E-Counselling. Study Case for Romania

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Abstract
In a changing world, with a more pronounced dynamics on labour market, our society requests new methods for the counselling relationship. In this context, our approach is part of an effort analysis of e-counselling process in Romanian universities.

Keywords: e-counselling, online counselling, counselling centre

1. Introduction. Theoretical Review

In a changing world, with a more pronounced dynamics on labour market, our society requests new methods for counselling relationship (psychological, vocational or career counselling).

If until now, specialists were focused on face-to-face counselling relationship, nowadays realities (for example, overcrowding, crushing tradition, race with itself, receptivity to indoctrination etc. described so relevant by K. Lorenz) request less traditional methods for counselling process.

This issue represent a recent concern for specialists; we could mention here an international Leonardo da Vinci project focused on distance counselling. It has included many European countries (Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Liechtenstein, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Switzerland) and started from a German study that revealed a significant request for telephone counselling, e-mail counselling or other distance counselling forms (Jigău, Chiru, 2004).

The interest on distance counselling research has grown up lately: “Throughout the world, online counselling services have been provided and expected to increase in the future.” (Tanrikulu, 2009)

Specialty literature (Jigău, Chiru, 2004) describes few forms of distance counselling:
- by phone – which allows direct contact with an expert;
- by electronic contact – the beneficiaries are allowed to access web pages in order to discover a long range of information or the client could interact on line with the expert;
- by correspondence – the information are accessible by mail.

Our interest is focused mostly on e-counselling counselling process, described like “asynchronous and synchronous distance interaction among counsellors and clients using e-mail, chat, and videoconferencing features of the Internet to communicate” (National Board of Certified Counsellors [NBCC], 2001, apud Tanrikulu, 2009).

Online counselling is described in specialty literature (Jigău, Chiru, 2004) as a particular form of distance counselling which involve a different training for the counsellors who practice it (they use special methods and approaches). In this situation, nonverbal communication process is missing, so that both client and counsellor have to pay more attention to verbal communication (more precisely in formulating requirements and responses). More, there is a very limited feedback process and more difficult to clarify some misunderstandings.
There are also many advantages for this counselling form as the rapidity of information transfer (as attachment, by e-mail or web site etc.), the accessibility (easy to establish contacts – for employees, people with disabilities), saving time and money, the possibility to reflect and review the information, the client partial anonymity, the flexibility of the communication process (both for counsellor and client).

After the analysis of specialty literature we have identified some nuances of definition; there are differences between online and Internet counselling. If online counselling process (by e-mail, chat, and videoconference) implies mostly synchronous communication, Internet counselling (by e-mail, web sites) is an asynchronous process.

Researchers’ interest was also aroused by the attitude / effects on beneficiaries of the counsellor – client relationship’s form. For example, they have considered the influence of personality type (Harrington, Loffredo, 2009) and their conclusion was that „a statistically significant majority of Introverts prefer online college classes while a majority of Extraverts prefer face-to-face college classes”.

A researching group (Chang, Yeh, Krumblotz, 2001) has also studied the implications of ethnic identity on online counselling process; they have not identified significant posttest differences between the online support group and control group in ethnic identity or collective self-esteem. Another conclusion was that the group participants felt supported, comfortable and connected to other group members, and preferred using aliases instead of their real identities (there is such a possibility in online counselling, when the client does not feel comfortable using his real identity).

2. E-Counselling in Romania

In Romanian educational system, online counselling is developing, unfortunately, with very small steps, so that this issue represent a challenge for all educational actors involved in this process (both in schools, high schools or universities).

Our research has focus on analysis of Romanian universities’ offer concerning online counselling. Known as well as cyber counselling, online therapy or internet counselling, it has a wide area of application: anxiety disorders (Kenardy, McCafferty and Rosa, 2003), depression (Christensen, Griffiths and Jorm, 2004), marriage and family counselling (Pollock, 2006), tobacco-cessation program (Mallen, Blalock and Cinciripini, 2006) (apud Tanrikulu, 2009); suicidal phenomenon (Barak, 2005), sexual dysfunctions (Vizzari et al. 2008) or career development (Herman, 2009) (www.sciencedirect.com).

3. Research methodology

Our investigation research goal is to shape an objective representation regarding the visibility and the accessibility of universities’ sites concerning counselling services for students in order to improve e-counselling process in Romania and providing a theoretical and practical framework for counselors. Subsequently, we also intend to continue our investigation by interviewing interested persons (counsellors, students, and teachers) about their attitude towards a counselling relationship through Internet environment.

Sample and methodology

Our sample consists in 29 universities from Romania, both state and private ones, randomly selected. Using documents’ analysis, we have studied the information posted on investigated universities’ sites in order to verify the existence of a psychological / career counselling centre and the possibility to initiate and develop a counselling relationship online (by e-mail or chat or even videoconference type).
Findings

In Romania all universities are required to create such centres, and, as we can see in table below, many universities investigated posted on their sites information about their career guidance or counselling centre. Although, there are still some universities about which we could not access any information about the existence of such a centre.

Table1. Investigated universities from Romania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nr.</th>
<th>University / Counselling Centre</th>
<th>Possibility to initiate online contact (an email address)</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia / Information and Career Counselling Department</td>
<td><a href="mailto:marioaraludusan@yahoo.com">marioaraludusan@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>Information Documentation Counselling</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>“Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad / Career Counselling and Professional Guidance Department</td>
<td><a href="mailto:doina.cheta@uav.ro">doina.cheta@uav.ro</a></td>
<td>There are no specifications on this issue.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>“Vasile Goldis” West University of Arad / Prognosis, Planning, Human Resources Development and Permanent Education Department</td>
<td><a href="mailto:abraica@uvvg.ro">abraica@uvvg.ro</a></td>
<td>There are no specifications on this issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacau / Professional Counselling Department</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dcp@ub.ro">dcp@ub.ro</a></td>
<td>Information – job offer</td>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>“George Bacovia” University of Bacau / -</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>There are no specifications on this issue.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>“Babes Bolyai” University of Cluj / Career Center</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cariera@staff.ubcluj.ro">cariera@staff.ubcluj.ro</a></td>
<td>Information Documentation</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>“Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University of Bucharest / Information, Counselling and Career Guidance Centre</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rectorat@ucdc.ro">rectorat@ucdc.ro</a></td>
<td>There are no specifications on this issue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>West University of Timisoara / Career Counselling Centre</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ccpoc@socio.uvt.ro">ccpoc@socio.uvt.ro</a></td>
<td>Information Documentation Personal development</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>“Petru Maior” University of Targu Mures / Information and Professional Counselling Centre</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Information Consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>“Constantin Brancoveanu” University of Targu Jiu / Centre for Information, Counselling and Career Guidance of Students</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cicocs@yahoo.com">cicocs@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>Information Documentation Consulting Manpower recruitment</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td><a href="http://ccoc.valahia.ro">http://ccoc.valahia.ro</a></td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>“Stefan cel Mare” University of Suceava / Counselling and Career Guidance Centre</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bujorl@usv.ro">bujorl@usv.ro</a> <a href="mailto:teodorescud@usv.ro">teodorescud@usv.ro</a></td>
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<td>Services</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:corp@uem.ro">corp@uem.ro</a></td>
<td>Information, Documentation, Consulting</td>
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<td>Petroleum – Gas University of Ploiesti / Counselling and Career Guidance Centre</td>
<td><a href="mailto:consiliere_upg_ploiesti@yahoo.com">consiliere_upg_ploiesti@yahoo.com</a></td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>University of Petrosani / Centre for Admission, Guidance and Professional Integration of Students</td>
<td><a href="mailto:nmtescu@upet.ro">nmtescu@upet.ro</a></td>
<td>Information, Documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>University of Oradea / Career Centre</td>
<td><a href="mailto:csc@uoradea.ro">csc@uoradea.ro</a>, <a href="mailto:egoplus@uoradea.ro">egoplus@uoradea.ro</a></td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>“Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi / Information, Career Guidance and Placement Centre</td>
<td><a href="mailto:alma.andrei@uaic.ro">alma.andrei@uaic.ro</a></td>
<td>Information, Documentation, Consulting</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Danubius University of Galati / Information, Counselling and Career Guidance Centre</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:ccep@univ-ovidius.ro">ccep@univ-ovidius.ro</a></td>
<td>Information, Documentation, Consulting</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>26</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:cicoc@unitbv.ro">cicoc@unitbv.ro</a></td>
<td>Information, Consulting</td>
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</table>

By analysing the information about career guidance / counselling centre posted on universities’ sites we have arrived to the following findings:

- Sometimes the counselling / career guidance centre is presented as part of Teacher Training Department, another time is considered an independent department;
• sometimes is posted only this information – that there is a centre / department which has
the mission to offer counselling services (psychological, career guidance etc.); and
another times we can access useful information, contact addresses, guidelines for
employment interview, making of a resume, tests, recommendations and information
about labour market and even useful links about an updated job offer. For example, the
most informative sites concerning career guidance or counselling services offered details
about how to conceive a resume (for example, “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba
Iulia), training, useful links, manual about conceiving a resume or a letter, how to find a
job, a data base for students that are looking for a job, information about the most wanted
fields or jobs for 2010 etc. (“Constantin Brancoveanu” University of Targu Jiu / Centre
for Information) etc.
• some sites are characterised by a lack of visibility concerning the information about
contact address, mail, telephone for the counselling / career guidance centre (for example
“George Bacovia” University of Bacau, Dunarea de Jos University of Galati);
• also, we have found that some universities’ sites are difficult to use – we have to consider
that not all the potential clients are experts in informatics’ field, so that all the information
should be more accessible (for example, is difficult to believe that Academy of Economic
Studies from Bucharest does not offer career guidance / counselling services, but it was
difficult for us to discover information about the existence of such a centre);
• if online counselling could be made by e-mail, chat or videoconference, our findings
revealed that the most popular type proposed by Romanian universities’ sites imply
initiating a counsellor – client relationship first by e-mail (or telephone), followed by face
to face meeting in a specialized office.

So, we could conclude that in Romania, online counselling is mostly used to initiate a contact
between counsellor and (potential) client and often the universities’ sites only refer to services
offered inside counselling office.

3. Conclusions

So, our investigation identified a lack of visibility and accessibility in Romanian universities’ sites
concerning the possibility to receive online counselling services (psychological or career
counselling). From those 29 universities randomly selected, none explicitly proposed online
counselling relationship.

More, online counselling is mostly used as a preliminary stage to a face to face counselling
meeting. Many of the investigated centres give to potential clients only the possibility to initiate
online (by e-mail contact) a counselling relationship.

Nowadays realities characterised by the explosion of information, and by the speed with which
information became obsolete, potential clients of a real or virtual counselling centre need more
guidance. Online counselling could be a complementary service in order to develop virtual labour
market. This is why we consider absolutely necessarily that specialist to develop functional online
counselling services.

But, it is gratifying that there are still universities centres that represent a real help for their
sites’ users, offering useful information for career guidance (for example, how to make a resume, a
letter, updated lists with job offer etc.).

Yet, we have to pay attention to the possible consequences of an extended access to online
counselling: reduced demand for direct counselling or, on the contrary, a greater demand (because
the contact obstacle is removed); persons / groups which has no access to technology or has no
skills for computer (for example, people with disabilities from Romania which are not the
beneficiaries of special computer programs) could be excluded from this kind of service etc.
References


