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Longitudinal Tracking in Adult Guidance in Ireland: Evidence and Implications

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Discourse on Measuring Individual Progression and Longterm Outcomes

- **Convergence and divergence –**

  definitions for progression, types of outcomes, rationale for measurement and methodologies for evaluation

- **Reasons for measurement –**

  political motivation, accountability, funding, service improvement and practice/policy development

- **Focus of policy –**

  upward mobility, accountability, cost-benefit, standardised measurables (hard outcomes)
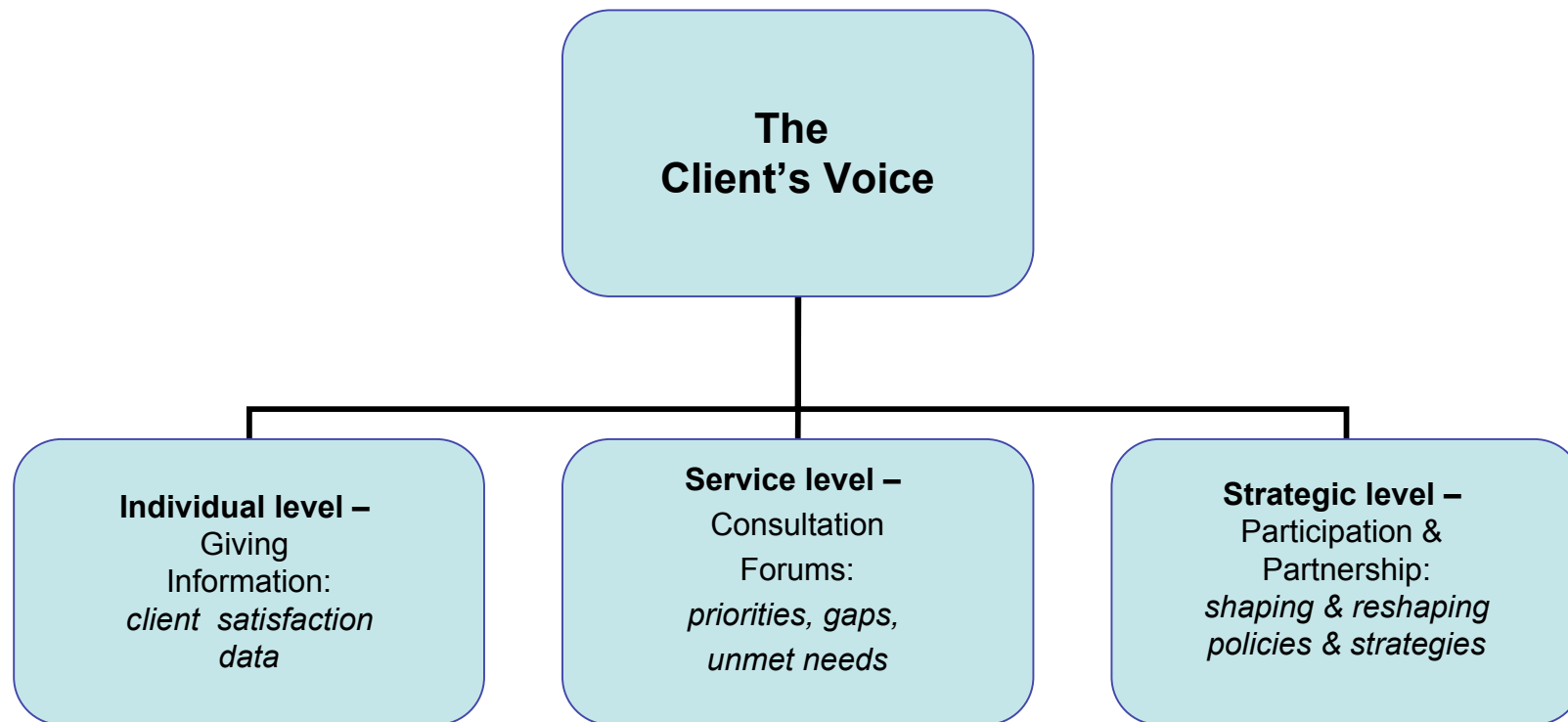
Discourse on Measuring Individual Progression and Longterm Outcomes

- Value assumptions in policy – education or employment output = progression for individual

- Primarily model of QA conceptualised as *input-process-output*

- Neglect of 'soft outputs'/ 'distance travelled' in pursuit of hard, tangible outputs

- Longitudinal studies to capture *time perspective*

- Democratic approaches to address gap of *user- led* models (underpinned study)

Framework for Client Involvement in Quality Assurance Process

(Plant, H. 2005)

The Client's Voice

Individual level – Giving Information: *client satisfaction data*

Service level – Consultation Forums: *priorities, gaps, unmet needs*

Strategic level – Participation & Partnership: *shaping & reshaping policies & strategies*

Evolution of Adult Guidance in Irish Policy and Practice

- Pre 2000 – adhoc delivery at local and national level (exception FA´S)

- Post 2000 – Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI) has led to strengthening profession
  - *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* (DES, 2000)

- Gaps in provision across sector
  - *Irish Review of Career Guidance Policies* (OECD, 2002)

Evolution of Adult Guidance in Irish Policy and Practice

Guidance for Life: An Integrated Framework for Lifelong Guidance in Ireland (NGF, 2007) addresses competencies and quality standards

- Adult guidance still a minority compared to second-level provision

- Adult guidance often viewed as 'different' to mainstream by those practicing in schools, and vice versa

- Provision in Ireland – a more universal, integrated stance (NGF, 2007)

Position of Adult Guidance in Irish Government Policy: Deconstructing the Discourse

Lifelong Learning goals:

- Greater emphasis on 'knowledge, skills and competencies' and 'improving the transition between education/training and work'

Labour Market goals:

- Role in terms of 'enhancing the labour mobility of workers', 'supporting the development of Ireland's human capital' and 'assisting economic competitiveness'

Social Equity goals:

- Role a key measure to support the 'social inclusion of the disadvantaged' and for 'equality of access to information, advice and guidance (IAG)'

Adult Guidance in Ireland: AEGI

– *1999 Phase 1:   8 Projects*

– *2001 Phase 2:   8 Projects*

– *2002 Phase 3:   9 Projects*

– *2006 Phase 4: 12 Projects*

- *2010 – Now 40 services nationwide*

- *300,000 had accessed the services from 2000 to 2007 (NGF, 2007)*

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational
Guidance Initiative 2000-2006 (NCGE, 2010)

Personal Observations of Report

- Literature and context – strong policy focus

- Lack of attention to guidance activities and person-centred focus
  indicating consultancy research does not always serve practice well

- Limited sense of individual progression for clients

- Missed opportunity: no real attempt to capture observations from
  services of changing contexts and client profiles over time

Methodology: Case Study

- **Case Site**

  REGSA, WIT

  AEGI service since 2000

  Approx 6,000 clients to 2009/10

  Approach – Interpretive longitudinal single-case study of clients' progression over 7-9 year timeframe

- **Research Aim & Objectives**

  Consideration of the development of a best practice framework for the longitudinal tracking of client progression in adult guidance

  - *definitions from 3 stakeholders*
  - *CDA on outcome measurement in guidance*
  - *contribution of client to development of a quality longitudinal tracking system*

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Methodology: Case Study

- **Data Collection Methods:**

    Individual Client Interviews (*n5*)

    UK Practitioner Focus Group Interviews (*n44*)

    Documentary Analysis of Irish Policy Documents (*n18*)

    Observations of Two Tracking Systems (Irish & Finnish PES models)

- **Analytical Strategy:**

    3- Dimensional Discourse Analysis Framework

UK Practitioner Discourse:
Then (2006) and Now

Difficulty in Defining Progression

Personal development (soft) – psychological, behavioural, social
Achievements & attainments (hard) – education, training, employment

Process – guidance intervention and client's experiences

Tracking Progression

Ad-hoc across sector

Divergence – requirements of stakeholders, values of practitioner, needs of client

Findings: Client Narratives

- Range of career decision-making styles: evaluative, strategic, aspirational, opportunistic, and circumspective

- High levels of *emotional resilience* in coping with personal and structural barriers

- Career scripts and personal goals change over time

- Stories reveal complexities of measuring progression longitudinally: memory, attrition, changes in circumstances, priorities and perspective

Findings: Progression as a Process and Outcome

- Process is *non-linear, cyclical, zig-zag, retrospective*

- Personal construct: subjective process objectively measured

- Overlooking of intrinsic (psychological) and extrinsic (sociological) variables:

  age, gender, decision-making, attitude, motivation, attributes, barriers, expectations, goals, roles, supports, mobility opportunities, economic contexts

- Soft outcomes and *distance travelled* by individuals

- Measures for *identity shifts* needed in longitudinal studies as this is often central to the personal development of the client over time

(Maguire & Killeen, 2003)

Findings: Progression as a Process and Outcome

Barriers:

- **Structural obstacles** – course postponement, course attrition, inflexible provision, finances

- **Personal/dispositional** - self-concept, blocks to learning and the realities and responsibilities of everyday life
  - **Age** is primary dispositional barrier

Clients' Contribution: Value of Longitudinal Tracking

1) Validate progression experience through regular follow-up.
2) Encourage a reciprocal relationship
3) Re-engage previous clients or introduce new clients to service
4) Forum for feedback on structural improvements in guidance service and education sector.
5) Contribute to greater understanding of issue of non-progression
6) Evidence (case studies) on clients' journeys and spectrum of opportunities available

Types of 'Hard' Outcomes for Longterm Measurement

- **Education/Training:** *from entry to completion, full-time/part-time/modular/distant/flexible*
- **Qualifications:** *level, full/part qualification, accredited/non-accredited*
- **Employment:** *full-time/part-time, self-employment, voluntary sector*
- **Training/Job Placement Initiatives**
- **Specific Career Change**
- **Internal Promotion**
- **Retirement Activities**

Types of 'Soft' Outcomes for Longterm Measurement

- **Self-concept:** *confidence levels, self-esteem, self-worth*
- **Attitude change:** *open-mindedness, clarity of options*
- **Abilities**: *discoveries, talents*
- **Choices:** *education, career, lifestyle*
- **Personal satisfaction:** *contentment, achievements, dreams realised*
- **Agency:** *personal and structural mobility*
- **Opportunity awareness:** *education, training, employment, voluntary*
- **Wellbeing:** *health, changes in lifestyle, reduced isolation*

Types of 'Soft' Outcomes for Longterm Measurement

- **Change in circumstances:** *personal, social, economic, for example, financial.*
- **Personal relationships:** *family, friends, work, community*
- **Goals:** *present, future, specific*
- **Skills:** *learning-specific, work-specific, career management, decision-making, self-management, creative, problem-solving, listening, time-management*
- **Motivation Levels:** *flow experiences*

Considerations for Practice, Policy and Research

➢ Quantitative data provides a 'snap-shot' only of progression Methodological pluralism - capture multi-faceted nature of progression

➢ Constraints of resources vs. needs of clients

➢ Democratic inclusion of all stakeholders in discussion on evaluation systems

➢ Case study represents a *microcosm* of vicarious experiences of recipients of policy decision-making

➢ Major paradox – non-directive and progressive nature of intervention vs. quantitative measurement of provision

➢ Implications for Irish practice at service level - time, cost, human resources, training, re-design of AEGI tracking system

As you set out for Ithaka
hope your road is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery…..

Constantine P. Cavafy

Thank You

Full thesis: http://repository.wit.ie/1446/

Thesis report: http://www.regsa.org/news/publications_workshop.html

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