his qualification but he was not sure what to change to. Then I was working with him with activities of making a career choice but he wasn't convinced that those activities can assist him to know what he can do. But then after explaining to him and exploring he then agreed to go and do the activities.*"

My experiences of students regarding their expectations from counselling is that they tend to require immediate gratification. I however also realised that this is not related to the main career needs but to the feelings of being overwhelmed related to the decisions or anxieties about their career choice, especially where students have pressure from significant others to choose a specific career.

5.2.1.2   Balancing the needs of individuals versus the masses

Counsellors have to ensure in their counselling process that they continuously strive to balance the needs of individuals versus the masses. Sarah shared her struggle with balancing her services to individuals versus servicing the masses because of her principle of fairness and equal access. She however shares how she integrates this principle in her day to day practise in striving to address career needs of individuals and those of masses:

> "*If you look at the whole process of 'my Choice @ Unisa', the workshops, anything that I do with applicants, it is informed by theory. It's got the basis that individual stories are honoured. I constantly have to think when I work with large groups that there is the individual, but how can I help more people? There is this balance for me between honouring the individual story versus the huge need for career services. How can I do it responsibly? How can I relate to the individual stories when there is constantly this tension?*"

This is however not only the participants' challenge of ensuring that there is a balance in addressing needs of individuals versus the masses, since the University has also included in its policy a mandate that counselling has to reach the masses. The provision of decentralised technology-enhanced guidance and counselling services forms an important part of Unisa's institutional goals as directed by the Unisa Open Distance Learning Policy (University of South Africa, 2008). The Open Distance Learning Policy has a direct impact on how counselling services need to be rendered at Unisa. Betty shared her blended approach to counselling to ensure that she manages the large number of students who needs counselling while honouring them as individuals as follows:

"One on one interaction is always I think a prime point of human relationships. So I think what has really changed for me was to become like breathing. The students, the majority of students that I see these days have made contact with me via e-mail or telephone and they followed it up most likely with an e-mail and then made appointments. So I think the big changes for me is that I am far more insistent now that students do their homework because that is why we have got resources on-line, and then we have a number of exchanges, then have an appointment. I think what I realise within the University context is that the luxury of seeing 8 to 10 students a day doesn't exist. There is time pressure on everybody."

5.2.1.3   Blended counselling

In their views of career counselling as a process, participants have adopted a blended approach to counselling which provides clients with a choice of how they wish to access counselling services. This multimodal approach to counselling could include digital platforms (e.g. internet and e-mail) as well as off-line services such as individual face-to-face counselling, as opposed to a traditional counselling approach which is only face-to face.

Career counselling as a process is aimed at addressing diverse clients and their career needs. Unisa's Open Distance Learning Policy (University of South Africa, 2008)

emphasises the student-centred nature of the University when rendering services to diverse groups of clients that include students, prospective students and the broader community. In addition, Betty pointed out when providing blended counselling, they are also ensuring that they are in-line with international trends. However, at Unisa they seem to be doing blended counselling without labelling or describing it as such. Betty described it as follows:

"*Where we are now in 2015, working on-line has become an international trend. It sits well with Unisa's Open Distance Learning Policy model and policies around blended learning. I think we were a bit slow in picking up that at Unisa we have been doing blended counselling for quite a long time and then we do it so naturally that we perhaps don't even think about how we describe it.*"

5.2.2 Students and their career needs

The participants encountered specific needs of students who came to them for career counselling. These needs are discussed according to the following three sub-themes.

5.2.2.1 Diversity of student population with diverse career needs

It is clear that counsellors have to deal not only with the diversity of the student population but also with their diverse career needs. Within the diversity of clients as well as the career needs, I could still find the common thread in what counsellors describe as the main needs of clients. It is important to note that students' needs form an important part of the career counselling process. It would seem that all other processes that I captured in the other themes emanate from the desire to respond to the diverse needs of the prospective students. It was also interesting that each counsellor has his or her own unique way of describing the career needs of students. This in some way is evidence that there is diversity at different levels irrespective of the mode of counselling or whether they present in groups or as individuals as Sarah shared below:

"*Each person's story would be different, but there are common themes among individuals' career stories. When I engage with people on different levels, whether it be phone calls, e-mail throughout the year, during the workshops and as I talk to*

colleagues, I get a sense of the themes. Those themes could then link to the individual story."

While describing the career needs of students, Sarah categorises prospective students into specific groups. The different groups illustrate the diversity of groups and needs that must be addressed in career counselling. The groups seem to be categorised according to their level of career maturity which is also related to the stage where students are in their career journey when they need assistance in choosing a career as she described below:

"One large group that we work with are the school leavers, people still at a level that they need to make the initial career choice, really the basics of exploring as widely as possible and helping them to narrow down the different options. The concern is that they don't have enough exposure to different types of careers so it actually limits their choices. The whole career counselling process is to get them expand that frame of reference but not throwing it so open that they get overwhelmed. Then another large group would be people already working. They have in some sense started with their career development but now they would want to change or they would want to progress with a certain career path."

Joyce's description is different from Sarah's since in her description of needs she made a link of the career needs of choosing a career to specific groups of prospective students. Joyce illustrates the diversity of clients and their career needs that the research participants regularly come across:

"Let me start by saying that with counselling, you come across different peoples or I could say people from different walks of life. You get students who are going to start secondary school or your high school whereby they need guidance on which subjects to take, that will link with the qualification that they would like to see themselves in, or you get students from high school who doesn't know which career and qualification to choose.

Other categories of people would be those who have been studying with Unisa, however, due to some career development they feel that they want to do something related to their current work or position.

Others have lost interest in their qualification so they want to explore other fields. There are other ones that have been working for a certain number of years. They feel maybe bored or they want to try something new. They would need somebody to sit with and have a conversation or even contact by e-mail or telephone, just to have a conversation with somebody who will assist them to know which career fields they can choose.

Others are those that they will say that they have been working in a certain position or company without qualifications so they need guidance to choose a qualification so that they can have a formal qualification."

It would seem that prospective students do not articulate their needs for assistance very clearly from the beginning as it becomes evident from Grace's extract below. The question they ask will not directly indicate that they need assistance with choosing a career until further exploration:

"Most students that I engage with, they are concerned about admission requirements. Even if they were not sure which qualification they want to study but the first question would be, will I qualify to study at Unisa. Then should we start having a conversation with general admission requirements and we start engaging discussions about their career plans, what they are interested in studying, then that's when I get a sense this person is curious about admission requirements but they are still not sure what qualification to study."

Lim (2004) explains that the differences in formulating the needs or expectations to be understood in relation to a number of factors. The following are some of the factors (Lim, 2004) mentioned: clients have difficulty in understanding what to expect from the

counselling process; they are uncertain regarding their needs; they lack knowledge of the career decision-making process; and they are not acquainted with the role of the counsellor in the process. The extract below provides us with Piet's experience or conclusion on why prospective students struggle with choosing a career:

"*What I have encountered is that there is a need for more research in terms of career guidance to students. My role as a counsellor is to facilitate the process so that students can address the gaps. I realise that a lot of students don't really have sufficient information to make a decision of what to choose mainly because they don't have sufficient information to make a decision. A lot of them know what to do but it is because there are still gaps that they need to fill, that they come for counselling. There are also issues around support since there are pressures on them that they must choose certain careers from their family*".

This indicates the role of significant others in students' career decision and the complexities of the problem. The gap Piet has identified is captured in Hartung and Niles' (2000b, p. 4) definition of career counselling which states that "a career problem may be defined as a crystallised gap between 'what is' and 'what ought to be' in one's academic or work life and counsellors attempt to bridge this gap by offering a variety of career services". The author further points the main intention is to help students to answer the central question related to their career.

5.2.2.2 Need for validation

While in the process of making a career decision, some students need the decisions that they are making to be validated by the counsellor. The validation could be regarding their career or qualification. In some cases, the need to just being listened to and acknowledged further validates them as human beings who have a career story. This has been captured in the extract below from Betty:

"*I think there are basically three different kinds of needs. The first need is kind of validation for the stirring things that they need to make a change in their life. That they need a sounding board to discuss the kind of decisions they want to make. They*

have a stirring need to make a change in their lives, they need a discussant,
somebody with whom they can check out what this change means and what is it they
need to know about this change.".

The validation or affirmation of career decision could be facilitated through the
resources used in counselling since the extract below indicates that resources were
developed taking into account this particular need from prospective students as pointed
out by Sarah:

"*So even in the case of 'my Choice @ Unisa' how we set up the career counselling*
process, would still be valid for people to kind of affirm decisions or again to look
broadly at other options, you know people come with ideas."

Mary expanded on this aspect by saying that she also found that another way of
manoeuvring for validation is when a prospective student prefers to have a face-to-face
(in-person) counselling with the career counsellor compared to other modes of
counselling. In face-to-face counselling, there is a human relationship created between
the student and counsellor. The context of counselling validates and reaffirms clients
through empathetic listening compared to on-line counselling which could be perceived
as distanced and inhuman. My experience is that it requires a skilful counsellor to infuse
humanness and connection through on-line contact which students crave for as
indicated by Mary:

"*A lot of students still prefer the face-to-face interaction, the human interaction…. that*
is what students still crave."

Piet's view is that the counsellor is able to provide the validation students need just by
listening to their career story which the significant others could not provide as he shared
below:

"*When they come to counselling, it may mean that no-one has really listened to them.*
No one is really hearing what he or she is saying. It may mean that the interaction
that they have been having with other people has been always about other people,

about what they want, about what other people think they should do. So what I have realised is that when they come into session and they find someone who is willing to listen, and they feel that they are making a right decision. Most of them will just want to have a confirmation."

Schultheiss (2002) recommends that there needs to be an integration of the client's psychological, emotional and social concerns within the career counselling process in order to view the person in counselling as an integrated whole. Grace's explanation below indicates the need for validation of students' emotions which they present during the counselling process. Since communication is verbal and non-verbal, the fact that the counsellor can grasp the emotion indicates students' needs that their emotions will be contained:

"*I acknowledge that as prospective students they are overwhelmed; the process could overwhelm them. They might be anxious, they might be under pressure to apply and have to do all these things in a short period of time. When we start having a conversation about taking one step at a time it helps them to understand that at the end they will still achieve their goals in a realistic way.*"

5.2.2.3   Planning their study route

It would seem that another important part of their career decision-making process is to be able to plan their career journey. Such planning requires that they choose a suitable programme but furthermore that they understand the Unisa distance learning system and then realistically plan how to achieve their goals. The process has been articulated by Mary as follows:

"*In my experience, the career needs of prospective students are firstly understanding of distance learning and what it would mean for them. Because lot of students have a misconception about what being an open distance learner entails, especially coming from high school, classroom set up or from residential campus.*"

Mary's explanation below illustrates how with the understanding of the needs discussed above, the conversation is directed towards these needs. Furthermore, there is a focus on preparing students to prepare for opportunities:

> *"So for me firstly, it's open distance learning adjustment conversations that you need to have with them. If they decide that Unisa is for them, then identifying a suitable programme that meets their needs and also that fits their long-term goals in terms of their career. A lot of conversation focusses on career planning and how to plan for future careers, how to prepare themselves for opportunities in the fields that they are looking to work, for me those are the main needs."*

The main focus under the planning theme is on helping students to have a better understanding of Unisa as a distance learning institution, which has a different method of teaching when compared to other learning contexts.

The overall impression I got when identifying this subtheme is that the counsellors' experiences of prospective students' needs are mostly the same. However, they differ in how they describe or articulate these needs.

5.2.3 Counsellors' resources

The counsellors' resources when facilitating the counselling process is grounded in a diversity of career theories. It is not only a variety of theories that are used as resources, but they also use literature and a framework for counselling to assist them to be of help to students who must decide about their careers and how to prepare for it.

5.2.3.1 Diversity of career theories

It is clear that the participants use theory as a grounding in their practise as career counsellors. They use a diversity of theories – this is applicable to differences between the counsellors, but there is also the use of a diversity of theories within each of the participants.

Hartung and Niles (2002b, p. 4) maintain that "Conventional wisdom holds that there is nothing so practical as a good theory, because theories of career choice and development offer counsellors practical ways in which to understand and promote career development. Furthermore, counsellors use career theories to comprehend a student's career problem and constructing strategies". The extract below from Sarah indicates the application of theory to the counselling process. It is a process that develops since the counsellor feels comfortable with the integration of the theory in the process as pointed out below by Sarah:

"At the beginning maybe we experimented a lot with different approaches, one could say from a very like, can we say quantitative approach, let people tick things that help them decide versus a very open ended qualitative approach, you ask a lot of reflective questions."

The explanation helps us to understand that when career counsellors engage theory, they also critically evaluate whether it fits the context. They take into consideration their experiences and their need on how they want to articulate the theory in a career counselling process with prospective students.

The theories that form part of the counsellors' theoretical grounding and the aspects they integrate in the counselling process will be described below. The theories that form part of the counsellor's theoretical frameworks are Rogers' (1961) client-centred theory together with second order cybernetics; theories on careers by Holland (1973), Parsons and Super (1953); the chaos theory (Pryor& Bright, 2003a) and social cognitive career theory (Lent, 2005).

- **Client-centred approach and second order cybernetics**

Rogers' (1961) client centred theory's principles were referred to by most of the participants as their frame of reference when interacting with students in terms of their behaviour, attitudes or how they establish the relationship with prospective students. The principles or main assumptions of the theory were often referred to without even

mentioning the theory when participants described their approach and their position as counsellors when they facilitate career conversations with clients. Rogers' (1961) principles of unconditional acceptance, congruency (being genuine) and showing empathy are widely regarded as the basis for establishing a relationship with clients.

During counselling, career counsellors' stance is that of being client-centred by focussing on what prospective students bring to the career counselling process. The evidence from the participants indicates that each one of them allowed the prospective students to present their needs and they facilitated what is being presented. The students and their career needs are unconditionally accepted by the participants since they are allowed to set the agenda for the counselling process and the counsellors illustrate empathy through listening as indicated by Mary:

> *"The foundation theory for me is unconditional, non-judgemental, accepting the students and working with the students' needs."*

Piet further illustrates the influence of the theory on how he views clients and the stance he takes when facilitating the career counselling process. Clients are also valued and respected that they have a contribution to make in the process of career counselling:

> *"I cannot remember our core specific theories. I think what comes to mind is the person-centred. Understanding that the client knows their problem better than what you can think. And not being judgemental to the client, understanding that this is how the client is telling their story and you have to appreciate that. Help them even to tell or strengthen their story, acknowledging the person's strength, not being judgemental and treating them with respect, showing positive regard. The most important thing also comes from the person-centred understanding that the client has something that they have brought in."*

The theory seems to be used as a foundation for the counselling process since it determines the relationship before the application of other theories. I found that Rogers' client-centred theory was mentioned more persistently as the main theory by what I

would refer as novice counsellors or junior counsellors compared to senior counsellors who would refer to other career theories. I have realised that this is the first theory that they are introduced to during their training as peer helpers in the Directorate. I could also however not ignore the fact that they are all psychology students and they are introduced to the theory during their undergraduate studies.

I have decided to refer to the second-order cybernetics principles (Anderson & Goolishan, 1992) as complementary to client-centred theory as presented by Piet since the fundamental principles are that students are the centre of the counselling process and is further regarded as experts of their career journey. He described his second-order cybernetics approach of not-knowing when he shared how he displays the attitude of curiosity, openness and respect towards the students, describing his interest in understanding what they bring:

> "*I try to shy away from an expert position understanding that the client brings in, they already have something, there is not a clean slate or some kind of blank sheet, but they are bringing something. It means that your role as a counsellor is just to provoke some thinking and bring another perspective that could challenge even the way of thinking and bring another perspective that could challenge even the way of thinking without imposing your views.*"

- **Theories of Holland, Parsons and Super**

The Holland career theory (Holland, 1973), Parsons' career theory (Parsons, 1909) and Super's life-span theory (Super, 1953) are also part of the diverse theories that constitute the counsellors' frame of reference. The three theories complement each other when looking at the aspects that need to be considered when making a career decision. I will now illustrate how the participants integrate the assumptions of the three theories in their counselling process.

Sarah explained how she applies Holland's theory qualitatively to assist clients to understand who they are in terms of their personality and interest:

"One of the career theories that I would say shaped the most of my thinking in my work was obviously the Holland theory in terms of the interest. Qualitatively and narratively, so with the Holland for example it provides me with a framework to know that if someone is interested in a, b, c then most likely then they would begin the process of exploring careers in these fields. The Holland theory helps to narrow careers without limiting them. Even helping clients to think about themselves and their choices. In terms of current work environment, why are some things working and why are some things not working. I can do all those things without going into detail of doing the self-directed search assessment, it just helps them to orient themselves in terms of their interests and it influences their career choice."

The Holland theory of careers can be applied to assist in exploring different careers. It can assist prospective students to narrow down their interest in different careers in order for them to be able to make a choice that fit with all other aspects that they have explored about themselves and the environment. Students are asked open ended questions that provoke them to think about and have an in-depth reflection about different aspects that are important when making a career decision

The application of Parsons' career theory and the aspects that are being facilitated as articulated by Joyce and Grace point to similar aspects as described by Sarah on the application of Holland's career theory. Joyce also shared that Parsons' (1909) assumptions are applied qualitatively to help clients to understand themselves and learn more about their environment as they make career decisions as she pointed out below:

"Parsons' theory in which you analyse skills that clients have, looking at their values, interest, and personality and then help clients match these with jobs where they can use them. This also helps them to reflect and think about the career they may follow."

Super's theory, while advocating for the importance of the work environment when making a career decision, is in line with both the Holland career theory and Parsons' theory in that all three theories emphasise the role of the working environment that

should be taken into account when making a career choice. Grace pointed out how she applies Super's theory in her career counselling with students who are making a career decision.

"Super's theory is about having exposure to the work environment. I believe the work environment exposure empowers one to make effective career choices. The effective tool that I used as a counsellor to empower clients to do more research, network and engage with professional in the field of work they are interested in, and to conduct information interviews to understand the advantages and disadvantages of the career and work environment as well as shadowing in, I always encourage them to volunteer or to be involved in part time work to get the experience of the field and experience the work they intend to do in the future. The theory also played a role in my career decision."

- **The chaos theory of careers**

The concepts of the chaos theory of careers such as complexity and uncertainty are applied by the counsellors to prepare prospective students to understand the Unisa system and their career journeys. Pryor and Bright (2005) argue that other theories applied in career counselling fail to incorporate the complexity in systems as well as the uncertainty of the career counselling process. Mary shared how she applies the theory to assist students to understand their own career journey which is characterised by uncertainty, complexity and is also influenced by other systems such as their family and the Unisa system. Mary explained the relevance of this theory to the students to understand and prepare themselves for the uncertainties and opportunities in their career journey:

"The chaos theory of careers is relevant when working with the Unisa system and the rules that keep on changing every year. Unisa is part of the chaotic system, with external bodies that have a say on what clearly we are able to offer which creates more chaos within the chaotic system. I then use the theory in assisting students to then be able to prepare for career opportunities and helping them understand that there may not be a clear path to their future career. But you also may need at some

point to consider not just a job that will link your qualification to your career but also look at survival jobs in the interim. Students need to be prepared to think out of the box and work with chaos instead of working to work against it."

Betty and Sarah also incorporated the principles of the chaos theory in their frame of reference. They both concur with what Mary articulated above with regard to preparing students to understand that their career journey is a complex journey which is characterised by uncertainties. However, by incorporating the principles of this theory in their frame of reference as pointed above by Mary they are able to help students to know how to plan within the uncertainties in order to prepare for opportunities as explained by Sarah:

"When I started reading about the theory it had a very huge impact on me on the whole concept of preparing for opportunities. The chaos theory for me is very new but one thing I take from it is that I can use the theory to explain to clients that the career process is not linear. That even though they may have all these experiences, if they start thinking about it, all link together. Furthermore, I want to help clients to realise that they can do some planning despite the fact that they have to manage the uncertainty in their career journey. But also to some extent I have been shaped by the realities of being part of the system."

Pryor and Bright (2005) describe career counselling as an interactive and adaptive way of facilitating career counselling in order to prepare for unplanned and unpredictable events. These events and experiences are regarded as crucial in the narrative of people's careers according to the chaos theory of careers (Pryor & Bright, 2005).

- **The social cognitive career theory**

The social-cognitive career theory's main assumption is that cognitive factors play a role in the career decision process (Brown & Lent, 2006). The theory's main concepts that are applied in career counselling with prospective students are performance attainment and overcoming obstacles (Lent & Brown, 1996). The reality prospective students need

to be prepared for is the challenges they will experience and how they will overcome them. Even while choosing a career, there are challenges that confront them as pointed out earlier on in the discussion such as significant others choosing certain careers for them or not supporting their choice of careers. Sarah shared how she applied the concept of barriers in the career journey during career counselling. The intention is to make clients aware or sensitise them so that they can prepare themselves for how to overcome barriers, as she explained:

"You know with social cognitive theory, the one thing that stands out for me is thinking about barriers, you know to their career, to learning. How can one tap into clients' resources to manage those barriers? How does this counselling process allow people to utilise their own resources to overcome barriers to learning? Thinking more creatively about the realisation that there are challenges but how do I overcome this? But also the philosophical undertone that I have the belief that people have potential and how one can into that despite challenges?"

Betty shares the views similar to Sarah about the social cognitive theory. Betty described how in her journey of experimentation with different theories she integrated the theory with other theories that became her frame of reference. Betty shared how she integrates the principles of the social cognitive theory in her framework:

"*During the internship I had the freedom to choose the theoretical approach that works best for me. The social cognitive career theory was my preferred point of departure during my internship. The thing that stuck me there was agency and barriers to learning. How to overcome barriers to learning? The person's goals and their abilities in terms of executing those goals plus how that fit in with the greater picture?"*

The social cognitive career theory influenced the kind of questions the counsellors would ask, like questions about the barriers in the development of career resources. The intention to identify barriers is not to discourage clients, but to make them aware that they will have challenges. The goal in career counselling is to sensitise prospective

students through awareness of barriers and to recognise their own strength or resources that they need to activate to manage the barriers.

5.2.3.2 Literature

The career counsellors incorporate literature or books and articles beyond the career theories which could help them to broaden their frame of reference for their career counselling process with students or contribute towards their career development as counsellors. Literature impacts on the work of the counsellor to remain relevant and broaden their knowledge and being effective are important. Furthermore, Grace pointed out that the environment also contributes to the counsellor's frame of reference with specific reference to the written and unwritten rules and literature discussions that impact on her as a counsellor and counselling process:

"It is not only about theories but also about the context, the professional context that one is employed in. The ethics that one needs to apply when we are having conversations with clients. The conversations I had with colleagues about books such as 'what colour is your parachute?' 'The principles of the book that is important for me when having conversations with students is for them to think about how they will make sure they are unique; how could they prepare themselves to stand out in their careers."

Betty's journey echoes the sentiment shared by Grace, as she relates how she engages other theories or literature that could empower her to deal with the issues that she is confronted with as a professional counsellor in her practise or the challenges that are confronting society. Betty emotionally shared her views and experiences with race and her attempt to work with theories and her colleagues in order to firstly confront and heal her own pain so that she can respond appropriately to others.

5.2.3.3 Framework for career counselling: embedded in career resources

The participants in the discussion above describe how they incorporate the diversity of theories in their frame of reference. During the analysis of data, some participants made

reference to the career counselling framework. The career counselling framework was developed especially for facilitating career counselling with prospective students. It is important to clarify that the DCCD does not have an official articulated framework that is presented in the strategic documents or enforced that all counsellors need to follow when facilitating career counselling. The framework was embedded in the brochure *my Choice @ Unisa* as described by Sarah in the extract below that some counsellors advocate within their respective offices to create a framework for facilitating career counselling:

> *"I spoke about the challenge of the counsellors at all levels not having a shared framework of career counselling specifically with applicants. In my opinion one of the roles of 'my Choice @ Unisa' was also to provide such structure for all counsellors on all levels. In theory, the ideal was that each person before they applied, needed to have a conversation with a career counsellor about their career and linked study choice(s). In practise this was not possible due to limited resources. It is the reason that the 'tone' of 'my Choice @ Unisa' had to be as if a counsellor is having a conversation with an applicant to help them select an appropriate qualification."*

In the absence of a clearly demarcated framework for career counselling, the 'my Choice@Unisa' brochure was developed in an attempt to have a framework for facilitating career counselling. The purpose of the brochure is twofold; it is available as a self-help resource to assist students in making a career decision without the assistance of the counsellor. While on the other hand it provides assurance and consistency on the nature of conversations that counsellors are having with students at different levels. This was the remedy of the concerns that confronted Betty and Sarah in their roles as supervisors, trainers and senior counsellor as articulated by Sarah:

> "*At some stage I was struggling with let's call it quality control, quality assurance. The concerns that I have about working with peer helpers and assistant student counsellors was whether we are talking from the same book with students. So we thought that 'my Choice @ Unisa', or 'my Career' whatever it was called, is actually a good kind of structure in terms of how we do career counselling at Unisa. The theory*

informed the development of the brochure 'my Choice @ Unisa' but it was not in the
brochure."

Sarah continues:

> "*Just linking now of the assistant student counsellors, one of the concerns is*
> *always, you know, what level of service are students getting from them versus let's*
> *say a professionally trained counsellor. So having this kind of structure also creates*
> *a sense that students are getting at least similar conversations and maybe just at*
> *different level.*"

Participants support Sarah's view of the role of the resources in providing structure in counselling and further providing the framework for facilitating career conversations. Mary's approach illustrates how the resources provide the framework for facilitating the career counselling process in order to have a systematic and logical way as she narrated below:

> "*Firstly, what is important, is to work through the 'my Choice @Unisa' brochure with*
> *them. And now there's student readiness on-line assessment that can assess*
> *whether they are ready to study through distance learning. But also the nice thing*
> *about the student readiness tool, it's not just an assessment, as they work through*
> *the questions that are being asked, they automatically also get the feedback and*
> *information as to what ODL entails. The online assessment tools also address the*
> *misconceptions that they may have and also prepare them effectively to be*
> *successful distance learners.*"

Piet concurs with Mary's view regarding the framework which is represented in the resource. He indicated that the framework helps him to stay out of trouble and further ensures that he can use it to check on his own process of counselling and stance towards the client. Piet acknowledges that in the absence of the framework the counselling would be unstructured. The framework helps counsellors to facilitate counselling in a systemic and logical way:

"*It helps because it informs your practise. It helps you to see carefully. Some kind of an eye on how you should look at things in counselling. If I was not given a framework, it would be very messy. I will be in an expert position where I tell clients what to do which will be in contradiction to the client-centred approach. Having a framework also helped me also to deal with preconceived ideas to say I really need to take them out of counselling.*"

The counsellor ensures that the structure is maintained through the integration of resources with the counselling process in a harmonious way. The resource to be used is also determined by the student's need. Boer (2001) emphasised the importance of appropriate and effective use of both off-line and on-line referrals when integrating them in the counselling process. It is therefore important that the counsellor remains skilful when referring prospective students to these resources, by clearly indicating how the resources relate to the respective prospective students' career needs. This is irrespective of the mode of counselling and the further assessing and negotiating with the client about what they are able and willing to do as homework to address their career problems. Sarah shared how this integrated and systemic way of using the resources' impact on both the counselling process and the student as described by Mary. Furthermore, Sarah in the extract below indicates the impact especially on students who will invest in using the resources:

"*I will get a phone call, or e-mail or someone would come in, I would come in, I would explore what is the need of this person, why are they here, and then I think of the resources available to allow this person to take some time to work through the resource. And once they are done, I can always see if I have given a person something to work through in their feedback. The kind of questions that they ask, the kind of deeper reflections from somebody who maybe didn't take time to work through that resource. So for me its empowering for this person because they could ask different kinds of questions and it prepares them also to have conversations with other people in the University. So it also helps with how I refer clients to other sections in the University. And obviously I and the person will, if they need to follow*

up. Part of the individual discussion would be to get a sense of how comfortable would this person be to read something on-line and how they come back. If they haven't worked through the resource I can normally deduct you know something like either the person is very anxious, so how they deal with homework also tells you how to proceed with the client."

Sarah is highlighting that the resources do not replace the facilitation role of the counsellor since she still infers the emotions of students through their engagement with the resources. In addition, Mary explained how she is able to use specific resources with specific needs in different modes of counselling. In Mary's explanation I get the sense that she is able to map out the process easily for the student to have an understanding of the process which relates to the structure which has been alluded to by all participants and her description of the process being logical and systemic. She explained:

"The student readiness tool I find becoming more useful in e-counselling and face-to-face conversation with students. In the 'my Choice @ Unisa' brochure they find the career questionnaire section on choosing the career. Also there's the questionnaire: 'Is the Unisa journey for me?' So currently what I am using is the student on-line readiness tool, and also on the new application process there is a section that asks them to reflect on their career choice using that for the students to identify a suitable career and suitable qualifications. So, step one application, the new application process on the website, 'is the Open Distance Learning at Unisa for you', and then step 2, 'Are you certain about your career?' Those two are the most important in working with prospective students."

The above approach of Sarah and Mary is linked to students' needs. This is evidence of the client-centred approach as the foundation theory that I found to exist among the participants. The steps and issues to be discussed are connected to the students' career needs. This was discussed earlier on under the previous themes, namely career

counselling is a continuous process and balancing the needs of the individual versus the masses.

Furthermore, the framework creates consistency in the conversations counsellors have with prospective students even though counsellors are allowed to have unique conversations with prospective students. However, due to the framework and the use of resources, the student can have follow-up career conversations with different counsellors without confusion but have continuity in the career processes

The extract from Sarah below indicates the counsellors' experience is that the introduction of resources creates structure that gives the career counselling process a flow and direction. In addition, it seems as if there is clarity regarding the framework due to the resources available, which is the practical application of the framework, which guides the counselling process with prospective students. It seems that there is a sense of shared understanding under the participants of the framework in facilitating career counselling using resources as captured in Sarah's comment:

> "*I think previously for me it was very much kind of like each to his own so there were so many different approaches or frameworks that one can learn from. I experienced that people just kind of chose things as it suited them. Whereas now with this process, most applicants are helped with that particular process. It is more structured, its more focussed in terms of, you know, how we can approach particular kinds of clients and it's also more integrated for me. Over the years I feel we have integrated much more of the on-line, plus then face-to-face consultations, so integrating those two aspects and now moving forward where we are now almost fully on-line. So that is basically changed but the process itself has become more structured and I guess it creates comfort in some sense not saying you cannot think about renewing your practise based on the client.*"

The above articulation of the process by Sarah indicates shifts that has happened regarding the framework. The integration seems to be on different levels since there is

159

an integration of frameworks wherein from individual counsellors' framework, there is a Directorate framework. Finally, there is an integration of on-line and off-line resources into the framework. The integration led to a perception among counsellors that there is structure in the process.

5.2.4 Development of career counsellors

When the participants told me their stories, it became clear that all of them had developed from different situations to become career counsellors. Their development contributed to their identity as counsellors, giving them self-confidence. It was clear that they experienced quite noticeable changes during their studies and their time at the DCCD.

5.2.4.1 Career counsellors' identity

The role of the counsellor's identity is critical in the career counselling process with prospective students. It is therefore not surprising that the theme of the development of the career counsellor's identity became evident when the data was analysed. The development of the counsellors' identity cannot be seen outside the context of career counselling theories and the framework discussed earlier. While referring to theory and the framework, the participants also made some reference to the development of a shared identity as career counsellors at a distance learning institution. The discussion below illustrates the counsellors' reflection of how the career counselling process with prospective students shaped the development of their career identity.

What I understood from all the six participants was that they came into the DCCD with their own identity of having interest in working with people as described by Joyce below:

"I joined the Directorate for Counselling and Career Development as a peer helper where I was volunteering. I was only studying then. When I started as a peer helper, my aim was to give back to the community. I felt isolated studying on my own and I wanted to sort of test the theory or put into practise some of the modules that I have already passed. Knowing how it feels to be isolated and confused while studying, I

wanted to give back to fellow students. I knew I will not eliminate the feeling of all
students but I would touch a few."

However, this identity of having interest in helping others needed to be shaped or polished in order to prepare them to help properly. There are a number of building blocks that are involved in the development of the identity or the participants' development as counsellors. The integral part of the counsellor development is the self-reflection; not only on the career counselling process and on the prospective students but on themselves, which brings self-awareness. The reflection that brings self-awareness adds value to their journey of their development as career counsellors since they became aware of who they are, their strengths and their areas of development. When they became aware of who they are and connecting to what they are doing as counsellors, it seemed to give them confidence in themselves as shared by Joyce below:

"*On who I am as a counsellor, I have realised that I enjoy engaging with other people. I enjoy helping them. I have realised that it is one of the things I didn't know that I had. I thought I am impatient but then I realised that it is one of the things that I like is working with different kinds of people.*"

It seems that the important part is to have the personality or traits required in the helping environment. It also seems important that they have an awareness or the self-discovery that as counsellors they are capable of managing the diversity of clients and their needs, especially clients presenting with unpleasant emotions as Joyce illustrated below:

"*Sometimes you get those students who are frustrated at that moment, some are short tempered. But it then made me realise that I could manage, whereby I would be on another level. I would not maybe fight back or be like them. I would try and understand what their needs are, contain them to be calm so that we can continue with the conversation and try to help them.*"

The reflection brings further insight on how different they are as counsellors in their perceptions and views of themselves. In addition, they recognise the changes or development that has happened that has been influenced by their current roles and responsibilities as Piet pointed out below:

"I am exposed to more responsibilities. I did more research and mentoring of other career counsellors as well. For me, this has been a transformation process. Transforming my life and relationship with people. This environment has really taught me to spend a lot of time within me before I can try to help others. I have even used this platform to also work on my self-confidence as a counsellor and also working with others. I have learnt more of how to take a healthy risk, how to take constructive feedback and also being honest with myself, not putting pressure on myself."

The integration of self within the framework with reflection and training and supervision empowers counsellors to find their own voices and have their own identity that is congruent to who they want to be as career counsellor as Piet pointed out below:

"If I were not in this environment, I know I will be very fake. But I think the process of reflecting and supervision helped me to develop some kind of identity, a voice. The interaction I had in counselling and outside counselling helped me to have an identity and self-confidence. I was given platforms and opportunities to do other things."

Even though as individuals the participants mentioned how they have grown and developed their identity as career counsellors, Betty raised critical questions relating to the shared identity and her views of the importance of the identity:

"What does it mean to be a student counsellor at an open distance learning practise? We come from different backgrounds, clinical, research educational or industrial. But what is a unifying factor when we work in a massive open distance learning institution with its fabulousness and desperateness? What is the glue that holds this together? For me, it is the identity of the student counsellor in open distance learning."

5.2.4.2 Self-confidence

An important aspect that became evident in the development of the career counsellors' identity is the building of self-confidence. Self-confidence seems to impact on how they encourage prospective students to complete certain tasks. The confidence motivates the counsellor to be assertive, persistent and patient towards prospective students when they are reluctant to complete homework or tasks required from them. Self-confidence helps them not to be impatient during the counselling process. In concurring with Piet regarding the transformation as a counsellor and development of the identity and self-confidence, Grace shared how she has developed as a counsellor and advanced with the skills required. She further pointed to the role of training in the counsellor's development and in building self-confidence and how the development further impacts on how she approaches the counselling process differently:

"*I think to be honest, the process of facilitating counselling is similar. I think my personal development impacts on how I do things, in terms of how I engage with these clients. It's a different process because in the past I doubted myself that maybe I can't do this. There are skills that are required through the counselling process. I have polished them in terms of understanding how to utilise my skills effectively in counselling now as an Intern Career Guidance Practitioner. I also get to have more conversations in terms of where I am now and what kind of help I need. So also reflecting about different roles that I have played in the Directorate. I also connect the dots in terms of what I have learned when I got here as a peer helper, as an Assistant Student Counsellor as an Intern Career Guidance Counsellor. So the process is the same but the level of communication with clients now and the level of facilitating the career counselling conversations.*"

The development of the identity of the career counsellor is linked to the counsellor's ability in facilitating the career counselling process and the counsellor's confidence in the effectiveness of their role in the counselling process with prospective students. Furthermore, it would seem that to all the participants the growth and the development of career identity was influenced by the trust in the framework provided. The participants

seem to have internalised or integrated their self into the framework. They expressed their individuality within the framework which allowed them to grow their identity as career counsellors without feeling disintegrated in their personal identity as articulated by Piet below:

> "*When I was being supervised and being mentored, there was a structure of this is how counselling can be done. This is how you effectively address the client's concern but my way of thinking was being taken away. It was about integration and I think that helped me to also not lose my identity in the process. This even makes work to be more enjoyable to say this is how I relate to clients. I was given a platform. I was given a chance to show my uniqueness but also being moulded.*"

Mary further highlights the fact that within the framework counsellors feel grounded as professionals which impacts positively on their confidence in themselves and the counselling process whereby they are willing to take risks and become creative which Betty referred to earlier in the extract above as "*being free to roam and touch*".

The counsellors' development is also impacted by their interactions with students. The counselling process with students and their feedback play a significant role in the development of their confidence and identity as career counsellors. Joyce indicated that she appreciates feedback from clients since it helps her to grow as a counsellor especially where the client's needs and expectations were not met. She regards the situation as an opportunity to reflect on what she can do differently in the future as articulated in the extract as follows:

> "*Clients' responses to the counselling process are important for me. It grows my self-confidence and it also makes me to work harder. To know that at least I can help people. How about if I can work more so that I can increase the quality of my work? It also makes me think about those who were not happy even if most of the time they are few. If I have those who expressed dissatisfaction with my counselling, I reflect on what I can do differently to make them feel the same as others that I have worked*

with. It's rewarding but at the same time challenging for me to make sure that I help everybody so that they are all satisfied with the career counselling process."

I can relate to Grace's view because even if I have an identity as a clinical psychologist, in the context of Unisa, I have to take cognisance of the context where I work as a career counsellor. However, in the absence of clear shared identity that defines who we are as a group, I find myself aligning my current role to the clinical psychology identity which at times creates the feeling of being disconnected to other counsellors.

5.2.4.3 Counsellors' growth

There is growth that take place as part of the counsellors' journeys while working with other counsellors as well as prospective students as reflected in the discussion above. The counsellors experienced shifts during their development as counsellors as mentioned by Piet below wherein he has changed from feeling that he is ineffective as a counsellor and altered his understanding of what needs to happen in the counselling process. Piet shifted from a mechanical process to a natural spontaneous process:

"What I have learned recently is that I have made counselling to be more of a conversation rather than a back and forward information interaction. I have learned to be more natural, allowing the process, staying with the process and not rushing the client. That's something that has changed moving from a Peer Helper to an Intern Career Guidance Practitioner. Understanding that each person has a process, not to say you want them here. One of my colleagues would say this is more like a dance; so one step at a time and not dancing more than the client actually."

Furthermore, Joyce shared how the counselling context impacted on her to the extent that there was a shift on her perception of the career counselling process and her role as a counsellor:

"When I started, I thought it would be about counselling which is just giving out and giving out to others. I realised that it's not only about giving out, you also learn and grow from counselling."

165

Grace's shift happened when she took time to reflect on her difficulties with reflections and feedback. The shift when she realised the significance of reflection and feedback in her development as a counsellor impacted positively on her growth and the building of her self-confidence as she articulated below. Her attitude when doing the reflections changed: Instead of completing the reflections superficially to comply with the training requirements, Grace started to make her in-depth personal reflections as a way to take ownership for her growth.

> *"I reflected reflecting, it did not make sense to me why I had to reflect. In most cases my reflections were not real. I just reflected because it was compulsory and managers were supervising them. My reflections were superficial. Feedback was also not for me. I did not receive it well. Every time I received feedback, I would feel like people were against me and attacking me. One day after I got home and reflected about how I can utilise feedback, how can I utilise this thing that I see as negative to enhance my career development. After reviewing conversations with my managers in terms of the feedback that I am receiving, I picked up the feedback is meant to improve my career development as counsellor, as negative as it is, I need to think about what I am doing ineffectively that I can do differently next time."*

As part of the growth mentioned above from Joyce, part of the development as a counsellor meant that the participants have to confront and heal their own pain so that they can effectively respond to others. Betty emotionally shared how she had to confront the issue of racism through reading, personal reflection and engaging in conversations with others. Grace too had to face the ghosts of her past in order to heal the wounds. The psychotherapy sessions helped her to close the open wounds even though she characterised the process as painful – it was accompanied by pain and tears as described below:

> *"I have grown, I have healed and I am relaxed within my body. It is now that I started to enjoy who I am, the reflection on the mirror has a past that does not inflict pain in my life. My life is like a story with a happy ending, I feel like it is not real. I have*

achieved beyond imagination academically, career wise and personal, it is just
amazing.

Personal development, when I started with therapy sessions, the experience was
difficult for me. Facing the ghosts of my past was traumatic, I felt like a stranger in my
own body, I was emotionally weak, hurting and wanted to run away from the
situation. The individual sessions I had with managers, I cried, I did not want to be in
that moment and situation. This was how the healing journey began, I actually
enjoyed being there even though I was scared. If you ask me what I want to reverse
in my life, the answer would be pain, tears, fears I went through in 2015, I would not
change the experience for anything."

5.3 Auto-ethnographical data: Becoming and being a counsellor

In what follows, I will share my own story of becoming and being a career counsellor at
the DCCD, which may show similarities and differences to what the participants
communicated.

5.3.1 The outsider

My journey of being a counsellor started when I was appointed as an Assistant Student
Counsellor. At this stage of my journey I felt like an outsider since I did not conform to
the practise that only candidates who had career counselling experience could be
appointed in this position. I later learnt that I was appointed because I had a degree in
Psychology.

It was difficult working in a team where I knew I did not have the knowledge required. I
had to adjust and learn quickly to be at the same level with other team members. I felt
that my performance and interaction with students was always being evaluated and
scrutinised. I was quite anxious and trying hard to make sure I perform since I was
aware that I am not on the same level as my peers. The first week of training was
difficult for me since I was worried that the Directorate might withdraw my appointment.

The opportunity offered to me as an Assistant Student Counsellor helped me to reconnect to my childhood dream of being a psychologist which had started to fade away. Despite being an outsider, I realised at the end of my contract that I have found a home after being offered further training to develop my counselling skills. My supervisor also encouraged me to consider completing my Honours degree in Psychology and pursue my career in Psychology.

I was offered another contract as an Assistant Student Counsellor. During this time, I then decided to further my studies by registering for my Honours degree in Psychology. While working as an Assistant Student Counsellor, I was offered a contract position as an Administrator for the Peer Help Project which I later occupied permanently. On my second year of my Honours studies, I applied for training in the Masters Programme in Clinical Psychology. I was invited to the selection process and was successful. I completed my first year of study while still rendering my duties as an Administrator. During the second year of these studies I secured a position as an Academic Assistant at the Department of Psychology which helped me to cope with the demands of the training.

5.3.2 The challenge of being a clinical psychologist and a career counsellor

After completing my training as a psychologist, I was appointed at the Department of Psychology, but after 3 months I was offered the position of Senior Student Counsellor at the DCCD. The move was emotional and challenging. I realised that I had returned to the same Directorate where I left as a Junior Administrator. I had to redefine my relationship with my colleagues since I was now appointed as a senior counsellor – on the same level as they were. It took some time to redefine and renegotiate the relationship and being acknowledged in my new role in the Directorate. I also had to let go of the past and focus on my new role and responsibilities.

When I was appointed as a Senior Student Counsellor, my responsibilities included training and supervision of career counsellors, intern career counsellors, assistant student counsellors and peer helpers. I realised in my first week when interacting with the intern career counsellors who were being trained by my predecessor that I did not have the depth of knowledge I needed to be competent as a supervisor – especially with regard to the career theories and assessment. At this time, I battled to differentiate my role as a clinical psychologist and career counsellor. It was comfortable for me to stay in my role as a psychologist since I was confident and felt competent in that role. Even though I tried to tap on my previous experiences when doing career counselling, the gap was just too wide. I had to manage my own learning while expected to train and supervise others.

I battled to negotiate the boundaries in supervision especially with peer helpers and assistant student counsellors. I found myself having to provide therapy in supervision which became overwhelming and uncomfortable. I later realised it was my attempt to develop these counsellors that made me getting involved in assisting them with challenges. On reflection, I thought of an effective way to manage this without feeling intrusive into the peer helpers' and counsellors' personal lives and avoiding dual roles. I started negotiating referrals to Unisa's psychotherapy clinic and other facilities outside the University. I remained supportive within the supervision throughout their journey but not treading into the therapeutic space.

The fact that I was still involved in the training of Masters Psychology students negatively impacted on settling in my new role as a career counsellor. My biggest concern and fear was that due to the confusion in my role, I will confuse the peer helpers and assistant student counsellors since I will train and supervise them as if I am training "mini-psychologists". The awareness helped me to always be on guard when I realise that I am confusing the context. I also realised the importance of having a framework since it would have helped me with being oriented to how I approach counselling as well as the supervision of counsellors.

Betty and Sarah had been working together and they were also the two people I would call for conversations or assistance. I gradually became part of the team and they helped me to integrate and understand my role as a career counsellor. I could continuously have conversations with them about my experiences with students' needs and gaps I experienced during career counselling. During these conversations I realised my challenges were not unique to me as they would also share their own challenges and we could support each other on how to effectively address them. We could agree on the impact of the lack of framework on our counselling and our biggest concern was on the quality of supervision and training.

I was always humbled and overwhelmed that during these conversations Betty and Sarah would always appreciate my contribution in the career counselling process. I will always hear comments that as a clinical psychologist I have defied the odds since I am able to think beyond and outside my role as a clinical psychologist and be a career counsellor. It was during these conversations that I realised that I had been pressuring myself and at times undermining what I could offer. At this time, I realised that my background and training as psychologist has profound impact on the Directorate and the students if I appreciate the context where I am in as a career counsellor and embrace both roles. The self-doubt I experienced further helped me to understand the negative impact the lack of structure has on the self-confidence of the peer helpers and assistant student counsellors.

In my struggle and effort to embrace my role as a counsellor, I appreciate the lessons I got from my daily interactions and conversations with students. I learnt these lessons from various situations at the DCCD, for example: The screening of students in the waiting area taught me that I can never judge a person on face value; the numerous telephone conversations taught me to tolerate frustration because of the number of calls and then some calls were cut off and I would not be able to trace the caller since they would have called from the public phone; and further I learnt to be patient and humble

when some students would tell me they need a qualified counsellor since they need someone they can trust to guide them in the right direction. These lessons helped me to understand that I need to be there for my clients and to be responsive to their career needs and by doing that I also embrace my role and identity as a career counsellor. Students need me to listen to their story so that I can acknowledge their presence and their experiences. They need me to create a space where they can make sense of their stories since due to the pressure and feeling of being overwhelmed, they doubt their own abilities to manage the process. When I started being confident that I can respond to their needs, it became easier for me also to integrate my identity as a clinical psychologist who provides career counselling.

5.3.3 Theoretical grounding in counselling and training

The second order cybernetics and the client-centred theory resonates with me, since my training as a clinical psychologist was grounded in these approaches. I also became familiar to career theories that I could integrate in my approach for career counselling. The two first mentioned theories form the basis in my approach to career counselling.

With these theories as my grounding, I became interested to what students bring to me. I created space for students to share their story and their career. I got a picture of peeling an onion during these conversations since students helped me to understand their life beyond the career decisions they are making. The space allows them to make sense of their story. In most cases I realised it was not even the career information or the qualification that they need but they needed space where they can be accepted, understood and be validated as they peel the onion of their career stories with tears in their eyes. I took the position that I do not know the layers of the onion they are peeling.

At first I had reservations towards Holland's career theory since I perceived it as more quantitative with the focus on career assessment. My second order cybernetic stance and being client-centred also influenced my views on career assessment. In addition, I also had reservations against the qualitative approach since I felt it does not empower

clients in the process of making a career decision since they are passive participants, because in this process students are not active participants in the career decision making process. This was further influenced by my interaction with students who would come to me with a career assessment but still feel confused about their career. My perception and experiences changed with the understanding of the qualitative application of the theory especially in the development of the *my Choice @ Unisa* brochure. With time I started to appreciate the theory since it had a profound impact on the conversations I had with students. My experience was that students felt acknowledged when I started to explore their interest and abilities with them and thereby helping them to understand how these factors play a role in making a career decision. It opens up the conversations. Having the conversation about the layer of the onion which focuses on themselves empowers them to realise that they are the only people who understand themselves better and know who they want to be and where they want to go. What they require from me, is to provide them with space to map out their journey.

The majority of my clients were referred to me because they were regarded as being in need of therapy. The social cognitive career theory helped me to integrate the therapy into the career conversation, especially managing challenges. In most of these conversations, I realised that I had to help students activate the resources that they could use to overcome challenges. I felt empowered by the realisation that some of the students actually overcame their personal difficulties by pursuing their studies. Pursuing their career and furthering their studies became a source of hope and a reason for existence.

I am so very grateful to Betty for making me aware of the chaos theory of careers (Pryor & Bright, 2003a). This enabled me to venture into new career conversations where I could enable students to explore the uncertainty of their career journey and thereby help them manage by being prepared for opportunities.

The different theories that I discussed in Chapter 3 provided me with a framework for career counselling as it enabled me to draw a distinction between career counselling and therapy. Without this structure I battled to focus on the career conversation. I realise now that when students share personal problems, they do not necessarily need therapy. I also realise that once a career problem has been dealt with, students could muster the energy to address their personal challenges.

My involvement with training and the supervision of peer helpers and assistant student counsellors has become an enjoyable task. It is fun to model and role play career conversations. I find that I am able to clearly articulate the focus of the career conversations and this helps my trainees to gain confidence. Reflecting on my journey from being a hesitant counsellor to being able to provide useful guidance to prospective career counsellors has become a source of pride and satisfaction.

5.3.4 Successes and disappointments in the journey of being a counsellor

My journey of becoming a counsellor is punctuated with challenges and successes that I had to embrace. These experiences shaped and reshaped me as a counsellor. I continuously strive to grow from even the most challenging of these interactions. Ironically enough the most difficult ones often ended as a success story. One of these stories that come to mind occurred when I had to provide career counselling for Peter, a student diagnosed with schizophrenia. I was challenged to assist Peter with his study problems irrespective of his clinical diagnoses. I encouraged him to stay in the course and to focus on his studies. Great was my joy when Peter completed his degree. I felt that I had created a space wherein he could achieve his career goals irrespective of his personal challenges.

I still find it a challenge to train and supervise other counsellors. I have to admit this was something of an ordeal when I had to provide these services even before I was grounded as a counsellor. This meant that I had to find myself whilst training others.

One complication of my role as trainer is that some trainees expect me to deal with their personal problems seeing that I am registered as a clinical psychologist. Over time I have learnt to distance myself emotionally in training and just become a trainer who is not a psychologist in order to avoid multiple relationships. Over time I have learnt not to feel disappointed in myself when I had to explain that I could not be a trainer and a therapist.

I will end this brief remembrance of some of my successes and disappointments by telling the story of my reaching out by telephone to students who requested assistance with career planning. The joy these students felt when Unisa actually reached out to them affirmed me as a counsellor. It was a learning experience to understand how students long for the connection with the University, their need for a sense of being part of the institution and connecting and having a relationship. I learnt to be human in my interaction and that students could connect to me even if I communicate through e-mail or telephone calls. The appreciation that students expressed over the phone provided me with the opportunity to understand the career challenges experienced by students who want to study through distance learning. I was empowered to think differently as a counsellor, who is also a psychologist, and who is in a distance learning context.

5.3.5 Summary

My journey of being a counsellor is similar to that of the other counsellors, except for the fact that other counsellors did not experience the feeling of being an outsider at the beginning of their journey. They also did not have to struggle to integrate being a career counsellor with being a clinical psychologist.

5.4   Conclusion

The major theme emanating from the stories of the counsellors is how they grappled with the counselling process in order to address the diverse clients and their multitude of needs. The main needs of students are their need to be assisted in choosing a career, their need to be validated and their need to plan a career.

Another theme is the struggle to balance help to individuals and efforts to reach the masses in addressing the career needs of prospective students. Fortunately, this process is continuously evolving through conceptual and technological improvements.

The participants also made reference to a framework that provides more structure and confidence in the counselling process. Different theoretical groundings are used as a frame of reference during career counselling conversations with prospective students. Within this framework, counsellors use their own creativity in counselling in order to feel comfortable with their unique ways to integrate resources in counselling. This however requires the counsellor's maturity and ability to shift his or her perception of counselling. There is consensus among the counsellors that even though the process is becoming more structured; counsellors are still free to allow the process to unfold without being required to follow the specific structure.

The diversity of theories, literature and the Unisa context contribute towards the development of resources, used as a frame of reference in career counselling. When referring to the theory, the counsellors focussed on the utility of the theory in their practise since most theories where applied taking into consideration the Unisa context.

All the participants have a unique way of describing their relationships with students and how the relationships with students and their roles have also impacted differently on their world views and their career development as counsellors.

I concluded the chapter with telling something of my own journey of becoming a counsellor. I described how I started as an outsider at the DCCD. I shared some of the challenges, disappointments and successes I had experienced. Lastly I shared how I learnt to be a career counsellor whilst also being a clinical psychologist. I hope I conveyed some of the anguish of being an outsider in the DCCD and moving from this position to actually being at home as a valued member in my workplace.

Chapter 6
Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1   Introduction

In this concluding chapter I will revisit the research objectives of my study. Thereafter I will present the insights that I gleamed form the most important themes which I identified from the semi-structured interviews and observations at the DCCD and from reflecting on my own experiences.

Other aspects that will also be dealt with are a proposed model for career counselling, and my insights on how to be and become a career counsellor.

I will conclude the chapter by reflecting on the strengths and limitations of the study and by making recommendations for further research.

6.2   Research objectives

While I was working as a career counsellor at Unisa's Directorate for Counselling and Career Development (DCCD), I found that there was not a specific approach to career counselling amongst the counsellors. Although some of their views were similar I found that they approached the process with different backgrounds, motives and theories as basis. I therefore undertook this study in order to address the need for research on career counselling at a distance learning institution such as Unisa. I decided to explore the counsellors' experiences of the counselling process and to fathom their views on helping students. This meant that I intended to investigate the counselling culture at Unisa. I found that following an ethnographic approach to the research would be the most suitable research approach.

The research has an autoethnographic component: I too share the counselling culture at Unisa. I therefore also explored my own journey of becoming and being a career

counsellor at Unisa. During this process I became aware of my identity transformation, moving from the position of an outsider to feeling at home in an environment that I love.

6.3   Presenting the identified themes

The participants told me their stories of how they became and function as counsellors at Unisa. From these stories and from my own experiences and observations I identified the following themes:

- All the participants agreed that career counselling is a continuous process and the counsellor's role is to facilitate life long career conversations. This is so because most individuals have to make a number of career decisions throughout their life. Counsellors have to diffuse students' expectations that there is an immediate quick-fix to help them with their career decisions. Clients need to understand that although they might not benefit immediately from the career counselling process, they could still utilise the information later as their situation requires.

- In striving to balance the needs of individuals versus the masses of students at Unisa, the counsellors adopted a process of blended counselling in order to be accessible to all the students. This means that they counsel students by using a variety of methods. What seems to be clear from the participants' stories and my own experience is that we all agree that it does not matter which mode of counselling is used, the student's needs must be the centre of the counselling process. This supports Maree's (2013) assertion that counsellors need to establish practices that focus on acting on the best interest of clients by focusing on addressing their needs.

- Although students' needs differ because they are on different levels of their career paths, there are similarities within this diversity. Often the difference in needs seems to be in the language used in the articulation of needs.
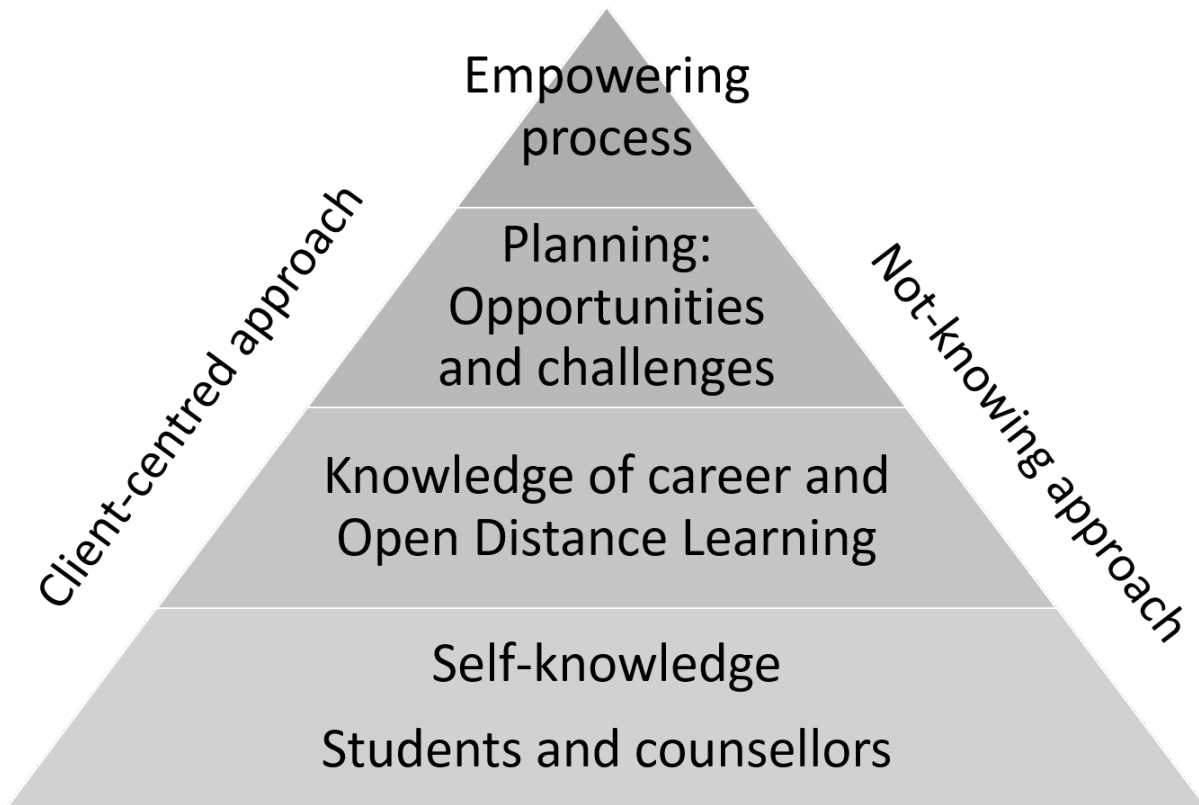
- The counsellors vary in how they perceive the needs of their clients. This could present a difficulty in establishing a unified culture of doing career counselling.

- When doing career counselling it is important to acknowledge clients as human beings with their own life stories, emotions and needs. They have the need that the counsellor should validate their choice – they therefore need affirmation. Hartung and Niles (2002a) explain that students search for the meaning in their academic, career and other life suits which underlie the needs they present in career counselling.

- Counsellors need to be pragmatic in their approach. This implies that they have to help students plan their study route and also help them understand the distance learning system and what it entails.

- All the participants value and respect their clients. In doing so they base their counselling on Rogers' client-centred approach by striving for authenticity, empathy and unconditional positive regard and it is therefore important for them to value and respect their clients.

- In addition to the client-centred approach the participants use a diversity of theories to ground their counselling. The most important of these are the career theories of Holland (1973), Parsons (1909) and Super (1953), as well as the chaos theory (Pryor & Bright, 2003a) and the social cognitive career theory (Lent, 2005). The application of these theories and the synergy that has been established is evidence that western theories can be effectively adapted to the context of South Africa in addressing students' needs as individuals and in groups. This is contrary to what Watson and McMahon (2009) have argued as they believe that theories and models which originate from developed countries are questionable within the developing world context.

- The brochure *my Choice @ Unisa* provides a useful framework for the participants as it structures their career conversations with students. The development of this brochure is consistent with Stead and Watson's (2006) proposal, that career practitioners and researchers should provide new techniques and models rooted in the South African environment. The brochure fits the bill since it not only addresses the South African context but it also provides a resource that can be applicable when facilitating counselling in a distance learning context.

- There is a common thread amongst participants describing how each one of them has been profoundly affected by their interaction with clients. They all started as individuals with established views and perceptions about their careers and the world but these were broadened, challenged and changed by the process of doing career counselling thereby shaping their own identities

6.4 A proposed model for career counselling

The themes that emanated from the research process as presented in the previous chapter and in the discussion above, led me to propose a model that could be applied as a framework for facilitating career counselling at the DCCD. This model was adapted from the existing framework the participants referred to, as well as a model in the literature, namely that of Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2009).

The counsellors' views as discussed in Chapter 5 and above and my own experiences at the DCCD, made me realise that there is no clearly articulated official framework for the DCCD. This motivated me to propose a framework that may be useful for counsellors at the DCCD, and also for other career counsellors. I have named this framework the Empowerment through Career Counselling Model. This model resonates with Watson and McMahon's (2009) view that the counsellor should value clients as active agents in the creation of their careers. The model is essentially client-centred and further intends to empower students through the career counselling process. The proposed framework is presented in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1. Empowerment through Career Counselling Model (adapted from Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009).

Figure 6.1 indicates that the basis (bottom level) of career counselling is self-knowledge. It was clear from the participants' discussions that as part of the career counselling process, students need to gain a better understanding of who they are (better self-knowledge). In facilitating students' self-knowledge, the counsellors explore their interest and abilities and further assist them to connect to their knowledge regarding the world of work.

The participants' theoretical framework when facilitating these aspects where either influenced by Holland's (1973) career theory and Parsons' (1908) and Super's (1953)

theories. They strongly emphasise the importance of students' understanding of themselves and their future world of work when making a career decision. On the other hand, counsellors also need to have self-knowledge and knowledge about their role in the career counselling process. It is important that counsellors have confidence in themselves and in the processes they facilitate so that they are effective in their roles. Self-knowledge of both student and counsellor is regarded as the basis for the career counselling process and the career planning of students as depicted in the Figure 6.1. Without this knowledge the process will not have positive results.

The level above "Self-knowledge" in Figure 6.1 points to the career knowledge and understanding of distance learning which is important because after students gained the information about themselves and where they need to be, they need to get a broader understanding of the career they consider and the implications thereof for their personal lives. They also need to have an understanding of the open distance learning context and of the demands and challenges it involves. For example, if students want to pursue engineering with Unisa, they need to be aware of the practical element of the course which might impact on them financially should they be required to travel for the practical component of the qualification. Furthermore, they need to have an understanding of the requirements of the professional regulatory body regulating their career field. This part of the model suggests that it is imperative for counsellors to be up to date with the current career trends and resources.

The third level in the proposed model as depicted in Figure 6.1 focuses on planning for both opportunities and challenges that students may come across. Such planning has to take into consideration challenges or barriers that could impact on students' career goals. In the same breath, students need to remain vigilant to opportunities. It is the role of the counsellor to create awareness in students that they need to have a mind-set which creates a constant awareness of where they are in their career journey, seeking and exploring opportunities that they might use. Through the career counselling process students need to start to prepare to become the future person they want to be. Students

should thus be made aware of and prepared for challenges to start activating resources they could use within and outside themselves. The chaos theory, social cognitive career theory and students' career needs influenced this section of the framework about preparing for opportunities and challenges.

The end goal of career counselling as indicated by the top part of Figure 6.1 indicates that a counsellor should empower his or her clients to engage with the information so that they take ownership of their study and career choices. The process should be facilitated in such a way that even the homework that the counsellor could give to the student will be aimed at empowering the student. Both the students and the counsellors' departure will be that counselling is a process that needs to be allowed to unfold and that it is not a quick-fix process. This is done to allow students to manage their own process without feeling too overwhelmed to have insight on how to manage career problems that they could encounter in the future. Students are given more responsibility and are active participants in the career decision process.

The recommended counsellors' stance during the career counselling process which can bring about positive results and allow students to be empowered is shown on the two sloping sides of the triangle of Figure 6.1. These are the stances of not-knowing and the attitude of being client-centred in order to create an environment where students can feel respected and where they are allowed to be experts in their career stories. This is also in-line with the goal of being empowered as discussed above.

The Empowerment Model will help to create a structure and foundation which can serve as a point of departure when counsellors have conversations with each other as practitioners and also when they have conversations with students. Working within a model could create a safety net where counsellors could be creative and express their sense of individuality within the framework. This could contribute to the development of the counsellors' self-confidence and their identity as counsellors since they have a sense of who they are as career counsellors in the DCCD, and how they could

approach career counselling as a team with no contradiction or uncertainty. The model provides a safety net for counsellors in relationships as well as in counselling.

Career counsellors at the DCCD are often required to explain or map out their career processes to other stakeholders within and outside the University. I found this challenging because in the absence of a written framework, counsellors have their own interpretation of the career counselling process as they see it. At times I realised that the mapped out career counselling process of different counsellors are at odds with each other. The reason is that each individual counsellor would position themselves focussing on what makes them comfortable when facilitating counselling, irrespective of how others are facilitating counselling. Even though I acknowledge the multiverse of reality, it is problematic when there is a lack of consensus among the career counsellors when we are working in the same context with students. Thus a model that captures the recommended framework can be useful to explain and map out the process of career counselling offered at the distance learning institution. The proposed model could be incorporated since it addresses the question of our views about the career counselling process as a Directorate, how we position ourselves as career counsellors during career counselling and how we envisage the impact of career counselling to students.

The proposed model can be consistently applied by career counsellors in conversations to empower students to understand the career counselling process and the aspects that will be facilitated linking them to their career needs. The model can be easily explained to students without overwhelming them and furthermore it can also be integrated into the career counselling process as facilitated by the different levels of practitioners. Furthermore, having such a model could help to screen and categorise students and their career needs which means it can be applied in the training and supervision of counsellors.

The value of a model is that it could articulate how the DCCD team strive to address the career needs of students. It incorporates the values that are communicated in a way

that could be understandable to the students. The proposed Empowerment through Career Counselling Model will ensure that career counselling provided to students is standardised. Students will also be able to experience a sense of continuity in the process even in circumstances where they follow up with different counsellors.

Lastly, the theoretical framework provided by the model could assist counsellors in doing research on the established practises of career counselling that are effective in the context of distance learning. This will not only contribute to their context but will further contribute to career counselling in the country.

6.5   My insights on how to be and become a career counsellor

Erikson (1963, p. 261) argues that "the individual has a sense of identity when he manages to integrate all his earlier identifications, his drives, wishes and expectations, abilities and skills, with the opportunities his societies offers to him". The participants' stories indicate that each one of us had our own story to tell on how we became counsellors. Even though the participants shared similar experiences such as that they started as peer helpers, each one of them has shared personal reasons that are unique to them on why they were interested to become part of the DCCD. Each participant has therefore their own experiences that one could regard as a passage of rites which shaped them to be who they are as counsellors. Some of these experiences include interactions with students, having to heal from their own pain and their growth as human beings in order to become a counsellor. It is a natural process that never ends since in my experience and what has been shared by participants, when you embrace yourself as a counsellor, you start a journey that never ends. You have to continuously respond to the opportunities and challenges in order to be shaped as a career counsellor.

I realise that irrespective of the level of seniority of a counsellor, the journey to be and become a career counsellor has the same obstacles that the individual counsellor has to overcome. The first of these is a low self-confidence. Unfortunately, the lack of

structure or framework impacts on the development of a positive self-confidence in the counsellor.

An important part of the journey of becoming a counsellor is to negotiate with oneself on the identity of being a counsellor. I can attest to this because part of my own journey as a counsellor, which was humbling and rewarding from the beginning, was to reach acceptance of myself as a counsellor. In the beginning my own perceptions of feeling I am an outsider and inadequate, made it hard for me to allow myself to unreservedly accept myself as counsellor. The same applies to the other counsellors. They had challenges in appreciating their contribution and their roles as career counsellors due to poor self-confidence or uncertainty about the processes they facilitate. As I had managed to resolve my dilemma of my identity as a career counsellor, each of the participants came to embrace their career identity as career counsellors.

The process of being and becoming a counsellor is a continuous one that is influenced by a number of factors within the individual such as developing a positive self-confidence and changes in perception of the career counselling process or their own career journey. In addition, changes within the counselling context and outside also play a critical role in the development of a counsellor.

What I have learned from the research process is that, when counsellors become comfortable in their roles as a counsellor, they are at risk of disconnecting from client-centred principles and the students' needs since they seem to be preoccupied with becoming more sophisticated and excited to implement the new theories or literature that they come across. Counsellors need to always strive to maintain a balance in their journey of being a counsellor: To remain client-centred while at the same time they need to keep themselves informed about the new trends or information that is important in their practise. Having a framework allows the counsellor to be sensitive and connected to the needs of their students, and when they are exposed to new theories or

literature that they would want to incorporate into their framework, it is a negotiating process and done in such a way that the students' needs remain at the core.

In the context of Unisa there are specific qualities that are important in being a counsellor. The counsellor needs to be creative and flexible since the open distance learning context challenges him or her to remain relevant and creative while ensuring that the career counselling services are accessible to the masses so that it can impact on the majority of Unisa students. Being flexible allows the counsellor to adapt and embrace blended counselling.

An important tool for the counsellor is the ability to reflect, not only on their counselling experiences but also on their personal development. Reflections are helpful to ensure that the counsellor could have a better insight of where they are in their journey of being a counsellor. It is only through reflections that the counsellor could connect honestly to their sense of self. Self-reflections also help counsellors to be aware of their needs and know how to articulate them. It is only through self-reflections that the counsellor can remain ethically sensitised to their scope of practise. I remain connected to my challenges and the process through sharing reflections with others and also with myself. These reflections also help me to remain grounded and be able to rationally make sense of the process unfolding without being overwhelmed.

Training and supervision is essential for the development and maturity of the counsellor. The training and supervision does not only empower the counsellor with career counselling skills but also provide an opportunity for the counsellor to mature in their roles and deepen their practise. Without training and supervision, the counsellor has no platform to check their reality. In the process of being a career counsellor, the individual needs to have the capacity to manage vulnerability. The counselling process does not only provoke vulnerability in students but also in the career counsellor facilitating the process. The sense of vulnerability will always remain during the journey as a counsellor.

There is an African idiom that says it takes a village to raise a child. Counsellors need to feel a sense of belonging to a bigger community wherein they can be nurtured and grow as counsellors – a community of career counsellors that can take care of each other with regard to career knowledge and providing feedback to each other. In this respect there seems to be a gap in the DCCD since the community of practise forum seems to be inactive as not all career counsellors seem to be participating in this forum.

Career counsellors need to have critical, reflective conversations among themselves across different levels about their practise. The platform can provide space for support and nourish individual growth and ensure that information and knowledge about career counselling is shared especially among new members. These conversations can contribute towards resource development that counsellors need to enable them to facilitate conversations with students. Counsellors could also use these conversations as a way of providing feedback to them and further question their appropriateness and effectiveness. This can be done by looking at their role in the Unisa context and broader community, and discussing strategies to render career counselling services that is appropriate not only to the career needs but also to relevant career trends.

When counsellors are provided with an opportunity to engage in other tasks such as developing a career brochure, it contributes towards their maturity and development as counsellors. When a counsellor is challenged to spread their wings and be involved in a career information brochure, it impacts on the growth of the counsellor's self-confidence. Furthermore, this allows the counsellor to internalise the resource since they start to develop the sense of ownership.

The being of the counsellor is important in the process of counselling just as the stethoscope that a medical practitioner will use is important to diagnose a patient. The implication for the counsellor is that the counselling process can provoke pain and discomfort to the counsellor. It is however through this pain that counsellors are healed.

The healing for counsellors helps them to be able to contain students in their career and personal journey. Depending on the nature of issues the counsellor needs to work through, the counsellor might need to consult outside the DCCD while the role of the supervisor remains a supportive one during the process to avoid multiple relationships.

Career counsellors work with a diversity of students with different expectations and career needs. Therefore, being a counsellor requires someone who is able to work with diversity. Beyond being empathetic, respectful and having unconditional acceptance (Rogers, 1961) acknowledging the diversity of students requires the counsellor to appreciate each student as unique and his or her counselling approach should be flexible enough to meet the students' career needs.

6.6 Strengths and limitations of the study

The main limitation of the study lies in the composition and the size of the sample. The data for the study was gathered from six participants. These participants, as well as me as the researcher, work in the same Directorate and are therefore not representative of career counsellors at other sections in the university or at other institutions. The representation of the participants is therefore a limitation, but the aims of a qualitative study are not to generalise to the whole population but to explore a phenomenon at depth.

It could be seen as a limitation that I as the researcher was part of the counselling team which made it difficult for me to disengage from the research process. However, it can also be seen as a strength because it gave me an understanding of the participants' experiences at the Directorate because I could identify with their experiences, which include their disappointments but also their growth.

The strength of this study is that it is based on the articulation of counsellors' experiences and this has implications for the future and practise of career counselling provided to Unisa students or even other distance learning institutions. The themes that

have emanated from this study provide insight into the experiences of the counsellors which have implications for future research and application of counselling at Unisa.

6.7   Recommendations for further research

This study could serve as a foundation for further exploration regarding the integration of theory, research and the practise of career counselling at a distance learning institution. This in turn could be used in the development of additional career counselling models at Unisa and other similar institutions.

The recommended model for career counselling could be further investigated for effectiveness when applied by all counsellors within the context of Unisa with a diversity of students in their wide-spread geographical areas.

Further research needs to investigate the experiences of students of the counselling process and how it corresponds with the counsellors' experiences with specific reference to the students' career needs and expectations. Furthermore, it could be important to check if the different career theories have any impact on the students' experiences of the counselling process.

In addition, we also need a better understanding through research on how career counselling interventions enable students to achieve their career goals.

There is also a need to investigate an overarching model for student counselling that can be applied in different higher education settings.

The training and supervision needs of career counsellors should be further researched in order to develop a framework for counselling and supervision among counsellors. Having such a model will be helpful during the induction for new student counsellors.

6.8 Conclusion

The study provided an insight on the experiences of how counsellors experience the counselling process. It also told us something of their own journeys in their careers at a distance learning institution (Unisa). The study therefore provided the participants (counsellors at the DCCD, including myself) an opportunity to reflect on their counselling practises and the career needs of the students.

I hope that my research will impact on the development of a framework for other career counselling interventions offered to students at distance learning institutions. The model that I have developed for counselling at a distance learning institution could be useful in this respect.

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