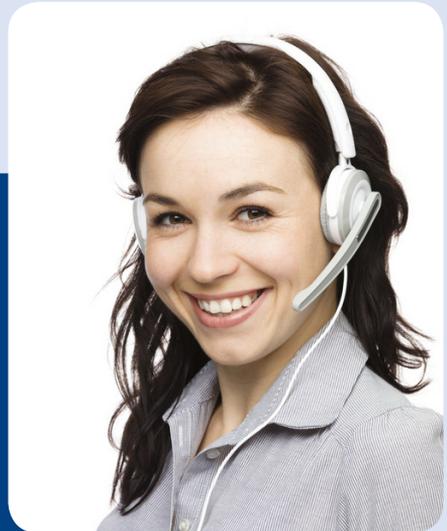Jaana Kettunen

# Career practitioners' conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services

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Jaana Kettunen

Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston kasvatustieteiden ja psykologian tiedekunnan
suostumuksella julkisesti tarkastettavaksi yliopiston
Seminarium-rakennuksen juhlasalissa 212
syyskuun 29. päivänä 2017 kello 14.

Academic dissertation to be publicly defended, by permission
of the Faculty of Education and Psychology of the University of Jyväskylä,
in the Auditorium S212
on September 29, 2017 at 14 o'clock.

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FINNISH INSTITUTE FOR
EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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# Abstract

This research examines career practitioners' conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services, contributing to current understanding and discussion of the use of ICT in a career services context. It is important to see this body of knowledge not only from the perspective of researcher but also as a potentially transforming approach to the work of career practitioners. New technologies and social media offer significant opportunities for career services, but they also create demand for new competency among career practitioners. The research aims (1) to investigate career practitioners' conceptions of social media in career services; (2) to examine career practitioners' conceptions of competency for social media in career services; and (3) to identify the critical aspects in developing social media competency within the profession. In the three empirical studies that comprise the thesis, data were gathered in two sets of focus group interviews—the first with Finnish career practitioners who had little or no experience of using social media in their professional work, and so were considered novices in the professional use of social media, and the second with Finnish and Danish career practitioners with experience of using social media in the course of their work.

The principles of phenomenographic research were applied in analysing and reporting the data. The qualitative analysis produced three outcome spaces, reflecting the qualitative variation in career practitioners' experiences of social media, their conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services. These outcome spaces were hierarchical in nature, as revealed by the dimensions of variation, which highlight

the differences between the categories of description. The five identified categories on conceptions of social media in career services ranged from unnecessary to indispensable. The practitioners' experiences of social media in career services revealed four categories, ranging from social media as a means for delivering information to paradigm change and reform. Conceptions of competency for social media in career services also revealed four categories varying from an ability to use social media for delivering information to an ability to utilise it for co-careering.

The consolidation of conceptions of three sub-studies presents an empirically derived conceptual framework for understanding career practitioners' general approaches to social media and competency for social media. Five identified general approaches encompass passive, information-centred, communication-centred, collaborative career exploration and co-careering approach. By exploring the logical relationships between qualitatively different conceptions, this research offers a holistic and an overarching view of career practitioners' varying conceptions of social media and competency for social media. Practitioners, trainers and policy makers need to be aware of these diverse understandings within the profession in order to move towards more advanced approaches. The study addresses practical and policy implications, as well as directions for future research.

Keywords: career services, career practitioners, social media, competency, conceptions, experiences, phenomenography

# Tiivistelmä

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan ohjaajien käsityksiä sosiaalisesta mediasta ja sen käyttöön tarvittavasta osaamisesta ohjauspalveluissa. Työn pyrkimyksenä on lisätä tietämystä ja keskustelua tieto- ja viestintätekniikan käytöstä ohjauspalveluissa. On tärkeää, ettei aihetta tarkastella ainoastaan tutkijoiden näkökulmasta, vaan siinä voidaan nähdä myös mahdollisuudet merkittäviin muutoksiin ohjaajan työssä. Uudet teknologiat ja sosiaalinen media tarjoavat ohjauspalveluille runsaasti uusia mahdollisuuksia, mutta samalla ne vaativat ohjaajilta uutta osaamista. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli (1) tutkia ohjaajien käsityksiä sosiaalisesta mediasta ohjauspalveluissa; (2) tarkastella ohjaajien käsityksiä tarvittavasta osaamisesta sosiaalisen median käyttöön ohjauspalveluissa; ja (3) havaita kriittiset tekijät sosiaalisen median osaamisen kehittämisessä ammattikunnan sisällä.

Väitöskirja koostuu kolmesta empiirisiin tutkimuksiin perustuvasta artikkelista. Niissä hyödynnettiin kahta fokusryhmähaastatteluin koottua tutkimusaineistoa. Ensimmäisiin fokusryhmähaastatteluihin osallistui suomalaisia ohjaajia, joilla oli vain vähän tai ei ollenkaan kokemusta sosiaalisen median käytöstä työssään, ja joita siksi pidettiin noviiseina sosiaalisen median ammattikäytössä. Toisiin fokusryhmähaastatteluihin osallistui suomalaisia ja tanskalaisia ohjaajia joilla oli kokemusta sosiaalisen median käyttämisestä työssään.

Aineiston analyysissä ja tulosten raportoinnissa noudatettiin fenomenografisen tutkimuksen periaatteita. Laadullinen analyysi tuotti kolme kokonaismallia, kategoriakokonaisuutta, jotka kuvaavat ohjaajien erilaisia käsityksiä ja kokemuksia sosiaalisesta mediasta, sekä sen käyttöön tarvittavasta osaamisesta ohjauspalveluissa. Nämä kokonaismallit ovat

luonteeltaan hierarkkisia, mikä näkyi kategorioiden välisistä suhteista toisiinsa. Sosiaalista mediaa ohjauspalveluissa koskevissa käsityksissä tunnistettiin viisi kategoriaa, jotka vaihtelivat tarpeettomasta tarpeelliseen. Tarkasteltaessa ohjaajien kokemuksia sosiaalisesta mediasta ohjauspalveluissa esiin tuli neljä kategoriaa, jotka vaihtelivat tiedon jakamisesta paradigman muutokseen ja uudistukseen. Käsityksistä, jotka liittyivät sosiaalisessa mediassa tarvittavaan osaamiseen, analyysi tuotti myös neljä kategoriaa. Nämä vaihtelivat kyvystä hyödyntää sosiaalista mediaa tiedon jakamiseen, kykyyn hyödyntää sosiaalista mediaa ohjauksellisten kysymysten yhteisölliseen tarkasteluun ('co-careering').

Sovittamalla yhteen osatutkimuksissa havaitut käsitykset, saatiin aikaan empiirispohjainen käsitteellinen viitekehys, jonka kautta voidaan ymmärtää ohjaajien sosiaaliseen mediaan kohdistuvia yleisiä lähestymistapoja, ja heidän käsityksiään sen käyttämiseen tarvittavasta osaamisesta. Tässä viitekehyksessä tunnistetut viisi lähestymistapaa ovat: passiivinen, informaatio-/tietokeskeinen, viestintäkeskeinen, ohjauksellisten kysymysten yhteistoiminnallisen tarkastelun ja ohjauksellisten kysymysten yhteisöllisen tarkastelun lähestymistavat.

Tarkastelemalla laadullisesti erilaisten käsitysten välisiä loogisia suhteita, tämä tutkimus tarjoaa holistisen ja yhdistävän näkymän ohjaajien erilaisiin käsityksiin sosiaalisesta mediasta ja siinä tarvittavasta osaamisesta ohjauspalveluissa. Niin ammatinharjoittajien, kouluttajien kuin päättäjienkin on hyvä olla tietoisia ammattikunnan sisällä olevista monenlaisista sosiaaliseen mediaan ja siinä tarvittavaan ammatilliseen osaamiseen liittyvistä käsityksistä, jotta näitä voidaan kehittää ja syventää. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan tulosten käyttökelpoisuutta käytännön työlle ja ohjausta koskevalla julkiselle päätöksenteolle. Lopuksi työ pyrkii antamaan suuntaviivoja tulevalle tutkimukselle.

Hakusanat: ohjaus, ohjauspalvelut, ohjaajat, sosiaalinen media, osaaminen, käsitykset, kokemukset, fenomenografia

# List of original publications

This dissertation is based on the following studies, which are referred to as sub-studies with Roman numerals I–III:

**Article I**  Kettunen, J., Vuorinen, R., & Sampson, J.P., Jr. (2013). Career practitioners´ conceptions of social media in career services. British Journal of Guidance & Counselling. 41, 302–317.

**Article II**  Kettunen, J., Vuorinen, R., & Sampson, J.P., Jr. (2015). Practitioners' experiences of social media in career services. The Career Development Quarterly, 63, 268–282.

**Article III**  Kettunen, J., Sampson, J.P., Jr., & Vuorinen, R. (2015). Career practitioners´ conceptions of competency for social media in career services. British Journal of Guidance & Counselling. 43, 43–56.

The study as a whole has been reported in three jointly authored articles. All these articles were substantially the work of the first author. The co-authors mainly commented on the work of the first author.

The articles are reprinted with the kind permission of the publishers, Taylor & Francis (I & III) and John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (II). Copies of the articles are appended to this report.

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# Acknowledgements

I am grateful to many individuals and communities for their support and encouragement over the years. This dissertation would not have been possible without the opportunity to work with many inspiring people and an environment of support and guidance.

First, I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Helena Rasku-Puttonen, Professor Päivi Häkkinen, and Professor James P. Sampson Jr., whose guidance, support, and encouragement throughout the research process has been invaluable and has enabled me to gain confidence as a researcher. Helena, you have patiently and supportively supervised me, always encouraged me and offered your expertise and advice whenever I needed them, and I am most grateful for that. Päivi, you have made the process seem achievable and reassured me at various stages; no matter what the question, you always had time for me. Jim, you have been incredibly insightful about all aspects of my research. You helped me to set goals, continuously encouraged me to keep at it and proceed systematically, and inspired me to do the best I could. I deeply appreciate our discussions, which have given me valuable insights not only into my area of research, but also into what it takes and what it means to be a researcher. I would also like to thank Professor Päivi Tynjälä for her indispensable comments and support during this journey.

I gratefully acknowledge my pre-examiners, Professor Spencer Niles and Professor Shirley Booth, for their valuable comments and remarks on my manuscript and their engagement in the pre-examination process. Their encouraging and thought-provoking remarks were valuable in completing the manuscript. I offer particular thanks to Professor

# 1

## Introduction

Rapid development in information and communication technology (ICT) has changed society fundamentally over the past two decades. One notable aspect of this evolution has been the rapid increase in the use of social media, which has transformed the Internet into an interactive environment offering numerous opportunities for communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing. Whether updating one's Facebook status, tweeting the latest news or joining a professional community on LinkedIn, social media has become central to our everyday life for both leisure and business purposes. Of particular interest in the present study is people's increasing use of social media for career-related activities. As technological advances change how individuals explore and acquire information about education, training and work opportunities, there is a pressing need to align new technologies more closely with career services and associated professional practices. New technologies and social media offer significant opportunities for career services, but they also create demand for new competency among career practitioners.

The term *career services* refers to the provision of guidance and counselling, including self-help, brief staff-assisted and individual case-managed services, as well as distance provision, where staff members assist adolescents and adults in making informed and considered decisions about occupational, educational, training and employment choices (Sampson, 2008, p. 1). In this context, Savickas (2011) links the distinct but complementary terms *career guidance*, *career education* and *career counselling*. In Europe, *lifelong guidance* is an umbrella concept for the provision of guidance and counselling. Lifelong guidance

refers to activities that enable citizens of any age, and at any life stage, to identify their capacities, competences and interests; to make meaningful educational, training and occupational decisions; and to manage their individual life path in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used (European Council, 2004, 2008). Throughout this study, the term *career services* will be used to encompass the provision of both guidance and counselling.

A number of European case studies and reviews (e.g. ELGPN, 2010; Sultana, 2004; Sultana & Watts, 2006; Watts & Sultana, 2004; Zelloth, 2009) indicate that the demand for guidance far exceeds the supply of services. In these circumstances, citizens' needs cannot be met exclusively through traditional forms of guidance, such as one-to-one discussions or career choice tests. Simultaneously, policy documents, case studies and reviews (e.g. Cedefop, 2011; Eurobarometer, 2014; European Council, 2004, 2008; OECD, 2004a, 2004b) consistently reflect a growing consensus concerning the increasingly essential role of ICT in the guidance service sector. According to Watts (1996), three factors fuel policy makers' growing interest in the use of ICT in guidance services: the potential to improve cost effectiveness, the ability to increase the effectiveness of the guidance process and user expectations that guidance services will harness such technologies. Certainly, the use of innovative and flexible self-access and self-help modes of service delivery has the potential to make access to services cheaper and more feasible (e.g. ELGPN, 2010). New methods of access to career services also offer excellent opportunities to address people's needs and expectations. However, one of the issues facing policy makers is the need to develop the skills and competences of the practitioners and managers of career centres/services (e.g. Bimrose, Hughes, & Barnes, 2011; Kettunen, Vuorinen, & Ruusuvirta, 2016; Watts, 2002). Since practitioners' skills and competencies in this area are frequently considered to be secondary, they are often poorly developed in both initial and continuing training (e.g. Cedefop, 2009; European Commission, 2014).

The successful integration of technology and social media in career services is dependent not only on the available skills or technical facilities but also on practitioners' willingness to accept the changes that new technologies may bring. A person's understanding and experience of a given phenomenon is intertwined with their capacity to act, since 'you cannot act other than in relation to the world as you experience it' (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111). This linkage has been confirmed by numerous phenomenographic studies of teachers' conceptions and practices (e.g. Åkerlind, 2004, 2008; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996; Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999), including in blended learning (e.g. Lameras, Levy, Paraskakis, & Webber, 2011) and online contexts (e.g. Gonzáles, 2010). Career practitioners who design and deliver career services vary considerably in their experience of technology, and in their training, credentials and responsibilities (Sampson, 2008). Some remain unconvinced of the relevance of social media, while others lack the skills or confidence to use

it effectively. To be able to assess its utility and potential, practitioners need appropriate training in social media, firmly grounded in a framework of career practice and emphasising a more developmental approach to capacity building (Bimrose, Barnes, & Atwell, 2010). It also seems likely that practitioners working in this area need be trained differently than for the traditional face-to-face service mode (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013). The biggest challenge facing trainers, career practitioners and researchers with respect to social media is accepting the information society framework within which we now live and reframing the concepts and constructs of career services and related practices within this framework.

The present doctoral study seeks to deepen our understanding of career practitioners' conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services. The study does not confine itself to any specific career theory, nor to any particular ways of using social media or to the effectiveness of social media in career services. Knowledge of career practitioners' social media use and training needs is still very limited, and scarce research has thus far been conducted within this area. A broader understanding and knowledge of practitioners' conceptions is needed because this can impact adaptation and adoption in practice and can also be used to guide the development of training. Along with this summary, the present study comprises three empirical sub-studies. The purpose of the present summary is not only to integrate the empirical findings of these works, but also to offer a wider perspective on the qualitative differences in practitioners' conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services. Knowledge of such variation can be useful in informing practice, theory and training in the field and supporting progress towards more advanced approaches. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the current discussion surrounding the development and successful use of social media in a career services context, motivating the improvement and development of training provisions.

The term *competency* is used throughout the study to refer to the combination of relevant attributes that underpin successful professional performance (Moore, Cheng, & Dainty, 2002; Woodruffe, 1991). This term is often used interchangeably with the term competence (e.g. Sultana, 2009). Despite the general confusion between the two concepts, competence is, however, different from competency. While competence is the ability to do a particular task, competency concerns the underlying characteristics which allow a person to perform well in a variety of situations (e.g. Trotter & Ellison, 2001, p. 36).

The study is organised into six chapters. Chapter One introduces the research and describes its motivation. Chapter Two discusses prior research in the study area on which the empirical investigation is based. The aims of the study are discussed in Chapter Three, and Chapter Four describes the methodology, including the research design, data collection methods and data analysis procedures. Chapter Five presents the results of the three empirical sub-studies (Articles I, II and III). Finally, Chapter Six discusses the findings and implications and presents a detailed overview of the study's conclusions.

# 2

# Prior research on the role of career practitioner, ICT and social media in career services

This chapter discusses prior research on the key concepts that underpin the present research, including the conceptual elements framing the evolving role of career practitioners, ICT and social media in career services and the competency in using these technologies in practice.

## 2.1    The evolving and expanding role of career practitioner

To keep pace with changes in society, the shifting emphasis in career services and functions has also meant continual expansion of the career practitioner's role. That role has evolved from content expert to process expert and, most recently, to expert in managing social spaces. Over much of the past century, the career choice model was focused on helping people to make informed, point-in-time occupational choices (e.g. Jarvis, 2014; Pope, 2000), driven by the need to match individuals traits to job characteristics. Within this context, the career practitioner was a content expert with specialised knowledge of the labour market and methods to assess individuals' suitability for and capabilities in the labour market (Bimrose & McNair, 2011). This model was based on an assumption that an individual's abilities and interests could be identified and matched with relevant occupations (e.g. Patton & McMahon, 2014).

In the latter half of the twentieth century, career choice came to be seen as part of a larger development process rather than as a singular matching exercise (e.g. Herr, 2001; Patton & McMahon, 2014). This transition shifted the emphasis from a choice of occupation as a single point-in-time event to a longitudinal expression of career behaviours that included precursors to career decision-making—or, in other words, from vocational development to career development. Here, the practitioner became more of a guide than an expert as the conceptualisation of career development expanded from content aspects of career choice to career-related processes (Niles & Karajic, 2008). Beyond an understanding of the labour market, the practitioner was seen to possess specialised knowledge about the processes of career development and career decision making. As a result, beyond guiding individual career choices, the practitioner now facilitated the individual's career development, decision-making and planning, including the acquisition and application of career management skills (Sultana, 2012).

Today, career services has evolved beyond placement and career development into a networking model (Casella, 1990). This model places greater emphasis on preparing individuals for employment with a focus on developing networking skills, building relationships with stakeholders and establishing communities that will serve the individual's career and professional needs throughout their lifetime (Casella, 1990; Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). Within this model, the practitioner's role has expanded to include expertise in managing social spaces, and new information technologies have accelerated this process. The continuous development of recruiting software and social media has redefined how individuals make sense of their experiences and connect with employers and professional communities (e.g. Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013). In this context, practitioners have evolved into agile content experts and network catalysts who participate in a variety of communities and develop meaningful connections among their constituents. Career practitioners now provide direct services to individual clients seeking educational or vocational opportunities, while simultaneously offering consulting services to organisations, informing policy makers and performing a range of other roles that directly or indirectly promote community capacity building and individual access to employment (Arthur, 2008). In short, career services have moved from the private to the public sphere and from individual sessions to more collective engagement (e.g. Plant, 2008; Thomsen, 2012, 2013).

In summary, the research reviewed above shows that the societal and economical changes of the past century have influenced career services and associated professional practices. Based on this trend, and the continuing technological development, the role of the career practitioner is likely to continue to evolve. In light of the reviewed research, it seems important to view this evolution as a continually growing set of building blocks, such that new models maintain well tried elements of past approaches, while continuously expanding in response to the changes in society such as emergence of new technologies

like social media. More detailed consideration will now be given to the evolving and expanding role of ICT in career services.

## 2.2 The evolving and expanding role of ICT in career services

The development and use of ICT in career services has emerged over the last 50 years (Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013). During that time, both technology and terminology have rapidly evolved. The term *computer* was replaced by information technology (IT), signifying a shift of focus from computing technology to the capacity to store and retrieve information. The subsequent introduction of the term *information and communication technology* (ICT) denoted a further change of focus from technology to function. In a career guidance context, Watts (2002) identified four phases in the development of ICT: the mainframe phase (mid-1960s to late 1970s); the microcomputer phase (1980s to mid-1990s); the web phase (late 1990s to early 2000s); and the current digital phase where previous telephone, television and computer devices are integrated. He also identified three overarching trends: increased accessibility, increased interactivity and increased diffusion of ICT-based resources. From the batch processing of career assessments by large, slow, expensive mainframes and mini-computers, ICT-based career interventions have evolved from the delivery of assessments, information and instruction on smaller personal computers to remote delivery over the Internet and, most recently, by means of wireless mobile devices (e.g. Sampson & Makela, 2014).

Sampson and Osborn (2014) noted that the first 50 years of ICT in guidance focused on automating existing guidance functions and supporting existing services—in other words, on what was already being done. However, recent advances in technology, including the exponential development of the Internet and social media, have radically altered how people interact and communicate and how information is created and disseminated (e.g. Bimrose et al., 2010; Hooley, Hutchinson, & Watts, 2010a, 2010b). From a general resource for facilitating communication and disseminating information, the Internet has evolved into a tool for the collaborative construction of knowledge through social media and mobile devices (e.g. Vuorinen, Sampson, & Kettunen, 2011). Furthermore, rather than disseminating only expert content, the Internet increasingly offers content created by users. Social media and online communities support knowledge exchange and interactive processes of knowledge exchange in which groups of individuals combine their contributions to create new insights. In the context of career information, in particular, Sampson and Osborn (2014) highlighted how the locus of control has begun to shift from expert content to a blend of expert- and user-constructed knowledge.

The potential of ICT in career services has long been recognised, despite the use of vary-

ing terminologies (e.g. Bimrose & Barnes, 2010; Bimrose, 2017). Terms in this field have included *computer-assisted guidance or counselling* (e.g. Super, 1970; Sampson & Stripling, 1979; Watts, 1978), *web- or Internet-based guidance or counselling* (e.g. Heinlen, Welfel, Richmond & Rak, 2003; Offer & Watts, 1997; Ranerup, 2004), *virtual guidance* (Watts, 2001), *e-guidance* (Offer, 2004), *distance guidance* (e.g. Malone, 2007; Watts & Dent, 2007), and, more generically, *online practice*. For more than five decades, career services have utilised technology to provide automated access to information and related processes. In recent years, this usage has continued to expand and exploit new technologies to provide distance services. In respond to this trend, a large and growing body of literature has examined the role (e.g. Harris-Bowlsbey & Sampson, 2001; Sampson, 2008; Watts & Offer, 2006; Watts, 1996) and use of ICT in career services (e.g. Harris-Bowlsbey & Sampson, 2005; Sampson & Osborn, 2014; Watts, 2002). This literature finds that, over past several decades, the role of ICT in career services has commonly been viewed in three ways: as a tool, as an alternative and as an agent of change (e.g. Barnes, La Gro, & Watts, 2010; Vuorinen, 2006; Watts, 1986, 1996, 2010). As a tool, ICT supplements the other tools used in career services; as an alternative, ICT replaces other career services elements; and as an agent of change, ICT fundamentally alters the design of the career service (e.g. Watts, 1996, 2010).

Offer and Sampson (1999) outlined five uses of ICT in career services. The first of these is to funnel users into existing off-line services to maximize service uptake. The second is to use ICT as a diversion, relieving pressure on existing and frequently limited off-line services by diverting users to other (usually web-based) resources that can meet their needs. Third, ICT can be used to deliver online guidance within a site itself. The remaining uses are as a forum for discussion with peers or with practitioners and a method of providing distance learning in career management skills and related areas.

More recently, Watts (2002) and Hooley et al. (2010a) identified three ways in which career practitioners generally use ICT: to deliver information, to automate interaction and to provide channels for communication. Using ICT to deliver information eliminates time and space constraints and increases individuals' access to information. By drawing on external resources, such as picture, audio and video, it is possible to provide a more media-rich experience. Using ICT to automate interactions can enhance some of the more routine aspects of career services by enabling practitioners to provide more personalized support to those individuals who need it. For instance, games and simulations offer interactive ways of exploring the worlds of learning and work. Finally using ICT to provide channels for communication increases individuals' access to professional support. Among the many possibilities for enhanced communications ICT can be used to build communities of learning, using different channels, methods and models such as one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many. Other uses of ICT in career services include as a resource, as a medium for communication and as a means of material development (Cogoi, 2005). While the use of

ICT as a resource is highly developed in career guidance, the latter two uses remain under-developed (Bimrose & Barnes, 2010).

Another way of conceptualizing the expanding role of ICT is to focus specifically on its contribution to the guidance process. In this context, Barnes, La Gro and Watts (2010) suggested that ICT could serve four functions: informing, experiencing, constructing and communicating. *Informing* refers to helping individuals to access and apply career information—for example, using different databases. *Experiencing* means using ICT to help individuals to learn—for example, from virtual online simulations. *Constructing* refers to helping individuals to better understand themselves and their situation—for example, by using e-portfolios or online assessment tests. Finally, *communicating* refers to the use of ICT to help individuals to access support and action, to gain wider access to placements or to increase their awareness of opportunities. Osborn, Dikel, and Sampson (2011) described ICT as having three functions: understanding, acting and coping. *Understanding* refers to helping the individual to better understand the nature of their problem—for example, by accessing web-based information to better understand the causes of underemployment. *Acting* refers to helping the individual to take action to solve their problem—for example, by accessing a web-based career portfolio to build an evidence base of skills for use in future job searches. Finally, *coping* refers to helping the individual to cope better with problems that cannot be completely resolved—for example, by accessing social media to communicate with others about successful strategies for coping with the frustration of underemployment. The former set—informing, experiencing, constructing and communicating—refers to processes, while the latter set—understanding, acting and coping—refers to more direct outcomes.

One further way of framing the expanding role of ICT in career services concerns the level of integration of ICT into career services. This can be described in two ways: integration in terms of use and integration in terms of system design. Most ICT-based systems are designed to be capable of standalone use or use without career practitioner support. Most commentary on such systems, however, has noted the benefits of broader integration. Watts (1996, 2002) identified three models for such integration in terms of use. The first is the *supported* model, in which a practitioner sees the user for a brief period before and/or after using the system. The second is the *incorporated* model, in which the system is used as part of another guidance intervention—for example, within a classroom session or a one-to-one discussion—thus enabling practitioner and service user to work side by side. The third model is the *progressive* model, in which use of the system is preceded and/or followed in a developmental sequence by other guidance interventions, such as interviews, group sessions or experience-based approaches (e.g. work experience or work shadowing).

Sampson (1999) distinguished two models of ICT integration in career service systems: free-standing independent websites (of the kind developed by commercial, government and other agencies), and integrated websites (of the kind developed by career centres

themselves). Integrated websites are of particular strategic significance for career services. On the one hand, they serve as the interface between local face-to-face services and other resources; on the other, they may incorporate independent web-based services (often national or international) offering a wide range of additional resources. Finally, ICT can serve as a mechanism for the development of more integrated and user-centred lifelong guidance system that transcend separate, sector-based or provider-centred provision, supported by national fora or other co-ordination mechanism (ELGPN, 2010; Watts, 2010).

In summary, the research reviewed above shows that the role of ICT in career services has gradually increased. Over the decades, the kinds of ICT discussed in relation to career services have broadened beyond only computers, to encompass a wide range of digital resources, social media and mobile technologies. The application and potential of ICT in career services have been well documented over the years, but so far, the focus has been on automating existing guidance functions and supporting existing services. This raises several questions concerning the future trajectory of evolving and expanding role of ICT in career services. A more detailed consideration will now be given to social media in career services.

## 2.3   The rise of social media in career services

In recent years, social media has played an increasing role within the career services sector and has become part of daily practice for many career practitioners. However, the profession as a whole remains unsure how best to implement and apply social media tools such as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter in everyday practice. Furthermore, although the term *social media* is now widely used, there is not yet any single or established definition. For many, social media refers to online tools that enable communities to share information, communicate and socialise. More precisely, social media can be said to refer to online services and communal operating cultures that support and build interactions and networking through the active participation and cooperation of users and the communal sharing and production of information (Franklin & van Harmelen, 2007). Social media can also be defined as a process involving content, community and Web 2.0 technology through which individuals and groups can build common understandings and meanings. Web 2.0 technologies, in turn, can be characterised as user-centred, open, participatory, interactive and knowledge-sharing (e.g. Ahlqvist, Bäck, Heinonen, & Halonen, 2010; Kolbitsch & Maurer, 2006). In this light, social media is primarily seen to refer not to a particular set of technologies, but to types of practice (Dohn, 2009) in which users may either play active, content-producing and interactive roles or engage simply as a observers or bystanders.

Since the use of social media in career services is a relatively recent phenomenon, aca-

demic research in this area remains limited. While a number of published studies point to the significant potential of social media in this field (e.g. Bimrose et al., 2010; Hooley et al., 2010a, 2010b; Sampson & Osborn, 2014), there are, as yet, few empirical studies on the use and effectiveness of social media in career services. Among these, Dyson's (2012) case study of youth employability services in England described the use of Facebook alongside more traditional service offerings, such as individual appointments, drop-in locations and telephone and text communication. She reported that individual and group sessions using social media increased young people's motivation, developed their career thinking and strengthened their continued engagement with their adviser. Given these findings, Dyson (2012) suggested that career services can be enhanced by a blend of online and face-to-face provision. Exploring undergraduates' professional network usage and career building, Gerard (2012) found that while young people may be active users of social networking services, they may not automatically use these services in the most effectively or appropriate manner for career purposes. Describing the phenomenon of career blogging, Hooley (2011) stressed the importance of the blogosphere for career conversations. He argued that the career services sector should engage more fully with career support blogging as an interactive, practitioner-led and cost-effective form of service provision. In their study of social media use in university career centres, Osborn and LoFrisco (2012) found that many such centres have increased their use of social media tools, including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. They also noted that the three most common ways career centres use social media are to provide career-related information to students, to connect with students and to promote career services. Similarly, an American study of perceptions and usage of social media among more than 5,000 practitioners in college career centres (NACE, 2013) found evidence of a growing acceptance of social media's role in college recruiting and career centre operations. The findings highlighted career practitioners' belief that privacy issues and a lack of knowledge are the biggest barriers to social media use. The study concluded that the use of social media in career services remains primarily confined to messages announcing career centre events to students, employers and alumni.

The research reviewed above shows that, though the use of social media in career services is largely nascent and experimental, it is also increasing among career practitioners. Practitioners use a range of channels, but their ways of using these channels have focused primarily on information delivery. This leads to several questions concerning the future trajectory of social media use in career services. Given this background, it seems increasingly important to support career professionals in their understanding of the various social media tools and the innovative ways in which these tools can be incorporated into existing practices. A more detailed consideration will now be given to career practitioners' competency for ICT in career services.

## 2.4    Career practitioners´ competency for ICT in career services

A growing body of literature has examined the skills and competencies needed by career practitioners to use existing and emerging technologies in career services (e.g. Barnes et al., 2010; Barnes & Watts, 2009; Bimrose et al., 2010; Cedefop, 2009; Cogoi, 2005; Pyle, 2000). Careful consideration has also been given to the ethical issues surrounding the use of technologies in career services practice (e.g. Barak, 2003; Malone, 2007; Sampson, 2002; Sampson & Makela, 2014). According to Pyle (2000), career practitioners using ICT need knowledge of computer-assisted software and websites, as well as an ability to diagnose client needs, motivate clients, help clients to process data and assist clients in creating and implementing action plans. Cogoi's (2005) three uses of ICT in guidance (as a resource, as a medium for communication and for material development) require practitioners to develop specific competences. More recently, Barnes and Watts (2009) classified ICT-related competences for guidance practitioners under two broad headings: competence for using ICT to deliver guidance and competence for developing and managing the use of ICT in guidance. The former set of competences relates to using ICT in the guidance process to address clients' needs for information, experiential learning, constructivist learning and communication. The latter set of competences involves developing and managing practitioners' own use of ICT-related guidance solutions in the career service context.

Bimrose et al. (2010) asserted that the skills and competences required for web-based career guidance constitute two separate but interrelated domains. The first of these relates to career practitioners' skills and competences as ICT users, including their awareness of technological developments and their acquisition of the technical skills necessary to use different technologies. In this context, social/personal skills, cognitive/physical skills and technical skills are most commonly required. The second domain encompasses the more generic career guidance skills and competencies that must be selectively transferred and adapted to different operational contexts. For instance, telephone-based career services require highly developed active listening skills to establish client needs; similarly, skills in analysing text-based communication are required when working with text-based interactions methods, such as email and chat rooms. Questioning, empathy, contracting and challenging are among the other guidance skills common to all forms of web-based career services.

In summary, the research reviewed above shows that the skills and competences needed by career practitioners to use existing and emerging technologies in career services generally emphasise separate but interrelated technical skills and generic career guidance skills. Whilst progress in this area has been made, evidence on the particular skill sets needed for the career services sector and the competency frameworks within which these skill sets would be situated is currently limited. Furthermore, this body of work has thus far devel-

oped very limited knowledge of competency for social media in career services. Therefore, this stream of research seems to be increasingly important. A more detailed consideration will now be given to the rationale of the present study.

## 2.5    Why study career practitioners´ conceptions?

Recent literature reviews by Sampson et al. (2014) and Crockett, Byrd, and Erford (2014) have shown an overall increase in technological themes in guidance and counselling studies. These themes include a range of practical guides and checklists for using ICT in career services (e.g. Harris-Bowlsbey, Dikel & Sampson, 2002; Offer, 2004a, 2004b; Osborn et al., 2011), the use of different ICT technologies and applications in career service practice (e.g. Hooley, 2011; Osborn, Kronholz, Finklea, & Cantonis, 2014; Watts & Dent, 2002), the efficacy of ICT-based resources and services (e.g. Sampson, 1994; Sampson & Norris, 1997); and the technology trends influencing career services (e.g. Bimrose, Kettunen, & Goddard, 2014; Hooley et al., 2010a, 2010b; Watts, 1996, 2002). This trend is believed to reflect the rapidity of technological developments and the increasing role of technology in addressing the needs of a today's diverse, global community.

In a literature review exploring the design and use of ICT in career services from 1990 to 2009, Sampson, Shy, Offer and Dozier (2010) identified an emphasis on the design of ICT-based career guidance applications and professional standards. Professionals appear to be concerned about potential problems in the design and use of ICT applications and seem willing to be proactive in optimising the use of this technology. The available information on ICT applications is generally seen as improving our understanding of how this technology might be used in practice. While some studies addressing the expanding role of ICT and social media in career services in relation to professional standards have described the requisite skills and competencies (e.g. Barnes & Watts, 2009; Barnes, et al., 2010; Bimrose et al., 2010; Cogoi, 2005; Pyle, 2000), there remains an urgent need to ground competency training more firmly in a framework of career practice and to adopt a more developmental approach to capacity building (Bimrose et al., 2010).

To date, much of the literature on the use of ICT in career services has been exploratory and descriptive in nature, consisting largely of case studies that rely solely on user evaluations. Evidence-based knowledge of the requisite skill sets and the competency frameworks within which these skill sets would be situated remains limited, and technological information quickly becomes outdated. Additionally, too little attention has been devoted to practitioners' conceptions of the role of ICT in career services. In a longitudinal study assessing practitioners' perceptions of ICT in career services over the last decade, Vuorinen et al. (2011) reported an encouraging increase in ICT use. However, the same study also

noted that after 10 years, ICT was still being used to deliver career information rather than to promote lifelong career management skills. In addition, no known research has yet adopted a developmental approach to career practitioners' conceptions of social media or competency for social media in career services. A broader understanding and knowledge of practitioners' prevailing conceptions of new technologies is needed to support adaptation in practice. To bridge this gap, the present study describes differences in career practitioners' conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services, and captures the underlying structure of variation across all study participants. In so doing, it hopes to contribute to the current discussion of effective development and use of social media in a career services context and to motivate the enhancement of career practitioners' training.

# 3
# Aims of the study

The overall aim of this doctoral thesis is to examine career practitioners' conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services, so contributing to the current understanding and discussion of use of ICT in career services. The general aims of the thesis are as follows:

1. To investigate career practitioners' conceptions of social media in career services (Articles I and II);
2. To examine career practitioners' conceptions of competency for social media in career services (Article III); and
3. To identify the critical aspects for developing social media competency within the profession (Articles II and III).

The general aims of the study are addressed on the basis of three empirical sub-studies (Articles I–III), each with its own specific aims and research questions. Article I examines conceptions of social media in career services among practitioners who are experienced Internet users but have little or no experience of using social media in their professional work, and are considered novice users of social media in a career services context. Article II pursues an understanding of career practitioners' different experiences of using social media in a career services context. In Article III, the focus shifts to conceptions of competency for social media among career practitioners who have experience in using social media in a professional context.

# 4

# Methodology and methods

This chapter will introduce the phenomenographic research approach as a conceptual and methodological framework of the present study. Then the chapter presents the details of the study explaining the methods used, the context and participants and the process of data gathering and analysis.

## 4.1 Phenomenographic research approach

This study adopted a phenomenographic approach. This approach was selected because it aims to help researchers understand the variations in conceptions of a phenomenon (Patton, 2002), which made it a strong fit for the aims of the study. Since its emergence in the late 1970s, phenomenography has become well known as a qualitative method of investigating the different ways in which a group of people experience or understand the same concept or phenomenon (e.g. Bowden & Green, 2005; Bowden & Marton, 1998; Bowden & Walsh, 2000; Marton, 1981, 1986, 1994; Marton & Booth, 1997). Previously, the aim of phenomenographic research was to identify the different ways of experiencing or understanding a phenomenon within the sample group. Today, the aim is to simultaneously identify the different component parts of the phenomenon, as experienced within the sample group, as well as indentifying how different patterns of awareness of some component parts and lack of awareness of others is associated with the different ways of

understanding the phenomenon found within the group (Åkerlind, 2017, p. 2). Originating in pedagogy-oriented educational research (e.g. Säljö, 1975; Marton & Säljö, 1976a, 1976b), phenomenography has since been deployed in a range of disciplines, including guidance and counselling (Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2017).

The phenomenographic approach is characterised by a number of fundamental principles. The first of these is a non-dualist ontological perspective, in which persons and the world are considered inseparable (Bowden, 2005; Marton, 2000); this means that a conception or way of experiencing a specific phenomenon is seen as a relation between the person and the phenomenon. Different ways of conceptualising or experiencing the same thing are viewed as internally related, representing different meanings of the same phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2003; Marton, 2000). For this, the terms 'conception', 'way of understanding' or 'way of experiencing' are used. The object of phenomenographic research, then, is the relation between the subject and the phenomenon, that is, the phenomenon as experienced by individuals rather than the phenomenon itself as depicted in Figure 1. In other words, phenomenography is based on a second-order perspective on how phenomena are perceived by people rather than on a first-order perspective describing phenomena 'as they are' (Marton, 1981).
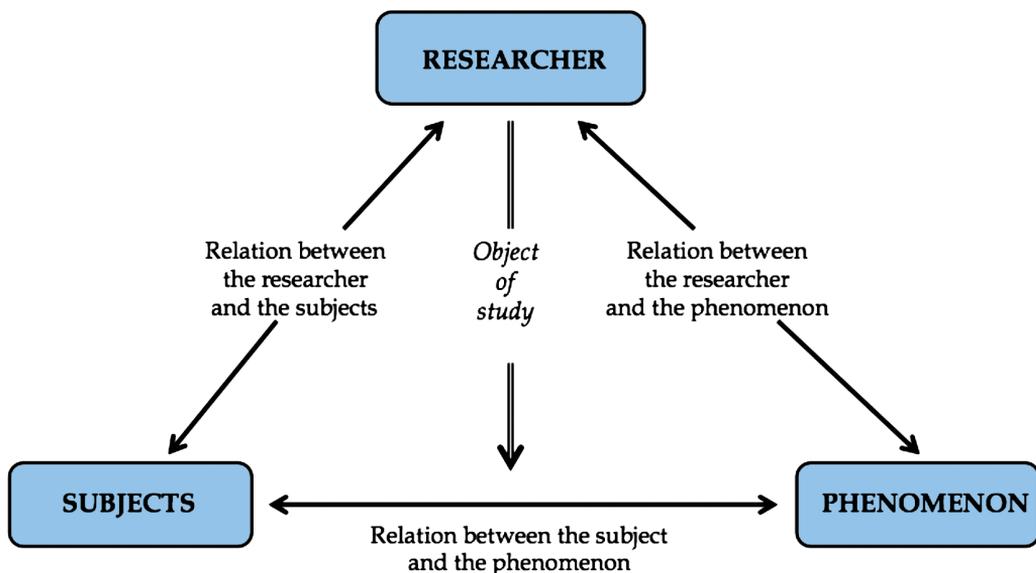


*Figure 1.* Focus on phenomenographic research (based on Bowden, 2005, p. 13)

While recognising that individuals may have more than one conception of a particular phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997), phenomenography is grounded in the premise that there are only a limited number of ways of experiencing a particular phenomenon, and that these are logically related to each other. The primary outcome of a phenomenographic analysis is a structured set of logically related categories, known as an outcome space, describing on the collective level the qualitative variation in people's ways of experiencing or understanding the phenomenon in question. These categories are often organised as a nested hierarchy of understandings, expanding from least to most complex. As well as identifying these different categories, a phenomenographic study seeks to identify the aspects that critically differentiate the categories from each other, hence revealing their qualitative differences. According to Marton and Booth (1997), the categories of description should meet three criteria of quality: each category should describe a distinct way of experiencing the phenomenon; logical relationships between categories should be hierarchically represented; and there should be a limited, parsimonious number of different categories that describe variation across the sample.

Similar to any research approach, phenomenographic studies have both strengths and limitations. Phenomenography was criticised, in its early days, for lacking specificity and explicitness concerning both data collection and analysis (e.g. Richardson, 1999). In other words, the methodological procedures were not described in enough detail for other researchers to be able to follow them in their own research. More recently, however, the methodological practices used in phenomenographic studies have become more transparent and guidelines for researchers have been presented (e.g. Åkerlind, 2005b; Bowden & Green, 2005; Bowden & Walsh, 2000). Within the last decade the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenography have been explored comprehensively, and as a result many of the early criticisms regarding the lack of theoretical underpinnings of phenomenography (e.g. Hasselgren & Beach, 1997) have been mitigated (Marton & Pong, 2005). Over the years, phenomenographic research has further developed into a theory of learning and awareness (Marton & Booth, 1997). In turn, this has led to a variation theory (Marton, 2015; Marton & Morris, 2002; Marton & Tsui, 2004), which focuses on the pedagogical utilisation of phenomenography in the design of educational activities (e.g. Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013).

As with other qualitative methods, questions have been raised about the validity and reliability of phenomenography. In response to these doubts, Åkerlind (2005d) has emphasised that because phenomenography makes no claims about the 'truth' of its results, external measures of validity may be irrelevant. Instead, phenomenographers refer to 'communicative validity' (accurate description of the procedures) and 'pragmatic validity' (meaningfulness of the results for the intended audience).

## 4.2    Participants and study context

In line with the phenomenographic approach (Åkerlind, Bowden, & Green, 2005; Marton & Booth, 1997), a varied sample was deliberately sought to maximise diversity in participants' ways of experiencing the phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2005d). Emails were sent to a number of professional guidance bodies and training units to recruit practitioners who were experienced Internet users (sub-study I) and who had experience using social media (sub-studies II and III). In sub-studies II and III, an email was also sent to eVejledning, a national eGuidance centre in Denmark that provides services using various virtual communication channels and social media settings. Participants' experience of social media guided the identification and selection of interviewees, and purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to ensure the use of information-rich cases with likely to yield significant amounts of data of relevance to the study. The participants were representative of the guidance community across a variety of settings: comprehensive, secondary, and higher education, as well as public employment services in both urban and rural settings. All participants held a master's degree and were qualified guidance and/or counselling professionals in accordance with national certification requirements.

In **sub-study I**, the participants were 15 Finnish career practitioners (14 women and 1 man) who had little or no experience of using social media in their professional work, and were considered novices in the use of social media for career services. They ranged in age from 30 to 57 years and had 1 to 14 years of career service experience.

In **sub-studies II and III**, the participants were 16 Danish and Finnish career practitioners (10 women and 6 men) with experience of using social media in career services. Of the 16 participants, 7 were from Denmark, and 9 were from Finland. They ranged in age from 30 to 59 years of age and had with 2 to 17 years of career service experience.

## 4.3    Data collection

The data were gathered using focus group interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999; Krueger, 1997a, 1997b, 1998). Because the primary aim of this study was to investigate a range of understandings of the same phenomenon, this method was considered appropriate as a means of encouraging participants from different contexts to express their thoughts, views and experiences through social interaction. Focus groups were considered particularly suitable because phenomenographic research seeks to capture collective, rather than individual, accounts for diversity in people's experience and understandings of a phenomenon. Finally, experience has shown that this population is particularly receptive to focus groups (e.g. Nykänen, 2011; Vuorinen, 2006).

Although focus group dynamics offer advantages for data collection, challenges may also arise. These may include an expectation of consensus rather that diversity, in which stronger members take the lead while others follow rather than expressing their own opinions and understandings (e.g. Farnsworth & Boon, 2010; Krueger, 1997b). While a facilitator may be able to mitigate this pressure to conform through clear instructions and careful probing of nuances of participants´ opinions, and ensuring specific members do not dominate, it would be naive to expect that even excellent facilitation can remove all the pressures of social desirability (Hollander, 2004). Wilkinson (1998, p. 119) noted that attributing bias to group interaction often reflects an ongoing epistemological commitment to individualism, which is most problematic where focus groups are used to capture individual attitudes of beliefs.

In general, granted these limitations, the researcher plays a critical role in steering the conversation, involving the silent participants and inviting participants to specify their views. In the present study, participants were given 5–10 minutes after each question to think individually about the question and to silently write down their thoughts. In this way, the participants had time to consider each question before any discussion. Before initiating the discussion, the researcher asked each participant to share their initial thoughts with the group in order to obtain each participant's spontaneous and unbiased input. These responses were recorded on a flip chart in the participant's own words. This approach helped to ease less verbal participants more comfortably into the conversation.

In determining a suitable sample size for focus group interviews, consideration was given to the purpose of the research, the type and number of questions as well as participant characteristics. In practice, most studies employ a focus group size which of 4–15 participants per group. According Kruger and Casey (2009), smaller focus groups are appropriate when: (a) the intent of the research is to understand a phenomena or behaviour, (b) the issue is complex, (c) groups members have substantial experience or expertise in relation to the subject matter, (d) participants are passionate about the topic, or (e) there are an extensive amount of questions to be presented. For present purposes, smaller focus groups were considered adequate, as the intent of the research was to understand practitioners' varying conceptions as well as experience with phenomenon, social media in career services.

Two sets of interviews were conducted. The first was with Finnish career practitioners who had little or no experience of using social media in their professional work and were considered novices in the use of social media for career services; the second set involved Finnish and Danish career practitioners with experience of using social media in career services. The first set consisted of three focus groups, each comprising four to six Finnish career practitioners from various contexts, conducted between April 2010 and August 2011 by two researchers. These interviews were part of a follow-up study of Finnish career practitioners regarding their role and the role of the Internet in career services (Vuorinen et al.,

2011), capturing conceptions of social media in career services. All focus group interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. In total, the transcribed data consisted of 47 pages of verbatim text (A4, single spaced).

The second set also consisted of three focus groups—one in English with Danish career practitioners and two in Finnish with Finnish career practitioners. Conducted between February and May 2012, each focus group comprised four to seven career practitioners and was conducted by Finnish researchers fluent in both languages. In total, the transcribed data consisted of 86 pages of verbatim text (A4, single spaced).

The focus groups were semi-structured, using a number of predetermined questions to focus interviewees on the target phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews involve open-ended questions that allow interviewees the necessary flexibility to reveal their current understandings and experiences of the phenomenon as fully and openly as possible while also providing a structure to will keep the interview on track. The interviews were informal and conversational, allowing participants to discuss their current understandings and experiences of the phenomenon as fully and openly as possible. Neutral follow-up questions like 'Could you tell a bit more about that?', 'Could you describe it/explain it a little further?', and 'Could you give an example of that?', encouraged participants to elaborate on or clarify their responses. When asking follow-up questions, the facilitator was careful to avoid leading practitioners' responses.

The phenomenographic approach requires that the researcher's preconceptions and personal understanding of the phenomenon should be consciously noted down and bracketed (e.g. Ashworht & Lucas, 2000; Bowden & Green, 2010b). The interview protocol was informed by the goal of encouraging participants to express their thoughts, views and experiences of the phenomenon through social interaction in as much depth as possible and uninfluenced by the interviewers' views. To that end, the interview questions were structured around Åkerlind´s (2005c) guidelines. Each interview starts with the same information and introductory questions, and ends with the same concluding questions. More specifically, each interview began with contextual questions that set the scene and encouraged the participant to focus on their experience of the target phenomenon, moving on to questions about experiences and ending with questions about the meanings they assigned to social media and social media competency in career services. The questions were open-ended, allowing participants to self-select aspects of most relevance to them.

Interview protocols extended beyond the questions, serving as a procedural guide. In conducting focus groups jointly, the researchers undertook both individual and shared responsibilities. While one acted as facilitator and was primarily concerned with directing discussion and keeping the conversation flowing, the other managed the recordings and occasionally probed participants' responses in more depth. When working alone, the facilitator also managed the recording. For quality control, the researchers reviewed and

discussed the list of questions and the roles of facilitator and assistant prior to the focus group interview.

## 4.4    Data analysis

Phenomenographic data analyses vary in their focus, which may encompass the entire transcript (Bowden, 1995, 2000b), large chunks of each transcript (Prosser, 2000), or excerpts extracted from the transcripts (Marton, 1986, 1994). In the present study, analysis began from an initial reading of the transcripts as a whole in order to establish interrelated themes before subsequently considering the transcript in large sections and selecting excerpts that exemplify variation and meaning. The use of the entire transcript, or of large sections of each transcript, was meant to improve accuracy in the interpretation of the participants' answers (Åkerlind et al., 2005). This approach was designed to minimise the risk of the researcher trying to make sense of an excerpt regardless of the context from which they emerged and it allow the transcripts to be understood as inter related meanings (Åkerlind, 2005d).

The first phase of the analysis focused on identifying and describing the participants' ways of experiencing the phenomenon in general terms. Having engaged in 'bracketing' to note down conscious presuppositions and personal understandings of a subject matter this stage of the analysis was approached with an open mind to possible meanings (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000, Marton & Booth, 1997). Repeated readings afford greater familiarisation with the data, and by focusing on the similarities and differences in the expressed meanings, cases of variation or agreement are identified and grouped accordingly. In order to identify key relationships that either relate them to or distinguish them from each other, subsequent readings of the responses focus on similarities and differences in the expressed meanings. Gradually, by comparing and contrasting identified similarities and differences, a draft set of descriptive categories for collective meanings was developed, defined and named. The labelling of meanings was postponed until late in the analysis, as recommended by Bowden (2005), as this may lead the researcher's awareness in a single direction and thereby limit further development of the emerging categories. In line with phenomenographic principles, categories of description were not predetermined, but were constituted on the basis of the collected data. In other words, categories were generated from empirical evidence rather than based on existing literature or theory.

The second phase of the analysis focused on delineating logical relationships among the various categories. Themes that ran through and across the data were identified and then used to structure the logical relationships both within and between the categories (Åkerlind, 2005d). The aim was to distinguish one way of seeing a phenomenon from an-

other, more complex one (Åkerlind, 2005d; Marton & Booth, 1997), revealing an increasing breadth of awareness of different aspects of the phenomenon. Throughout this phase, referring constantly to the data, categories of description were defined, and the most characteristic features of each category were described. Orderings and inclusiveness originated primarily from the content of transcripts and sometimes from logical argument, but in all cases needed to be confirmed by the transcription data before being accepted (Åkerlind, 2005a). Phenomenography does not require the researcher to deny prior knowledge, but the bracketing process is designed to ensure that such knowledge should not influence the creation of categories of description (e.g. Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). A tabular approach was used to specify the structural relationships between categories, accompanied by detailed descriptions of the categories and illustrative quotes from the transcripts. The tabular format provides a direct visual outline of increasing complexity (that is, breadth of awareness) across the categories of description, offering a holistic view of participants' experiences that reveals the variation within the whole.

To ensure analytical robustness, the data were initially analysed by the author. Second opinions were then obtained from colleagues, with whom the author met on several occasions to discuss and revise the categories and their structures and to confirm the validity of interpretations. These colleagues acted as 'devil's advocates', probing the category candidates and their critical aspects and asking for empirical justifications of a given formulation from within the transcripts. As emphasised by Bowden (e.g. 2000a, 2005), this group process made it less likely that the analysis would be incomplete. This also served to minimise the researcher's personal perspective and to remain true to the data in formulating the categories of description. Iterative rereading and redrafting continued until saturation occurred—that is, until rereading failed to produce any significant change in the categories of description (Bowden & Green, 2010a). The above steps were important in ensuring the reliability of results.

The final phase of the analysis focused on ensuring that the categories of description fulfilled the three criteria of quality set out by Marton and Booth (1997)—that each category described a distinct way of experiencing the phenomenon, that the logical relationships between categories were hierarchically represented and that in describing variation across the sample, the categories were parsimonious and limited in number.

## 4.5  Delimitations and limitations

This research was designed with a particular scope. The foundational delimiting factor for the current study was the choice of research questions to examine the career practitioners' varying conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services—

that being the second-order perspective gained from phenomenography. The focus was on the conceptions of a phenomenon rather than on the phenomenon itself and on a variation of the conceptions of a phenomenon rather than the richness of individual experience. This study was based on the perspectives of the career practitioners from comprehensive, secondary, and higher education, as well as public employment services. The delimitation of this design is the exclusive reliance upon perceptual data from practitioners, gathered using focus group interviews. 30 Finnish and Danish career practitioners provided a limited representation of the guidance community across a variety of settings. Given the *inherent limitation* of phenomenographic approach this study did not aim to develop an instrument for measuring the effectiveness of social media in career services or presenting the spread of career practitioners varying conceptions of social media or to verify the extent to which social media is embedded into career services or professional practices. Furthermore, appropriate caution should be exercised when generalising these qualitative findings. The direct generalisations of these results are career practitioners working in similar contexts in Denmark and Finland. Generally, qualitative studies' findings are unique in their respective contexts; nonetheless, transferability to other settings and groups may be possible.

This study was not without limitations. Since participants in Finland were located only in central, south and southeast Finland, a geographical limitation was present. The hope was that the participants would have been more representative from all across Finland. It is possible that with participants from a wider geographical area, other critical aspects may well have emerged.

# 5

# Findings of the empirical sub-studies

This chapter will summarise the results of the three sub-studies (Articles I, II and III) conducted as part of this dissertation. The qualitative analysis produced three hierarchal outcome spaces describing the qualitative variation in career practitioners' ways of experiencing social media, their conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services. It should be noted that the results presented and illustrated in the sub-studies are presented at the collective level rather than individual level. In each sub-study (Article I, II and III) a tabular approach is used to describe the structural relationships between the categories. The tabular format provides a direct visual outline of increasing complexity (that is, breadth of awareness) across the categories of description, offering a holistic view of participants' experiences that reveals the variation within the whole.

## 5.1 Article I: Career practitioners' conceptions of social media in career services

The aims of the first sub-study (Article I) was to examine conceptions of social media in career services among career practitioners who had little or no experience of using social media in their professional work, and were considered novices in using social media in career services. More precisely, the aim was to determine the different ways in which prac-

titioners conceptualise social media in career services, as well as the aspects that critically differentiate those conceptions. This study utilised data from focus group interviews with 15 Finnish career practitioners from a variety of settings within the guidance and counselling community, including comprehensive, secondary and higher education, as well as public employment services in both urban and rural settings.

The findings reveal five hierarchically ordered categories, describing career practitioners' conceptions of social media in career services (Table 1). Social media in career services was conceived as (1) unnecessary, (2) dispensable, (3) a possibility, (4) desirable and (5) indispensable (Table 1). The categories formed were nested and inclusive, expanding from least to most complex. Differences between the categories appeared in eight dimensions of variation: attitude, role in guidance, setting, perception, guidance locus, guidance paradigm, role of practitioner, and nature of interaction.

The results of the sub-study revealed that career practitioners' conceptions of social media in career services were widely divergent, ranging from clearly negative to clearly positive. In the first two categories, where social media in career services was conceived as unnecessary and dispensable, practitioners expressed negative attitudes toward social

*Table 1.* Career practitioners' conceptions of social media in career services

| DIMENSIONS OF VARIATION | CATEGORIES | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **unnecessary** | **dispensable** | **possibility** | **desirable** | **indispensable** |
| **Attitude** | negative | sceptical | unsure | positive | positive/exited |
| **Role in guidance** | not relevant | passing fad | potentially useful means | complementary tool | way to extend service |
| **Settings** | everyday setting for young peoples live | setting for creating and sustaining connections | setting for discussions | setting for reflective thought | setting for people processing on their life |
| **Perception** | threat | challenge | change | reality | positive potential |
| **Guidance locus** | supplier driven, time and space specific | supplier driven, time specific | demand driven, time specific | citizen/user-centred, time specific | citizen/user-centred |
| **Guidance paradigm** | individual face to face guidance | individual guidance | individual and group guidance | individual and group (with or without practitioner) | self-help approach

group (without or with practitioner) |
| **Role of practitioner** | expert role | advising role | supporting role | reflexive role | one resource among others on individuals life |
| **Nature of interaction** | practitioner → individual | practitioner → individual | practitioner ↔ individual | practitioner ↔ individual

individual ↔ peers | individual → practitioner

individual ↔ community members |

media and considered it a passing fad with little or no importance in career services. These categories embodied a supplier-driven model of guidance and expressed a preference for individual guidance. The practitioner was seen as an expert or adviser, and the individual was seen mainly as a passive recipient of information or advice.

A shift from clearly negative conceptions to those that were positive emerged between categories 2 and 3, as the view of social media shifted from unnecessary and dispensable to a possibility. The potential usefulness of social media in career services was articulated at this point. Here, the practitioner's role moved from directive to supportive, the practice of group guidance was mentioned for the first time, and a shift was discerned from supplier-driven to demand-driven guidance. In crossing this dividing line, one-way transmission shifted to a two-way interaction. Another dividing line appeared between categories 3 and 4, where the ways of perceiving social media in career services changed from possible to desirable. Here, the use of social media was embraced, emphasising a customer-centred, holistic approach that allows greater levels of self-help and values the social support that individuals receive from their peers.

In sum, the findings of this sub-study indicated that conceptions of social media in career services were interrelated with approaches to practice. Negative conceptions of social media in career services were closely linked to a directive approach to practice. A similar relationship seemed to exist between clearly positive conceptions and a citizen/user-centred, holistic approach to practice. This sub-study revealed that if career practitioners are to be helped to develop more complex understandings of technology and social media, their prevailing personal conceptions must be considered along with their practical knowledge. In this sense, the study's findings are of relevance in the development of career practitioner training. The outcome space of the first sub-study (Article I) is presented in Table 1.

## 5.2 Article II: Practitioners' experiences of social media in career services

The aim of the second sub-study (Article II) was to gain an understanding of career practitioners' different experiences of social media as used in career services. The study was based on data obtained through focus group interviews with a sample of 16 Danish and Finnish career practitioners representing the guidance community of similar diversity to the sample in Articles I.

The findings revealed four qualitatively different ways of experiencing social media in career services (Table 2) as (1) a means for delivering information, (2) a medium for one-to-one communication, (3) an interactive working space, and (4) an impetus for paradigm change and reform. The formed categories were nested and inclusive, expanding from least

*Table 2. Career practitioners' ways of experiencing of social media in career services*

| DIMENSIONS OF VARIATION | CATEGORIES | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Means for delivering information** | **Medium for one-to-one communication** | **Interactive working space** | **Impetus for paradigm change and reform** |
| **Role of social media** | useful tools | viable alternative | space for career service | participatory social space |
| **Function of social media** | delivering information and advice | delivering career services | collaborative career exploration | co-careeing |
| **Attitude** | reserved | careful | adaptive | proactive |
| **Rationale** | visibility | accessibility | interactivity | influence |
| **Perception** | challenge | change | opportunity | reform |
| **Intervention paradigm** | individual face-to-face intervention | individual intervention | group intervention | co-constructed intervention |
| **Nature of interaction** | practitioner → individual | practitioner ↔ individual | practitioner ↔ individual/ group<br><br>individual ↔ peers | individual ↔ community members<br><br>individual ↔ practitioner |
| **Practitioner's role** | expert role | reflexive role | facilitating role | participating and engaging role |

to most complex understanding. Differences between the categories appeared along eight dimensions of variation: role of social media, function of social media, attitude, rationale, perception, intervention paradigm, nature of interaction and practitioner's role.

The results of this sub-study reveal the variety and critical differences in practitioners' experiences of social media in career services, again indicating that ways of experiencing social media are interrelated with models of career practice. In the first two categories, where social media was experienced as a means of delivering information and as a medium for one-to-one communication, ways of experiencing social media solely as a tool/medium for the delivery of information and services seem closely linked to a strong preference for individual, face-to-face, or one-to-one career intervention. A similar relationship seems to hold in the latter two categories between experiences of social media as an integral part of career services and a more collaborative model of career intervention with an impetus for paradigm change and reform. Here, one can see a move towards a more open professional model along with a shift in locus of control from the expert to a combination of expert- and user-constructed knowledge. In the most complex category, the participatory culture fostered by social media in which users may either play active, content-producing or interactive role, was embraced; co-careering—that refers to the shared expertise and meaningful co-construction of career issues among community members—was mentioned for the first time, and the greater potential for influencing career services by means of social media

was articulated. Emphasis was placed on rethinking the entire ideology of career practice, and a more conscious involvement in communities of individuals, where meanings and understandings are co-constructed, was proposed.

In sum, the findings of Article II indicate that if social media is to play an increasing role in career services, it is important to expand awareness of the various models of career interventions available with online technologies. The results of this sub-study highlight the importance of developing training for career practitioners and of providing them with opportunities to experiment and practice using social media more broadly. The empirical findings of this sub-study make therefore a noteworthy contribution to the career practitioner training. The outcome space of the second sub-study (Article II) is presented in Table 2.

## 5.3    Article III: Career practitioners' conceptions of competency for social media in career services

The aim of the third sub-study (Article III) was to examine conceptions of competency for social media among career practitioners with experience of using social media in career services, as well as critical differences between those conceptions. The study was based on data from focus group interviews with 16 Danish and Finnish career practitioners representing the lifelong guidance perspective within the guidance and counselling community and of similar diversity to the samples in Articles I and II.

Four distinct categories of description emerged through the analytic process (Table 3). Competency for social media in career services was conceived as (1) an ability to use social media for delivering information, (2) an ability to use social media for delivering career services, (3) an ability to utilise social media for collaborative career exploration and (4) an ability to utilise social media for co-careering. Again, the formed categories were nested in hierarchies from least to most complex. Differences between the categories appeared along five dimensions of variation: approach to social media, function of social media in career services, online skills, ethical principles and personal characteristics.

The results of this sub-study revealed the variation in practitioners' conceptions of competency for social media and the critical differences between them. The first two categories focused on the ability to use social media for delivering information and career services, revealing, a technology-focused approach in which social media was seen mainly as an alternative channel for delivering information and one-to-one communication, and emphasis was placed on media literacy and online writing skills. In contrast, the two latter categories concentrate on the ability to use social media for collaborative career exploration and for co-careering. Category 3 emphasised methods, techniques and activities that

**Table 3.** *Career practitioners' conceptions of competency for social media in career services*

| DIMENSIONS OF VARIATION | CATEGORIES | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Ability to use social media for delivering information | Ability to use social media for delivering career services | Ability to utilise social media for collaborative career exploration | Ability to utilise social media for co-careering |
| **Approach to social media** | technology focused | content focused | pedagogically focused | systemically focused |
| **Function of social media in career services** | means for delivering information | medium for one-to-one communication | interactive working space | impetus for paradigm change and reform |
| **Online skills** | media literacy | online writing | online discourse | online presence |
| **Ethical principles** | accuracy, validity | privacy | confidentiality | professional proficiency |
| **Personal characteristics** | motivated | patient | confident | innovative |

foster collaborative processes in career learning. Social media was perceived as an interactive working space and as an integral part of career services. The importance of a practical understanding of methods for enhancing participation and interaction in online discourse was highlighted. The most complex category revealed an additional competency—the ability to utilise social media for co-careering—which had not previously been discussed. Co-careering refers to the shared expertise and meaningful co-construction of career issues among community members. Here, one can discern a change in career practitioner's role, and an evolution on locus and nature of control in guidance processes from the practitioner having a control of the process to being a participant in a process. In this category, a systemically focused approach to social media was first articulated; social media became an impetus for paradigm change and reform, and emphasis was placed on methods and strategies for creating a cognisant, properly managed and monitored online presence.

In conclusion, the results of this sub-study underline that competency for social media in career services is not only about a particular set of new skills. Success in developing competency for social media in career services is a dynamic combination of cognitive, social, emotional and ethical factors, all of which are interwoven. The study highlights the importance of seeing the subject matter from the practitioner's perspective in seeking to improve their understanding. The sub-study also identifies the aspects of competency for social media a group of career practitioners could currently discern; the results suggest that training must engage with those aspects if practitioners' competency for social media is to be enhanced. In this sense, the findings are relevant to the development of career practitioner training. The outcome space of the third sub-study (Article III) is presented in Table 3.

# 6

# Discussion

This chapter brings together the results of the three sub-studies. The main aim of this research was to achieve a deeper understanding of career practitioners' conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services. The study's implications, evaluations and ethical considerations are discussed here, as well as the main conclusions and suggestions for future research directions.

## 6.1    Consolidating conceptions

In this phenomenographic study, the qualitative analysis produced three outcome spaces (Articles I, II and III), reflecting the qualitative variation in career practitioners' ways of experiencing social media, their conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services. All three outcome spaces were hierarchical in nature, as revealed by the dimensions of variation, which highlight the differences between the categories of description.

Across the three sub-studies, the five conceptions of social media (Sub-study I), four different ways of experiencing social media (Sub-study II) and four conceptions of competency for social media (Sub-study III) are mutually complementary. Together, they offer a fuller, overarching picture of career practitioners' differing conceptions in these three areas. On that basis, the five general approaches to social media and competency for social media

| | Passive approach | Information approach | Communication approach | Collaborative career exploration approach | Co-careering approach |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Conceptions of social media in career services (Sub-study I) | unnecessary | dispensable | a possibility | desirable | indispensable |
| Practitioners experiences of social media in career services (Sub-study II) | | a means for delivering information | a medium for one- to-one communication | an interactive working space | an impetus for paradigm change and reform |
| Conceptions of competency for social media in career services (Sub-study III) | | an ability to use social media for delivering information | an ability to use social media for delivering career services | an ability to utilise social media for collaborative career exploration | an ability to utilise social media for co-careering |

*Figure 2.* Consolidating the conceptions identified in sub-studies I, II and III (Kettunen et al., 2013, 2015a, 2015b)

can be identified (outlined in Figure 2). These encompass a passive approach, an information approach, a communication approach, a collaborative career exploration approach and a co-careering approach.

First, the passive approach to social media links career practitioners' conception that social media is unnecessary to its perceived unimportance or irrelevance to career services. There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by these career practitioners and Harris-Bowlsbey and Sampson's (2001) finding that computers were considered impersonal and therefore inappropriate for counselling purposes when computers where introduced to career guidance in 1970s. This finding also aligns with more recent observations (Bright, 2014) that some practitioners may view the use of technology in career services in competitive terms, causing them to feel ambivalent, resistant, or even hostile to the possible benefits of technology for professional practice. This passive approach and the associated negative conception of social media were closely linked to a strong preference for an individual, face-to-face approach to career guidance practice.

Second, the information approach to social media links the dispensable or questionable need for social media to experiencing it as a means of delivering information, requiring an ability to use it in this way. Here, social media is perceived as an effective means of delivering and disseminating information quickly, enabling practitioners to reach a large number of people at the same time. This information approach accords with earlier obser-

vations that practitioners' ways of using both ICT (e.g. Watts, 2002) and social media (e.g. Osborn & LoFrisco, 2012; NACE, 2013) focus primarily on information delivery. The present findings show that one challenge associated with the use of social media is the rapid growth of available information sources and channels. This aligns with previous studies (e.g. Cogoi, 2005) indicating that although ICT is already in common use as resource, its potential has not yet been fully realised in career services, in terms of interrogating a wide range of sources, evaluating the efficacy of different sources, integrating data from a range of sources and disseminating information creatively in different formats for diverse audiences. This perspective links competency—the ability to use social media for information delivery—to an operational understanding of social media tools and their use to meet the information needs of different audiences. In other words, the focus is on technology and on the technical skills needed to use social media to deliver information. These findings are consistent with earlier research suggesting that to use ICT, career practitioners require knowledge of computer-assisted software and websites (Pyle, 2000) and the competences to develop and manage their own use of ICT in the career service context (Barnes & Watts, 2009), including an awareness of technological developments and acquisition of the requisite technical skills (Bimrose et al., 2010).

The third approach, communication, links the potential usefulness of social media in career services to experiencing it as a medium for one-to-one communication requiring the ability to use it to deliver career services. In this case, social media is perceived as a functional and readily available alternative to face-to-face career service delivery that enables anonymity. This aligns with earlier observations (e.g. Cogoi, 2005; Hooley et al., 2010a; Watts, 2002) that ICT is seen to be used for communication purposes (Bimrose et al., 2010, 2014). These findings are also consistent with earlier research (Barnes, La Gro & Watts, 2010) suggesting that communication is one of the key functions of ICT in this context, helping individuals to access support and action, to gain wider access to placements or to increase opportunity awareness. Although the use of ICT for communication is expanding, it remains relatively underutilised in career services (e.g. Bimrose et al., 2010, 2014). On this view, competency to use social media for delivering career services is linked to practical social media skills—in other words, an awareness of social media functionality, focusing on practical communication skills across diverse technological platforms and environments. This communication can occur asynchronously, where there is a delay in the receipt of message, or synchronously, where people communicate simultaneously in real time. These findings link to earlier suggestions that career practitioners may require competences for using ICT as a communication medium (Cogoi, 2005). Because most social media communication is still text-based, the findings suggest that proficiency in written communication is critical. The language, the manner of writing and the concepts all influence how well practitioners can reach and support individual client needs, and

communicating with different individuals requires versatile and varied writing skills and a readiness to operate in new ways.

Fourth, the collaborative career exploration approach links career practitioners' conceptions of social media as desirable to experiencing it as an interactive workspace, requiring the ability to utilise it for collaborative career exploration. Here, there is a greater emphasis on a more open professional model (Watts, 2002), and a shift in locus of control from expert knowledge to a blend of expert- and user-constructed knowledge (Sampson & Osborn, 2014). On this view, social media is no longer seen as an alternative tool but as a workspace that is in itself an integral part of career services, focusing on collaborative methods and operational models for peer groups. These results align with the findings of recent studies indicating a move from education and training to learning, shifting the focus from structures and institutions to the acquisition of individual lifelong career management skills (Watts, Sultana, & McCarthy, 2010). These findings are consistent with earlier research (Hooley et al., 2010a) suggesting that ICT can be used to build communities of learning in career services, using different channels, methods and models that include one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many. Similarly, Offer and Sampson (1999) suggested that ICT can be used in career services as a forum for discussion with peers or practitioners, and for distance learning in career management skills and related areas. This approach links an ability to utilise social media for collaborative career learning to the pedagogical affordances of social media—in other words, the methods, techniques and activities that foster collaborative processes in career learning among peer group members. The findings suggest that collaborative career exploration space that integrates self-directed materials with interactive communication with peers and practitioners requires proficiency in online discourse. Engaging effectively in discussion with individuals and groups to facilitate career learning requires structure, active support and guidance. These findings align with earlier research (Bimrose et al., 2010) suggesting that more generic career guidance skills and competencies must be selectively transferred and adapted to online contexts. For instance, to convey their intentions and engage individual, practitioners need to be able to draw on a variety of guidance and counselling skills, including paraphrasing, clarifying, summarising, empathising, sharing observations, supporting, open-ended questioning and reassuring (Amundson, 2003).

Fifth, the co-careering approach links career practitioners' conceptions of social media as desirable with an impetus for paradigm change and reform requiring the ability to utilise it for co-careering. The concept of co-careering refers to the shared expertise and meaningful co-construction of career issues among community members. Here, there is a change in the career practitioner's role, and an evolution on locus and nature of control in guidance processes from the practitioner having a control of the process to being a participant in a process. This aligns with earlier observations on continual expansion of career

practitioner's role (e.g. Casella, 1990; Herr, 2001). Barnes et al. (2010) described this paradigm shift as an evolution from 'provider-led' to 'user-led' (p. 30) career services. This new communal way of operating challenges practitioners to think about and develop their own personal work culture, and to reflect on the culture of their organisation and network. In this sense, the use of social media is viewed in the broader perspective of the entire system of career services. This approach supports Watt's (2010) view that the potential of ICT to act as an agent of transformational change is now greater than ever before. These findings align with authors such as Hooley (2012), who suggested that it is no longer sustainable to view online technologies solely as a tools; rather, they must be seen as an integral part of the social fabric, and as a key context in which career development is enacted. These findings are also consistent with earlier observations (e.g. Plant, 2008; Thomsen, 2012, 2013) that career services has moved from the private to the public sphere and to more collective engagement. Here, competency—an ability to utilise social media for co-construction on career issues—is linked to creating and maintaining a reliable online presence. The ability to create a reliable and authentic image of oneself within the relevant communities requires a mindful online presence as well as monitoring and active updating of one's online profiles. Maintaining an online presence also requires a practical understanding of the means and methods by which this presence is projected to others online.

By exploring the logical relationships between qualitatively different conceptions, this study offers a holistic and an overarching view of career practitioners' varying conceptions
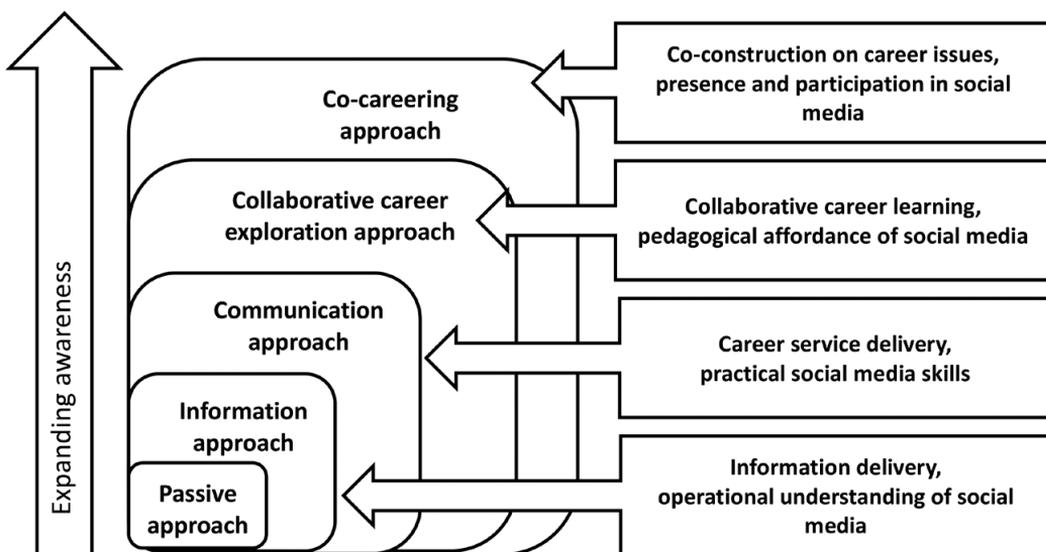


**Figure 3.** *Consolidated conceptions; five general approaches to social media and competency for social media*

of social media and competency for social media. The consolidation of conceptions of three sub-studies presents an empirically derived conceptual framework for understanding career practitioners' general approaches to social media and competency for social media. The five approaches, ranging from passive approach to co-careering approach, accord on Watts' (1996) earlier prediction that technology in career services could result in either growing convergence or divergence between the two. These findings show that if the careers field is to develop career practitioners' understanding of technology and social media, it must take account not only their practical knowledge but also their prevailing conceptions. This is of importance when considering the overall adoption and integration of new technologies in career services and careers field. Practitioners, trainers and policy makers need to be aware of these diverse understandings within the profession in order to move towards more advanced approaches. Figure 3 summarises the variety and critical differences in consolidated conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services.

## 6.2   Methodological implications

As a well-known qualitative research approach, phenomenography has been deployed in a range of disciplines. However, this approach has been used less often in guidance and counselling studies, and especially in the context of social media/-based career services. In the present study, the phenomenographic approach was utilised throughout the study. The results indicate that this approach was appropriate to study's aims by contributing to a deeper understanding of career practitioners' conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services, revealing qualitative differences among these conceptions and the underlying structure of variation. Consolidation of the findings from the three phenomenographic sub-studies yielded an empirically grounded conceptual framework for understanding career practitioners' differing approaches to social media and competency for social media. This thesis demonstrates that phenomenography is useful and needed tool, and should be more broadly applied within the multifaceted field of guidance and counselling. The present study might work as an example of how to capture the diversity of constructed realities and to develop more evidence-based practice in career services by using a phenomenographic approach.

From a methodological point of view, it must be recognized that the object of phenomenographic study is to reveal variation in the ways the phenomenon is experienced. Therefore, if compared with, for example an ethnography or narrative study, phenomenographic outcomes do not show the whole richness of an individual's experience in the data. The richness of the data is substantiated at a collective level in terms of variation, and through it, pithy empirical and logical analysis for which there is clear evidence from the transcripts

analysed. In this study, by revealing the variation and illustrating it with telling extracts, phenomenographic outcome offers richness in the relation between the career practitioners and the phenomenon of social media in their professional work.

## 6.3    Practical and pedagogical implications

By making career practitioners aware of qualitatively different conceptions of social media and competency for social media within the profession, the present findings can help them to engage in reflective thought in relation to their own practice. For career practitioners to be successful integrating new approaches they have to become aware of their own conceptions and practices and how those conceptions and practices vary from others. This can help to bring into view those aspects of social media and competency for social media that they previously avoided or failed to notice in their practice.

Secondly, these findings can help trainers of career practitioners to become more aware of diverse conceptions of social media and competency for social media within the profession. In particular, the study shows that this is not only about a new set of skills, but entails a dynamic combination of social, emotional and ethical factors. Trainers must be able to provide learning experiences that help practitioners to extend both their practical and conceptual understanding. In the present context, that means exposing them to situations that will heighten their awareness of how they currently experience social media and how they might move towards a more advanced approach. The hierarchical structure of the findings can serve as a pedagogical tool for trainers by enabling them to ground and convert these new competences into the future practice and continuous professional development. The differences between the categories constitute dimensions of variation that are open or have to be opened for learning to take place.

Third, because skills and competencies in this area are often considered secondary and are therefore poorly developed in training (e.g. Cedefop, 2009; European Commission, 2014), there is an urgent need to update both pre-service and in-service training curricula to incorporate the present findings. The derived conceptual framework (Figure 3) and findings of sub-studies have already been successfully applied to curriculum development in the international summer course for ICT in guidance and counselling, and the conceptual framework offers a basis for further development of the wider training curriculum.

## 6.4    Policy implications

The present findings have some important implications for policy. First, the empirically derived conceptual framework can help policy makers to understand critical differences in career practitioners' approaches to social media. This is salient to the adoption and integration of new and existing technologies in the careers field. Along with practitioners and trainers, policy makers need to be aware of these diverse understandings in order to support the move from a passive and sometimes negative conception of social media within the profession to more advanced approaches. This is an essential policy requirement if career services and related practices are to adjust successfully to the paradigm shift, from delivering career services to co-careering, that is emerging along with the social media. Policy makers should ensure that sustainable foundations and operational preconditions exist for such development.

Secondly, these results provide an evidence-based foundation for the design of pre-service and in-service training within a coherent framework of career practice, emphasising a more developmental approach to capacity building. Such training will enhance the professional profile and standards of career practitioners and other staff involved in guidance activities by enabling them to respond more effectively to the needs and expectations of both citizens and policy-makers (e.g. European Council, 2008). This in turn is likely to improve co-ordination and co-operation between stakeholders in the use of new and emerging technologies for easier access to lifelong guidance and information through diverse and innovative service delivery.

Finally, these findings provide direction for the evaluation and development of current competency standards and frameworks for the profession. The conceptual framework and sub-study findings have already contributed to the revision of ethical standards for the International Association for Vocational and Educational Guidance (IAEVG, 2016).

## 6.5    Evaluation of the study

One means of ensuring rigour in phenomenographic research is to apply the principles of trustworthiness (e.g. Collier-Reed, Ingerman, & Berglund, 2009; Sin, 2010). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the trustworthiness of a qualitative study is determined by its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. This section evaluates the study as a whole in terms of these qualities; the strengths and limitations of each sub-study have been separately evaluated in published articles I–III.

*Credibility* is broadly associated with the defensibility of interpretations of the data and the rigour of the research process through which the findings has been obtained. Build-

ing on Booth's (1992) study, Collier-Reed et al. (2009) have suggested three measures of credibility of phenomenographic research, related to content, method and communication. The present study exhibits content-related credibility in the researcher's training as qualified career practitioner and her familiarity with the topic and research context. With regard to credibility of method, the appropriateness of phenomenographic approach was first assessed before tailoring the research methodology and design.

To ensure methodological validity, the entire research process, from the initial planning stages through the collection of data, to analysis, and eventually to the interpretation, was approached from a phenomenographic perspective. The interviews were informal and conversational, allowing participants to discuss their current understandings and experiences of social media and competency for social media as fully and openly as possible. In the search for categories of description, the analysis continually questioned the data, and iterative re-reading and re-drafting continued to the point of saturation—that is, until re-reading failed to produce any significant change in the categories of description (Bowden & Green, 2010b). To ensure communicative validity, the results and conclusion have been presented and discussed at peer-reviewed national and international career development and phenomenographic conferences, attracting responses that confirm communicative validity.

*Transferability* relates to the generalisability of the data—that is, the extent to which the findings may be applicable in other contexts or to other participants (Collier-Reed et al., 2009; Sin, 2010). A detailed description has been provided of the research process in general, and of methodological choices in particular, enabling the reader to assess the study's transferability. In general, qualitative studies' findings are unique to their contexts, but some transferability may nevertheless be possible. Keeping in mind the contextual specificity of phenomenographic studies (e.g. Marton, 1981, 1986), these results can be directly generalised to career practitioners working in a similar context in Denmark and Finland. It can be assumed that conceptions similar to those identified in this study could be observed in other countries and thus, transferability to a similar context can be plausible.

*Dependability* refers to the extent to which the researcher provides evidence that the research process is logical, traceable and clearly documented. In the present case, care has been taken to document each step of the research process in as much detail as possible, both in the published articles and in the present text. The rigour of the phenomenographic research process can be enhanced by working within a research group (e.g. Bowden, 2005; Bowden & Green, 2010). Here, the group process, where colleagues acted as 'devil's advocates', helped to ensure the completeness of the analysis, as well as minimising the researcher's personal perspective and remaining true to the data in formulating the categories of description.

*Confirmability* is the extent to which findings can be shown to be empirically trustworthy.

Like dependability, confirmability relies on auditing to demonstrate quality. One approach is to document procedures throughout the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the present case, every effort has been made to ensure confirmability by reporting the research protocol as explicitly as possible, presenting all phases accurately and clearly. Illustrative excerpts from the transcripts have been presented to provide a further link between data and interpretations allowing the reader to understand the context.

In addition to these strategies for enhancing the trustworthiness and quality of the research, this study adopted a number of writing strategies to ensure rigour in qualitative research on guidance and counselling (e.g. Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk-Jenkins, 2016; Kline, 2008) by (a) providing a strong rationale for the study by means of a comprehensive, balanced literature review identifying research gaps; (b) articulating a clear statement of purpose and relevant research question(s); (c) referring to authoritative sources when discussing methodologies; (d) providing a strong rationale for methodological decisions; (e) comparing and contrasting findings with those of previous studies; and (f) discussing (de) limitations and future directions for practice and research.

## 6.6    Ethical considerations

The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity defines ethical principles for research in the humanities and social and behavioural sciences under three headings: (1) respecting the autonomy of research subjects; (2) avoiding harm; and (3) privacy and data protection (National Advisory Board on Research Ethics, 2009). This study was planned, conducted and reported according to these guidelines, and so meets the requirements of good scientific practice. Furthermore, this study applied the guidelines for research integrity (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2012) by following the principles that are endorsed by the research community; integrity, meticulousness and accuracy in conducting the research, and in recording presenting, and evaluating the research results.

To ensure the autonomy of research participants, they were advised that participation was entirely voluntary, and written informed consent was sought from each participant. They were also informed about the aim of the study and the methods of data collection and reporting in articles and in this thesis. Consent information was given both orally and in a written proforma that participants were asked to sign before focus group interviews took place. Participants were encouraged to ask any supplementary questions about the study; they were made aware that the discussion would be recorded, and that they could withdraw from the interview at any time if they so wished. To ensure avoidance of harm, interviewees were treated fairly and equally, and results and interpretations were reported in a respectful way. Privacy and data protection was also carefully handled. On transcribing

interviews, data were anonymised by assigning pseudonyms to participants and *removing* any identifying information. Furthermore, all of the data extracts reported in the three sub-studies were carefully selected and blinded so that the true identity of the participants is not revealed. The collected data has been archived at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä.

## 6.7    Future research

Looking to the future, this research has identified several avenues worthy of further investigation. As participation in the study was voluntary, the findings may not encompass all of the critical aspects from the perspective of the entire career services sector and further studies on the current topic are therefore recommended. Given the rapid pace of change in technology and social media it would be insightful if career practitioners' current conceptions would be studied in a similar fashion. Similar research would be of value investigating the career practitioners' conceptions also in other countries. By broadening the study through into an international collaborative project, other critical aspects may well emerge. It might also be useful to conduct a survey to explore whether similar variations exist elsewhere. Further research could also incorporate mixed methods design. That is, to complement qualitative outcomes with quantitative outcomes. Future research should also approach the topic from a longitudinal perspective. A longitudinal approach might capture a sense of how career practitioners' conceptions and practices evolve over time.

Further experimentation involving the pedagogical application of these results seems particularly important. To that end, the research should be extended to the development of pre-service and in-service *training for ca*reer practitioners based on the critical aspect identified in this study. Follow-up investigation of any such training would serve to clarify the applicability of the present findings. Future research should also consider the relationship between established institutional beliefs and practices and how they affect the conceptions and implementation of social media in career services. Such research holds promise for clarifying some of the reasons for the passive and sometimes negative conception of social media within the profession. Further investigation into the co-careering approach, which has not previously been articulated in career services, is also strongly recommended. Other further research related to this study should include the use of a similar research design to investigate the social media conceptions of trainers and policy makers for comparison with the present results. Similar studies of citizens' conceptions would provide valuable additional insights on users experience and, where possible, contribute to decisions that affect development and design of services. In the development of pre-service and in-service training, the examination of institutional practices, and exploration of co-careering, future

research should consider the impact of career theory. For example, how might career theory influence the assumptions about the nature of the relationship between the practitioner and the individual, the understanding of the guidance process, and the conceptualization of "career" in co-careering.

The findings suggest that phenomenographic research might usefully be more broadly applied within the multifaceted field of guidance and counselling to capture the diversity of constructed realities and to develop more evidence-based practice. In addition to what has been mentioned above, further phenomenographic investigation on practitioners' experiences of ethical practice in social media in career services is recommended. Furthermore, knowledge of the variation in career practitioners' or individual citizens' career intervention and career service experiences, can offer valuable information and have an important impact on career practice, theory, and training.

In this new and evolving area, there is a need for more research on how best to exploit the potential of social media in career services. As technology and social media continue to develop, in-depth investigation is needed to anticipate their future application in career practice. Future research should therefore investigate potentials of the existing and emerging technologies, such as smart phone apps, visual social media, virtual and augmented reality which may have a role in the future provision of information and career services.

Finally, further on-going research to establish evidence of the impact of social media and co-careering approach in career services is highly recommended. This evidence is essential in enhancing current services, evidence-informed practices and in providing a rationale for developing new services and services models. Such research holds promise to inform consistent evidence-based practice and policy development.


## 6.8    Concluding remarks

Employing a phenomenographic approach, the present study has elaborated an empirically derived conceptual framework to capture career practitioners' diverse conceptions of social media and competency for social media, ranging form the passive to co-careering, which have not previously been articulated. The findings indicate that to facilitate career practitioners' professional understanding and use of new technologies such as social media, it is important to assess and develop both their beliefs and their practical skills through further development of pre-service and in-service training based on the critical aspect identified in this study. By challenging traditional interactions and practitioner-client relationships, social media also plays an increasingly significant role in reforming career services and related practices.

# Yhteenveto (Finnish summary)

Uuden teknologian ja sosiaalisen median käytön yleistymisen myötä on ohjauksen toimintakentällä tunnistettu tarve modernisoida ja parantaa ohjauspalveluja sekä niiden saatavuutta. Sosiaalisen median käyttö hakee vielä paikkaansa, mutta siitä on kovaa vauhtia muodostumassa yksi merkittävä ohjauspalveluiden kanava. Yhteisen tiedon tuottamisen ja jakamisen ajatus on saanut yhä useamman ohjaajan pohtimaan ja soveltamaan näiden uusien kanavien mahdollisuuksia. Samalla pohdinnan kohteeksi ovat nousseet sosiaalisessa mediassa tarvittava osaaminen, sekä sen kehittäminen.

Viimeaikaisissa tutkimuksissa on enenevästi viitattu sosiaalisen median mahdollisuuksiin yhtenä ohjauspalveluiden kanavana (mm. Bimrose et al., 2010; Hooley et al., 2010a, 2010b; Sampson & Osborn, 2014). Tutkimuksissa on käynyt ilmi, että ohjaajat käyttävät yhä enemmän sosiaalista mediaa, mutta heidän tapansa käyttää erilaisia sosiaa- lisen median kanavia on keskittynyt ensisijaisesti tiedonjakamiseen (Osborn & Lofrisco, 2012; NACE 2013). Koska ohjaajien sosiaalisen median käytöstä ja sen käyttöön liittyvistä osaamistarpeista on vielä vähän empiiristä tutkimusta, on perusteltua pyrkiä syvemmin ymmärtämään ohjaajien omia käsityksiä ja kokemuksia aiheesta. Tämä tieto on tarpeen, koska sillä on vaikutuksia sosiaalisen median käyttöönottoon sekä ohjaajien koulutuksen kehittämistarpeisiin.

Väitöskirjassa tutkitaan ohjaajien käsityksiä sosiaalisesta mediasta ja sen käyttöön tarvittavasta osaamisesta ohjauspalveluissa. Työn pyrkimyksenä on edistää tietämystä ja keskustelua tieto- ja viestintätekniikan käytöstä ohjauspalveluissa. Tutkimus muodostuu

kolmesta empiirisestä osatutkimuksesta, joista kukin on julkaistu kansainvälisessä tieteellisessä julkaisussa, sekä aiemman tutkimuksen, metodit ja tulokset kokoavasta ja niistä keskustelevasta yhteenvedosta.

Tutkimus on toteutettu fenomenografisella tutkimusotteella, jossa tutkimuskohteena ovat ihmisten erilaisia arkipäivän ilmiöitä koskevat käsitykset ja niiden erilaiset ymmärtämisen tavat. Tutkimuksen empiirinen aineisto koostuu fokusryhmähaastatteluista, joihin osallistui eri oppilaitosmuodoissa työskenteleviä ohjaajia, sekä työ- ja elinkeinotoimistojen koulutusneuvojia ja ammatinvalintapsykologeja Suomesta ja Tanskasta. Ensimmäisiin fokusryhmähaastatteluihin osallistui suomalaisia ohjaajia, joilla oli vain vähän tai ei ollenkaan kokemusta sosiaalisen median käytöstä työssään, ja joita siksi pidettiin noviiseina sosiaalisen median ammattikäytössä. Toisiin fokusryhmähaastatteluihin osallistui suomalaisia ja tanskalaisia ohjaajia, joilla oli kokemusta sosiaalisen median käyttämisestä työssään.

Laadullinen analyysi tuotti kolme kokonaismallia, kategoriakokonaisuutta, jotka kuvasivat ohjaajien erilaisia käsityksiä ja kokemuksia sosiaalisesta mediasta sekä sen käyttöön tarvittavasta osaamisesta ohjauspalveluissa. Kaikki kokonaismallit olivat luonteeltaan hierarkkisia ja korostivat eroja kuvauskategorioiden välillä. Hierarkiassa ylemmät kategoriat saattoivat sisältää aspekteja hierarkiassa alemmista kategorioista, mutta ei toisinpäin. Hierarkkisuus ilmeni tietoisuuden avartumista kuvaavien teemojen välityksellä. Nämä teemat rakentuivat kategorioiden välisistä kriittisistä eroista, jotka ryhmiteltiin keskenään samankaltaisuuksien perusteella

*Ohjaajien käsityksiä sosiaalisesta mediasta ohjauspalveluissa* kuvattiin viiden laadullisesti erilaisen, mutta toisiinsa yhteydessä olevan kuvauskategorian avulla. Sosiaalista mediaa pidettiin ohjauspalveluissa (1) tarpeettomana, (2) turhana, (3) mahdollisena, (4) tavoiteltavana ja (5) tarpeellisena. *Ohjaajien kokemuksia sosiaalisesta mediasta ohjauspalveluissa* kuvattiin neljän kuvauskategorian avulla. Sosiaalinen mediaa nähtiin ohjauksessa (1) tiedonjaon välineenä, (2) kahdenvälisen viestinnän välineenä, (3) vuorovaikutteisena työtilana ja (4) sysäyksenä paradigman muutokseen ja uudistukseen. Ohjaajien käsitykset sosiaalisessa mediassa tarvittavasta osaamisesta voitiin niin ikään jakaa neljään kategoriaan. *Sosiaalisessa mediassa tarvittava osaaminen* nähtiin ohjauspalveluissa (1) kykynä hyödyntää sosiaalista mediaa tiedonjaossa, (2) kykynä hyödyntää sosiaalista mediaa ohjauksen kanavana, (3) kykynä hyödyntää sosiaalista mediaa yhteistoiminnallisessa tiedon rakentamisessa ja (4) kykynä hyödyntää sosiaalista mediaa ohjauksellisten kysymysten yhteisöllisessä tarkastelussa ('co-careering').

Yhdistämällä kolmessa osatutkimuksessa kerätyt tulokset voitiin luoda empiirispohjainen/kokemusperäinen käsitteellinen viitekehys, jonka kautta voidaan ymmärtää ohjaajien sosiaaliseen mediaan kohdistuvia yleisiä lähestymistapoja, ja heidän käsityksiään sen käyttämiseen tarvittavasta osaamisesta. Edellä kuvatut kolme kategoriakokonaisuutta

voitiin yhdistää viideksi yleiseksi sosiaalista mediaa ja siihen liittyvää osaamista kuvaavaksi lähestymistavaksi. Ensimmäinen lähestymistapa rakentuu käsityksistä, joissa sosiaalista mediaa pidetään ohjauksessa tarpeettomana. Tätä lähestymistapaa voidaan kutsua passiiviseksi lähestymistavaksi (passive approach). Sosiaaliseen mediaan liittyvät negatiiviset käsitykset liittyvät tässä lähestymistavassa läheisesti ohjaajien henkilökohtaisen mieltymykseen kasvokkain tapahtuvaan ohjaukselliseen lähestymistapaan. Toinen, informaatio-/tietokeskeinen lähestymistapa (information approach), rakentuu käsityksistä joissa sosiaalisesta mediaa pidetään hyvänä tiedonjaon välineenä. Kolmas lähestymistapa, jota voidaan kutsua viestintäkeskeiseksi lähestymistavaksi (communication approach), siirtää sosiaalisen median tiedonjaosta yhdeksi keskeiseksi ohjauspalveluiden kanavaksi. Tällöin sosiaalinen media nähdään toimivana, paremmin saavutettavissa olevana ja nimettömän asioinnin mahdollistavana vaihtoehtona perinteiselle, kasvokkain tapahtuvalle ohjaukselle. Neljäs lähestymistapa, ohjauksellisten kysymysten yhteistoiminnallisen tarkastelun lähestymistapa (collaborative career exploration approach), korostaa sosiaalisen median vuorovaikutteisuutta ja yhteiskehittelyn mahdollisuuksia yksilöiden ja ryhmien kanssa. Sosiaalinen media ei näyttäydy enää pelkkänä vaihtoehtoisena työvälineenä, vaan työtilana ja erottamattomana osana ohjaustoimintaa. Viides lähestymistapa, jota voidaan kutsua ohjauksellisten kysymysten yhteisöllisen tarkastelun lähestymistavaksi (co-careering approach), korostaa sosiaalisen median luonnetta sosiaalisena ympäristönä, jossa ohjauksellisten kysymysten yhteisöllinen työstäminen tapahtuu.

Tarkastelemalla laadullisesti erilaisten käsitysten välisiä loogisia suhteita, tämä tutkimus tarjoaa holistisen ja yhdistävän näkymän ohjaajien erilaisiin käsityksiin sosiaalisesta mediasta ja siinä tarvittavasta osaamisesta ohjauspalveluissa. Niin ammatinharjoittajien, kouluttajien kuin päättäjienkin on hyvä olla tietoisia ammattikunnan sisällä olevista monenlaisista sosiaaliseen mediaan ja siinä tarvittavaan ammatilliseen osaamiseen liittyvistä käsityksistä, jotta valveutuneella toiminnalla näitä voidaan kehittää ja syventää. Tämä tulisi huomioida myös entistä määrätietoisemmin ohjausalan ammattilaisten perus- ja täydennyskoulutuksessa. Sosiaalinen media haastaa perinteisiä ohjauksen valta- ja vuorovaikutussuhteita. Siten sillä on merkittävä rooli myös ohjauskäytänteiden ja ohjauksellisen toimintakulttuurin uudistamisessa. Laadulliset havainnot ja niiden pohjalta rakennetut viisi lähestymistapaa voivat toimia työkaluina, joiden avulla voidaan kehittää ohjaajien sosiaaliseen mediaan ja siihen liittyvään osaamiseen ohjauspalveluissa liittyviä käsityksiä ja arvioida näiden käsitysten kehittymistä.

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# Career Practitioners' Conceptions of Social Media in Career Services

by

Jaana Kettunen, Raimo Vuorinen & James P. Sampson Jr., 2013

British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, vol 41, 302–317

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

# Career practitioners' conceptions of social media in career services

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This article reports the outcomes of a study, undertaken from a phenomenographic perspective, of career practitioners' conceptions of social media usage in career services. Fifteen Finnish career practitioners – representing comprehensive, secondary and higher education as well as public employment services – were interviewed in focus groups. The analysis of the interview data revealed five distinct descriptive categories reflecting the career practitioners' conceptions of social media's use in career services. Social media in career services was conceived as (1) unnecessary, (2) dispensable, (3) a possibility, (4) desirable and (5) indispensable. The results indicated associations between career practitioners' conceptions and their practice. Moreover, the critical aspects identified in this study can be used to support the career practitioners' understanding of new technologies in career services.

**Keywords:** career services; career practitioners; social media; conception; phenomenography

The use of social media in career-related activities has increased dramatically in recent years, leading the career service sector to acknowledge the need to expand its understanding of new technologies and to modernise its services. Several researchers have emphasised that it is important that career practitioners gain competence and confidence in existing and emerging technologies in order to consider their usefulness and potential for clients (e.g. Bimrose, Hughes, & Barnes, 2011; Osborn, Dikel, & Sampson, 2011).

Social media is a new area for career practitioners who vary considerably in their experience in use of technology in career services. Some practitioners are not convinced of the relevance of technology in delivering career services and others do not have the skills or confidence to be able to do this effectively. However, practitioners who are experienced internet users no longer believe that technology replaces them (Vuorinen, Sampson, & Kettunen, 2011), but rather accept it as a potentially valuable tool that can assist them in doing their work (Osborn et al., 2011). A consensus has emerged in that both the practitioner and information and communications technology (ICT) have an important role to play in the design and delivery of career services (e.g. Harris-Bowlsbey & Sampson, 2001; Vuorinen, 2006; Watts, 1996).

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Existing research has investigated the role of technology (e.g. Harris-Bowlsbey & Sampson, 2001; Sampson, 2008; Vuorinen, 2006; Watts, 1996, 2002; Watts & Offer, 2006) and the potential of new technologies in career services (Bimrose et al., 2011; Hooley, Hutchinson, & Watts, 2010a; Osborn et al., 2011). There is evidence to suggest that the latest wave of technologies, especially social tools, have considerable potential for career services (Hooley et al., 2010a), but more studies are needed to support professionals in their need for models that enable them to fit together existing guidance practices with new technologies (e.g. Bimrose, Barnes, & Atwell, 2010; Osborn et al., 2011). Furthermore, training and skills development needs have been emphasised (Bimrose et al., 2010, 2011). It is also very likely that practitioners need to be trained differently in this area than for the traditional face-to-face service mode (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013).

Successful integration of technology and social media in career services is not only dependent on the skills or technical facilities available, but also on practitioners' willingness to accept the changes that new technology may bring to service delivery. A person's understanding and experiencing of certain phenomena are intertwined with his/her capacity to act, since 'you cannot act other than in relation to the world as you experience it' (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111).

A broader understanding of practitioners' conceptions is needed because this will have an impact on the adaptation of new technology in their practice. An extensive body of phenomenographic research has examined conceptions of and approaches to teaching and learning (e.g. Åkerlind, 2004, 2008; Kember, 1997). Indications of the association between teachers' conceptions and their practices have also been confirmed (e.g. Trigwell & Prosser, 1996; Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999). However, no research has specifically analysed career practitioners' conceptions of social media use in career services.

## Aim and research question

This study sets out to examine conceptions of social media in career services among career practitioners who are experienced internet users but inexperienced in using social media in career services. The main aim is to discover and describe the qualitatively different ways in which practitioners conceptualise the target phenomenon. The particular study questions were framed as follows: (1) What are career practitioners' conceptions of social media in career services? (2) What are the critical aspects that differentiate qualitatively varying ways of understanding the phenomenon? The ultimate aim of describing career practitioners' conceptions is to provide a basis for understanding the different ways in which they think about social media, as well as its character and purpose in career services. Such a description may contribute to expanding the understanding of aspects that are seen as critical in the successful use of new technologies in career services.

## Methods

This study examined the conceptions of social media in career services using a phenomenographic approach. Phenomenographic research aims to investigate the qualitatively different ways in which people at a collective level experience or conceptualise the target phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2005b, 2012; Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Pong, 2005). A central premise of phenomenography is that it has a

non-dualist ontological perspective, where the world and people are considered inseparable (Bowden, 2005; Marton, 2000). This means that conceptions or ways of experiencing are seen as relations between the person and a specific phenomenon in the world. Consequently, the different ways of conceptualising or experiencing the same thing are seen as internally related, as they represent different meanings of the same phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2003; Marton, 2000). Phenomenography also recognises that individuals may possess more than one conception of a particular phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997). The result of phenomenography is the identification of categories of description in which the different ways of conceiving the phenomenon are hierarchically and logically interrelated, and hence the establishment of a typology (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998). Categories of description should meet three quality criteria (Marton & Booth, 1997): each category should describe a distinctly different way of experiencing the phenomenon; a logical relationship between each category should be hierarchically represented; and there should be a limited, parsimonious number of different categories that describe variation across the sample.

### Participants and the context of the study

The participants in the study were 15 Finnish career practitioners (14 women, 1 man, age range 30–57 years), who were self-identified experienced internet users but novices in the use of social media for career services. In phenomenography, participant selection is a strategic effort to maximise diversity in participants' experiences to enable an inclusive view within the aims of the study (Åkerlind, 2005a). The aim was to have a wide variety of career practitioners' accounts, and emails inviting practitioners who are experienced internet users were sent to mailing lists of professional guidance bodies and training units. The participating practitioners represented the Finnish guidance community with a lifelong guidance perspective. Comprehensive, secondary and higher education, as well as public employment services and both urban and rural settings, were represented in the sample. The data for the present study were collected during 2010–2011 as part of a follow-up study of the perceptions of Finnish guidance practitioners regarding their role and the role of the internet in meeting guidance goals and delivering career guidance services (Vuorinen et al., 2011).

### Data collection

In this phenomenographic study, the data were collected using a focus group interview methodology. The goal of the focus group interview is to interactively collect the participants' conceptions, ideas and different viewpoints, which then feed off each other and thus generate new, potentially surprising perspectives and observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Krueger, 1997a, 1997b, 1998). Since the intention of the interviews was to encourage career practitioners to reflect and talk about social media in career services from multiple perspectives, the use of focus group discussions as the method of data collection for this study was seen as appropriate. Furthermore, this was considered suitable because phenomenographic research aims at capturing collective rather than individual accounts of people's conceptions of different phenomena.

Three focus groups, each comprising four to six career practitioners from various contexts, were carried out in 2010–2011. The focus group interviews were conducted by two researchers and took a semi-structured form. Researchers had both individual and shared responsibilities. One acted as a facilitator and was primarily concerned with directing the discussion, keeping the conversation flowing. The other managed the recordings, logistics and occasionally probed the response of a participant in more depth. For quality control, the list of questions and the roles of the facilitator and assistant were discussed prior to the focus groups being run. To obtain answers about the target phenomenon, the respondents were asked, 'What is the role of social media in internet-based career services?'. The aim was to let the interviews proceed as freely as possible. Follow-up questions such as 'Could you describe/explain this a little further?' and 'Could you give an example of this?' were used to encourage participants to elaborate on or clarify their responses. When asking follow-up questions, facilitators were careful to avoid leading the practitioners' responses. The overall duration of each focus group interview was three hours. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

## Data analysis

A feature of the phenomenographic data analysis method is variance in practice, which includes variance in data sorting methods (Åkerlind, 2005b, 2012). One approach focuses on quotations that have been extracted from data collected (Marton, 1986), while the other concentrates on whole transcripts (Bowden, 1995, 2000b). The approach taken in this study was to begin with the transcripts as a whole, in order to establish interrelated themes and meanings, and subsequently to consider the transcript in large sections and select excerpts that exemplify variation and meaning. The use of the entire transcript, or of large sections of each transcript, had the purpose of increasing accuracy in the interpretation of answers (Åkerlind, Bowden, & Green, 2005).

The first phase of the analysis focused on identifying and describing the meanings that career practitioners gave to the social media in career services in general terms. Transcribed interviews were considered as a whole and read repeatedly in search of the underlying foci and intentions expressed in them. During these several readings, interviews were read with a focus on similarities and differences in the conceptions expressed in order to find cases of variation or agreement and thus group them accordingly. Gradually, by comparing and contrasting identified similarities and differences, a draft set of descriptive categories were developed, defined and named.

Analysis of the structural relationship between the categories, as recommended by Bowden (2005), was postponed until the overall meaning of the categories had been finalised. This second phase of an analysis focused on critical aspects of variation, that is, aspects distinguishing the varying ways of experiencing the phenomenon being studied (Åkerlind, 2005a). The focus was not on all the aspects of variation, but rather on the critical ones. The aim was to reveal one way of seeing a phenomenon to another, more complex one (Åkerlind, 2005a; Marton & Booth, 1997), where more complex understandings are indicated by an increasing breadth of awareness of different aspects of the phenomenon being investigated (Åkerlind, 2008).

To ensure that a robust analysis of the interview data was conducted, the initial analysis was done by the first author and a second opinion was then given by colleagues with whom she met several times to discuss and revise the categories and their structures to confirm that the interpretations were validly delivered from the data.

Colleagues act as devil's advocates, probing the category candidates and their critical aspects and asking for justifications from within the transcripts for the particular formulation. This group process, emphasised by Bowden (e.g. 2000a, 2005), made it less likely that analysis would stop part way. Iterative re-reading and re-drafting was repeated until saturation occurred, that is, until the re-reading failed to produce any significant change in the categories of description (Bowden & Green, 2010). The steps described above were important in ensuring the reliability of the results.

### Results

The analysis of the data revealed five distinct categories of description reflecting the career practitioners' conceptions of social media in career services (Table 1). Social

Table 1.   Career practitioners' conceptions of social media in career services.

| DIMENSIONS OF VARIATION | CATEGORIES | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | unnecessary | dispensable | possibility | desirable | indispensable |
| Attitude | negative | sceptical | unsure | positive | positive/ excited |
| Role in guidance | not relevant | passing fad | potentially useful means | complementary tool | way to extend service |
| Settings | everyday setting for young people's lives | setting for creating and sustaining connections | setting for discussions | setting for reflective thought | setting for people processing on their life |
| Perception | threat | Challenge | change | reality | positive potential |
| Guidance locus | supplier driven, time and space specific | supplier driven, time specific | demand driven, time specific | citizen/user-centred, time specific | citizen/user-centred |
| Guidance paradigm | individual face to face guidance | individual guidance | individual and group guidance | individual and group (with or without practitioner) | self-help approach group (without or with practitioner) |
| Role of practitioner | expert role | advising role | supporting role | reflexive role | one resource among others on individuals life |
| Nature of interaction | practitioner → individual | practitioner → individual | practitioner ↔ individual | practitioner ↔ individual individual ↔ peers | individual → practitioner individual ↔ community members |

media in career services was conceived as (1) unnecessary, (2) dispensable, (3) a possibility, (4) desirable and (5) indispensable. The formed categories were nested hierarchies expanding from the least to most inclusive understanding. The aspects of the phenomenon that differentiate the categories are called *dimensions of variation*, comprising the critical aspects for expanding a more sophisticated level of understanding. These dimensions were named: attitude; role in guidance; settings; perception; guidance locus; guidance paradigm; role of practitioner; and nature of interaction.

Each category is described in more detail below. Excerpts from relevant interview transcripts are included to illustrate the key aspects of the categories. It is important to keep in mind that this categorisation represents the collective rather than individual conceptions of social media in career services. Thus, at an individual level some practitioners hold more than one conception of a given phenomenon.

### Description of the categories

*Category 1: social media in career services is unnecessary*

In the first category, social media is conceived as unnecessary in career services. The practitioners express negative attitudes towards social media in general and consider it an everyday setting for young people's lives with no importance or relevance in career services.

> It gives the impression that one has to hang out there nightly, and I wonder who would want it that way?
>
> I, for example, am not in a Facebook, and I have no plan to get on there. I can be met in person in my 'booth' and everywhere and that may do it.
>
> Students suggested that I should establish some kind of Facebook system. I responded with 'what added value would it bring to this as I see you here all the time' and so on?

Practitioners appear to perceive social media as a threat to the profession and to the practice. They fear that a shift towards social media might replace and mechanise the human interaction and thus believe that the profession might also be under threat. They perceive social media to be uncontrollable and unsafe.

> I think it [social media] is a bit scary right now, so that the control, and also relative to guidance that we do not make a shift towards that…somehow it has a tremendously increasing power, but it is scary if services and human encounter take place only on the internet, so it is scary.
>
> So one of these days, am I going to be completely dispensable?

A locus on a supplier-driven model of guidance was identified in this category. This view was expressed in statements emphasising the individual face-to-face career services mode within an institution. From this point of view, service delivery is best connected to a specific time and space. The practitioner was seen

as an expert and the individual mainly as a recipient of the information or the services.

> I preferably meet face to face and in person.

> I have made a deliberated boundary. Even though we have a new e-mail system which could be used from home, there is no way that I would want to use that from home.

> Discussion gives unambiguous answers to unambiguous questions.

*Category 2: social media in career services is dispensable*

In the second category, social media is conceived as dispensable in career services. The practitioners express a sceptical attitude towards social media and are not sure that it is anything more than just a 'passing fad'. They question its necessity and role in career services.

> So this Facebook, it might historically be kind of a short phenomenon . . . maybe it has been given excessive significance . . .

> Maybe it is a fad.

Social media appears to practitioners as a setting where individuals create and sustain connections with others. Raising awareness of the potential and relevance of social media as a new means of building connections and relationships and disseminating information to individuals was acknowledged.

> Today has forced, for instance, the educational establishments to go into Facebook, 'cause it is the meeting place where, for example, the youth can be reached today, it is commonplace for them.

> This social media is without a doubt a place where youth could be met in their own environment.

Practitioners perceive social media as a challenge. In regard to its use and potential, they indicate that social media is difficult to comprehend. They feel overwhelmed with the real-time nature of social media and are worried about the amount and quality of its content.

> It [social media] is a challenge to guidance and to organisations as a whole because we have not gained an insight into how and for what we could utilise it.

> And at my work I have had to straighten up the perceptions that circulate like fire there in social media.

A supplier-driven locus of guidance was also evident in this category, with the distinction from the previous category that guidance is no longer formally bound to a specific space, only to a specific time. Preference for individual guidance was discerned, and the practitioner was seen as an adviser, whose role is to advise and help individuals to make the right choices. The role of the individual was seen mainly as a recipient of information or advice.

Does this promise 24/7 availability? I don't want that. I want office hours.

...as there is a lot out there [social media] available, so to be there to guide them somehow to the right direction there too...

*Category 3: social media in career services is a possibility*

In this third category, social media is conceived as a possibility in career services. Practitioners consider social media as a potentially useful means of communicating, but the overall value of using it has not been established in their minds. The practitioners remain unsure about social media and how to approach it professionally.

...we don't quite know how we would take it...

I was, about a year ago, on this course – meanings of social media in guidance, or how to utilise it in guidance. And, oh, I have to say that, it did not open up for me how to make use of it.

It kind of brings us new channels and possibilities to be in touch.

It might bring a possibility to make contact with someone who would hardly come in otherwise.

Practitioners in this category regard social media mainly as a setting where people have conversations. The volume and importance of these conversations among individuals, through the means of social media tools, are growing and observed by practitioners. Thus, they see new possibilities of reaching people and initiating communication with individuals by entering into the realm of social media.

There must be a lot of conversations that are school related, or about training and about everything that relates to education, a lot which we are not aware of.

It could be possible to open some topics for discussion, and then in there, I think, so it could be so that everyone could participate there.

Practitioners perceive social media as a change. They indicate that social media creates a need for career practitioners to change the way they are accustomed to doing their work. They mention that they have the skills to use social media, but are reserved and hesitant when it comes to reframing their practice. Of concern is the transparent and open nature of social media.

We have become accustomed to an old way.

We are more like that, so it is more like a change for us.

We have the skills to use social media, but it is somehow so difficult, awkward, and strange for us; it is not so peculiar to us.

The locus of guidance shifted in this category from supplier driven to demand driven. A new aspect was the practice of group guidance. The practitioner's role was seen as that of a supporter who provides information on options rather than

direct recommendations to individuals. The role of the individual shifted from recipient to an active participant in the guidance relationship. A two-way nature of interaction was much more evident in this category than in the previous ones.

> The career practitioner has to be quite active so that it won't happen that they chance upon information and discuss it among themselves there.

### Category 4: social media in career services is desirable

In this fourth category, social media is conceived as desirable in career services. The practitioners express a positive attitude and interest towards social media. They consider these new channels not as a substitute but as a complement to the other ways in which they obtain information and connect to people on a daily basis.

> So if it brings the practice closer to the people, it is for sure a good thing.

> There's a feeling that one needs to start finding more out about this matter . . . I see this as a big and interesting thing.

> I can imagine that it might, it may have, there could be developed, some kind of significant career services in there and for sure some already exists.

> There are many different channels, and this [social media] is not going to substitute the face-to-face guidance; even so, as such it will complement the traditional use of the internet.

Social media appears to practitioners as a setting for reflective thought. They recognise that these platforms facilitate the growth of peer support and encourage individuals to engage in ongoing meaningful dialogues, sharing their experiences with peers. Social support that individuals gain through these peer connections is observed and valued by practitioners.

> I say that in these different social media places, the youth reflect their future and other matters like that.

> Those different opinions wave in favour of or against, but it is kind of interesting per se as you reflect your own state of affairs.

> For a student, it is peer support, and I took a look at what they talk about in there; it was school matters and such which are then away from us, so that they do help our work when they reflect their thoughts over there.

Practitioners perceive social media as part of today's reality, including the field of career services. They see it simply as another factor in societal change to be put into service. However, they also puzzle over the lines between professional and personal life that might get blurred.

> This [social media] what is new now; it is a natural process.

A locus shift in guidance from a demand-driven to a citizen/user-centred service that follows up on individuals' needs was evident in this category. The practitioner's

role was seen as assisting individuals in understanding, exploring and overcoming their difficulties. Beside the practitioner-led groups, group guidance opened up to include groups without a practitioner. Practitioners recognise the value of peers and trust that some issues can be resolved, with or without a practitioner, through online collaboration utilising social media. The emphasis shifted from the previous category, where the practitioners' need for control was more obvious. In this category, individuals are seen as active meaning-makers interacting with practitioners and peers.

> When they talk to each other and among each other there, it is kind of so that it can not be controlled, nor is that the career practitioner's place/task/job to do so.

> [There are] different kinds of guidance groups that take place in virtual worlds, and individuals reflect on their issues there among themselves but also so that the career practitioner is with them.

### Category 5: social media in career services is indispensable

In this fifth category, social media is conceived as indispensable in career services. The practitioners express an excited attitude towards social media and consider it an increasingly important way to extend career services.

> I myself am very excited about this.

> Career services should be there, in no conditional way, but career services have to be there.

Social media is seen as a setting for people processing their life. Practitioners see possibilities in social media through combining knowledge from peers with that of other individuals who may act as a possible source of information in guidance settings.

> We as practitioners should be present there where our clients and youth process their life questions.

> And to reflect it always to one's own life situations so that if someone says something then to think whether it means the same for me or if it means something different for me.

> And then, what kind of answers peers and other individuals could bring into to discussion, so this could bring something new to the table instead of just the single career practitioner and single student, or one's own situation.

Practitioners perceive social media as having positive potential. They indicate that the use of social media might be the beginning of a new phase in career services. Practitioners express willingness and need to use social media to extend their practice, to have a presence there where individuals – their clients – are today. Practitioners do not see the need or possibility to differentiate the personal 'I' and professional 'I'.

> It feels like this might be the beginning of a new phase in career guidance.

> I would like to move in this direction with career services.

> I am interested in digging into the world of games and taking a look at how something small could be built around, for example, further studies in Second Life.

> We are becoming active players in there [social media], producing material and being part of the interaction that is going on there all the time.

A shift in the locus of guidance from individual and group guidance to self-help and self-management approaches was evident in this category. The perspective also shifted from the service deliverer and career practitioner to delivery from the user's perspective – towards career services that enable delivery as an on-demand service. Practitioners recognise that they are not only the source of information or future directions, but, if necessary, they act as a means by which individuals discover a way forward with their questions. The practitioner was seen as one resource among others on individuals' lives.

> And as long as the individual gets his or her aims and goals clarified, it is not important from which channel she or he receives the guidance services.

> Not everyone has the perseverance to wait until the next day with their question; instead, when the questions appear in their mind, they wish to ask it right away.

### Relationship between the categories

The categories of description were delimited from each other and organised hierarchically through dimensions of variation that emerged from the data. Due to the structural hierarchy of inclusiveness, some conceptions can be regarded as more complete and more complex than others (Åkerlind, 2005a).

The career practitioners' *attitude* to social media changed in a more positive direction across the categories of description. Concurrently, the discerned *role in guidance* expanded. In the first two categories, where social media is conceived as unnecessary and dispensable in career services, the attitude was clearly more negative than in the last three categories. In category 1 the role of social media was irrelevant or not recognised, whereas in category 2 it was seen as a passing fad. Even where that attitude remained unsure or undecided, a shift from negativity to positivity was discerned in category 3, where social media is conceived as a possibility, since the potential usefulness of social media was articulated. In category 4, where social media is conceived as desirable, a clearly positive attitude and shift from a potentially useful role towards the actual use of social media was embraced. In the most complex category, where social media is conceived as indispensable, the discerned role of social media moved from a tool to a way to extend career services.

Social media *settings* appeared and were characterised differently in all categories. In essence, the difference between category 1 and the other categories was that social media was simply seen as a setting for young people's lives, whereas participation across age groups was presented in more complex categories. In categories 2 and 3, where social media is seen as dispensable and as a possibility, social media appeared as a social space in which individuals create and sustain connections (category 2) and interact (category 3). A turning point was category 4, where social media is conceived as desirable, as it marked a shift from a social space to a setting where individuals support each other and engage in reflective thought. A deepening engagement, a setting for people processing their life, was expressed in the most complex category.

Shifts in *perceptions* of social media, from seeing it as a threat to having positive potential, were distinguishable across the categories. Social media was perceived most negatively in the first two categories, where social media is viewed as unnecessary and

dispensable as well as being perceived as a threat (category 1) and a challenge (category 2). The most positive perception is in category 5, where social media is conceived as indispensable and as having positive potential. In categories that are in between, practitioners had a more neutral stance, perceiving it as a change (category 3) and a reality (category 4).

Shifts in *guidance locus* were the transitions from a supplier-driven service, formally bounded in time and space, to a citizen/user-centred service that is ubiquitous. The most distinctive difference in category 1, in relation to the other categories, was the notion that guidance was space specific, attached to the physical space. Guidance was discerned as time specific in all except the most complex category. Shifts from supplier-driven to demand-driven guidance were discerned in category 3, where social media is conceived as a possibility. In the most complex categories, where social media is conceived as desirable and indispensable, the locus shifted from structures and institutions to a citizen/user-centred approach.

In terms of *guidance paradigms*, the transition across the categories was from face-to-face guidance to self-help. An expressed preference for individual face-to-face delivery differentiated category 1, where social media is conceived as unnecessary, from other categories where enhancements to other methods of one-to-one interaction were discerned. The practice of group guidance appeared in category 3, where social media is conceived as a possibility. Group guidance opened up in the most complex categories to include groups without a practitioner. A significant shift where self-help took precedence over directed delivery by professionals was discerned in category 5, where social media is conceived as indispensable.

The *role of practitioner* varied across categories. In the least complex categories the practitioner was seen as an expert (category 1) and as an adviser (category 2). A turning point was in category 3, where social media is conceived as a possibility, as this marked a change from a directive expert role to a more supportive role based on dialogue with individuals. Not only a supportive but also a reflexive role with individuals was discerned in category 4, where social media is conceived as desirable. Greater emphasis was also placed on the individuals as active agents within the guidance process. In the most complex category, practitioners perceived themselves as one resource among others, available in need, during an individual's lifelong journey of independent career management.

Shifts across the categories regarding the *nature of interaction* moved from practitioner-led interaction to individual-led interactions. In the least complex categories, practitioner-led one-way interaction that positioned the client as a passive recipient was dominant. A turning point was again found in category 3, where social media is conceived as a possibility, as this marked a change from one-way transmission to two-way interaction. In the most complex categories, interaction shifted from point-to-point two-way interaction to many-to-many group interaction and collaboration, with or without a practitioner. In category 5, where social media is conceived as indispensable, individuals were seen to select and regulate the interactions.

## Discussion

This study revealed career practitioners' conceptions of social media in career services in five distinct categories of description that ranged from unnecessary to indispensable. Eight dimensions of variation were identified: attitude; role in

guidance; settings; perception; guidance locus; guidance paradigm; role of practitioner; and nature of interaction.

The findings showed that the conceptions were interrelated with practice approaches. The negative conceptions of social media in career services were closely linked to a directive approach in practice. A similar relationship seemed to hold between the clearly positive conceptions and the citizen/user-centred, holistic approach in practice. One can also see the relation of conceptions of social media in career services and the move from education and training to learning that changes the focus from structures and institutions to the development of individual lifelong career management skills (Watts, Sultana, & McCarthy, 2010).

As mentioned, it is possible to draw a dividing line between career practitioners' conceptions that are clearly negative and those that are clearly positive. This confirms Watts' (1996) prediction that technology in career services could result in either growing convergence or divergence between the two. The first dividing line is between conceptions 2 and 3, when the view of social media shifts from unnecessary and dispensable to a possibility. It is at this point that the potential usefulness of social media in career services was articulated, that the practitioner's role moved from directive to supportive, that the practice of group guidance was first mentioned and that a shift from supplier-driven to demand-driven guidance was discerned. In addition, in crossing this dividing line, one-way transmission shifted to two-way interaction.

Another dividing line lies between conceptions 3 and 4, where the ways of seeing social media in career services changed from possible to desirable. Here, the use of social media was embraced, and emphasis was placed on a customer-centred holistic approach that allows greater levels of self-help and that values the social support that individuals gain through their peers. With respect to this dividing line, one can see similarities with Watts' (2002) notion of moving towards a more open professional model. In addition, social media acts as an agent of change in relation to career services provision as a whole (see Watts, 1996).

The findings show that conceptions of social media in career services appear to be interrelated with practice approach. The findings support the results of other studies (e.g. Hooley, Hutchinson, & Watts, 2010b) addressing the need to re-evaluate some professional paradigms in the light of the opportunities offered by new technologies. Career practitioners need to remodel their practices and concepts of quality to take into account the needs not only of those clients who come through the door, but also of all citizens who need career services (Sampson, Dozier, & Colvin, 2011).

There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by career practitioners in this study and those described by Harris-Bowlsbey and Sampson (2001) concerning the initial use of computers in guidance in the 1970s, namely that computers were impersonal and therefore inappropriate in counselling. The findings also accord with Watts' (1986) earlier observation, which showed that ICT in guidance can be seen as having one of three roles: a tool, an alternative or an agent of change. Here, it should be noted that, as in the present study, career practitioners' attitude to social media changed in a more positive direction. The discerned role of social media concurrently expanded from a tool to a way to extend career services.

The results of this study show that if the career field is to develop career practitioners' understandings of technology and social media in a more complex direction, it has to take into consideration not only their practical knowledge, but

also their prevailing personal conceptions. This is of importance when considering the overall adoption and integration of new technologies in the careers field. In this sense, the findings of this study are relevant to the development of career practitioner training. We would argue that it is important to develop training and support for the expansion of career practitioners' understanding of new technologies using the critical aspects that were identified in this study.

## Acknowledgements

## Notes on contributors

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# II

# Practitioners' Experiences of Social Media in Career Services

by

Jaana Kettunen, Raimo Vuorinen & James P. Sampson Jr., 2015

The Career Development Quarterly, vol 63, 268–282

# Practitioners' Experiences of Social Media in Career Services

## Jaana Kettunen, Raimo Vuorinen, and James P. Sampson Jr.

This article reports findings from a phenomenographic investigation into career practitioners' ways of experiencing social media in career services. Focus-group interviews were conducted with 16 Danish and Finnish career practitioners with experience using social media in career services. Four qualitatively different ways of experiencing social media in career services were identified. Social media in career services was experienced as (a) a means for delivering information, (b) a medium for 1-to-1 communication, (c) an interactive working space, and (d) an impetus for paradigm change and reform. The results suggest that models of career intervention and ways of experiencing social media appear to be intertwined. The hierarchical structure of the findings may serve as a tool that enables career practitioners to deepen their ways of experiencing and understanding social media in career services by using the critical aspects that were identified.

*Keywords*: career services, career practitioners, social media, experiences, phenomenography

A growing number of career practitioners and career centers are reaching out to individuals and community members in new ways by integrating various social media tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, into their professional practices (e.g., Dyson, 2012; Osborn & Lo-Frisco, 2012). To many, social media are simply online tools to share information and to communicate and socialize with one another. In the broader sense, social media is defined as a process whereby individuals and groups build a common understanding and meaning with contents, communities, and Web 2.0 technology (e.g., Ahlqvist, Bäck, Heinonen, & Halonen, 2010; Kangas, Toivonen, & Bäck, 2007).

An extensive body of literature has examined the role (e.g., Harris-Bowlsbey & Sampson, 2001; Sampson, 2008; Vuorinen, 2006; Watts, 1996; Watts & Offer, 2006) and the use of information and communications technologies in career service delivery (e.g., Harris-Bowlsbey & Sampson, 2005; Osborn, Dikel, & Sampson, 2011; Sampson & Osborn, 2014; Watts, 2002). Information and communication technologies in career services are continuously viewed as a tool, an alternative, and an agent of change in guidance (e.g., Barnes, La Gro, & Watts, 2010; Watts, 1986, 1996, 2010). Because of the relatively recent use of social media in career services, a limited amount of research has been conducted in

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this area. Existing literature has provided some examples and evidence that social media has considerable potential for career services (e.g., Bimrose, Barnes, & Atwell, 2010; Hooley, Hutchinson, & Watts, 2010a, 2010b; Sampson & Osborn, 2014); however, empirical studies on the use and effectiveness of social media in career services are limited. Recently, Dyson (2012) provided an example of using Facebook in career services; Hooley (2011) explored the phenomenon of career blogging; and Osborn and LoFrisco (2012) investigated the use of social media in university career centers and found that many career centers have increased their use of social media tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The three most common ways the career centers used social media were to provide students with career-related information, to connect with students, and to promote career services. Social media can also be used to develop job networks (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013).

Social media is fast becoming as much a necessity as an opportunity in career services, and practitioners' competency to work in this new mode is an area of increasing importance (e.g., Bimrose, Hughes, & Barnes, 2011; Osborn et al., 2011). Kettunen, Vuorinen, and Sampson's (2013) study revealed that models of career intervention and the ways of conceptualizing social media appear to be intertwined. Their findings indicated that, if the career services sector is to take advantage, to be innovative, and to fashion novel career service delivery formats afforded by new technologies (e.g., Hooley et al., 2010a, 2010b; Watts, 2010), it is necessary to support professionals in their understanding of the various social media tools and the ways in which they could be incorporated into existing practices. To do so, more detailed research on career practitioners' experiences with social media and its influence on career professionals' practice is needed.

Consequently, the present study examined how career practitioners experience social media while using it in career services. The aim was to discover and describe the qualitative variation in the ways of experiencing the phenomenon. The study was guided by the following research questions: (a) What are career practitioners' ways of experiencing social media in career services? and (b) What are the critical aspects that differentiate qualitatively varying ways of experiencing social media in career services? This study lent itself to a qualitative research methodology known as phenomenography (e.g., Marton, 1986; Marton & Booth, 1997), which is specifically designed to investigate the qualitatively different ways in which people at a collective level experience or conceptualize a particular phenomenon (in this case, social media in career services). The reason for choosing this methodology, and the ultimate aim of describing the variation in experience, was to expand the understanding of critical aspects in the development and successful use of existing and emerging technologies in career services.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 16 Danish and Finnish career practitioners with experience using social media in career services. Seven of the 16 participants were from Denmark and nine were from Finland (10 women and six men, ages 30–59 years, with career service experience ranging from 2 to 17 years). In keeping with phenomenographic techniques (Åkerlind,

Bowden, & Green, 2005), we deliberately sought variation within the participants to maximize diversity in the ways of experiencing the phenomenon. We sent e-mails inviting practitioners with experience using social media to a national eGuidance center, eVejledning, in Denmark that provides service via various communication channels and in social media settings. We also sent e-mails to lists of Finnish professional guidance bodies and training units. Practitioners were self-identified with experience using social media in career services. Experiences concerning the use of social media guided the identification and selection of interviewees, and we used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to ensure information-rich cases from which knowledge concerning the research objectives could be gathered. The aim was to ensure that a sufficient number of relevant voices were heard (Bowden & Green, 2010). In previous phenomenographic studies, it has been suggested that, as long as the sample is selected to maximize variation, between 10 and 15 participants is normally enough to capture the variation (Åkerlind, 2008; Trigwell, 2000). The study participants represented career and guidance counselors from a variety of settings: comprehensive, secondary, and higher education as well as public employment services in both urban and rural settings. All the participants had a master's degree and were qualified in accordance with the national certification requirements.

### Procedure

We collected data using the focus-group interview methodology (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999; Krueger, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c). Interviews are the most common method of obtaining phenomenographic data, although other methods are possible (Marton & Booth, 1997). Because the aim of this study was to investigate the range of different ways of experiencing the same phenomenon, we considered focus groups to be an effective method for encouraging the participants to express their thoughts, views, and experiences through interacting with one another. Furthermore, we considered focus groups appropriate because phenomenographic research aims at capturing collective rather than individual accounts of people's experience of the phenomenon.

Three focus groups, one in English with Danish career practitioners and two in Finnish with Finnish career practitioners, were carried out between February and May 2012. Each focus group comprised four to seven career practitioners and was conducted in Finnish by the first author and in English by the first and second authors, who are fluent in both languages. When conducting focus groups jointly, we had both individual and shared responsibilities. One of us acted as a facilitator and was primarily concerned with directing the discussion and keeping the conversation flowing. The other managed the recordings and occasionally probed the response of a participant in more depth. When facilitating the focus group alone, the facilitator managed the recordings. For quality control, we reviewed and discussed the list of questions and the roles of the facilitator and assistant before the focus-group interview.

The focus-group interviews were semistructured and consisted of questions designed to direct the interviewees' focus toward the target phenomenon. Five questions were addressed: (a) What is the role of the career practitioner in meeting career services goals? (b) What is the role

of social media in career services? (c) What is career service like in social media? (d) What are the skills needed for social media in career services? and (e) How can social media be best used in career services? The interviews were informal and conversational, allowing the interviewees to reveal their current experiences of the phenomenon as fully and openly as possible. To encourage the participants to elaborate on or clarify their responses, we used follow-up questions (e.g., "Could you tell a bit more about that?" "Could you describe it/explain it a little further?" and "Could you give an example of it?"). When asking follow-up questions, the facilitator was careful to avoid leading the interviewees' responses. The focus-group interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

## Data Analysis

We conducted the data analysis using a phenomenographic approach (Åkerlind, 2005b; Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Pong, 2005). There are various approaches to phenomenographic data analysis concerning whether the focus should be on the whole transcript (Bowden, 1995, 2000) or on quotations that have been extracted from the data (Marton, 1986). The approach taken in this study began with looking at the transcripts as a whole to establish interrelated themes and meanings. Subsequently, we considered large sections of each transcript, and we selected excerpts that exemplified variation and meaning. The purpose behind using the entire transcript or large sections of each transcript was to increase accuracy in interpreting the answers (Åkerlind et al., 2005).

The first phase of the analysis focused on identifying and describing career practitioners' ways of experiencing social media in career services in general terms. Repeated readings gave familiarization with the data, and by focusing on the similarities and differences in the expressed meanings, we identified cases of variation or agreement and grouped them accordingly. Before the data analysis, no codes were developed. Gradually, by comparing and contrasting identified similarities and differences, we developed, defined, and named a draft set of descriptive categories for collective meanings.

The second phase of the analysis focused on delineating logical relationships among the various categories. Critical aspects—themes that consistently occurred across all categories representing differences between various ways of experiencing social media in career services—were identified and used to structure the logical relationships both within and among the categories (Åkerlind, 2005a). The aim was to reveal one way of seeing a phenomenon in comparison with another more complex one (Åkerlind, 2005a; Marton & Booth, 1997).

To ensure a robust analysis of the data, the first author, fluent in both Finnish and English, initially analyzed them, and then she sought a second opinion from research colleagues with whom she met several times to discuss and revise the categories and their structures so that each category would confirm that the interpretations of the data were valid. We acted as devil's advocates, probing the category candidates and their critical aspects and asking for justifications from within the transcripts for the particular formulation. This group process, emphasized by Bowden (2000), made it less likely that analysis would stop partway. This was also a means to minimize the researcher's individual perspective and to ensure loyalty to the data when formulating the categories of description. We repeated iterative rereading and redrafting until

saturation occurred (i.e., until the rereading failed to produce any significant change in the categories of description; Bowden & Green, 2010). We all have experience in both information and communications technologies in career services and qualitative research. All of the steps mentioned were important in ensuring the trustworthiness of the results.

According to Marton and Booth (1997), categories of description should meet three quality criteria: (a) Each category should describe a distinctly different way of experiencing the phenomenon; (b) a logical relationship between each category should be hierarchically represented; and (c) there should be a limited, parsimonious number of different categories that describe the variation across the sample. The final phase of analysis made sure that these criteria met the hierarchically structured set of categories of this study.

## Results

The analysis of the data revealed four distinct categories of description that reflected career practitioners' ways of experiencing the use of social media in career services (see Table 1). Social media in career services was experienced as a means for delivering information (Category 1), a medium for one-to-one communication (Category 2), an interactive working space (Category 3), and an impetus for paradigm change and reform (Category 4). The formed categories were nested in hierarchies expanding from the least to the most complex understanding. The phenomenal aspects differentiating the categories are called dimensions of variation. They comprise the critical aspects for expanding a more sophisticated or complete level of understanding. These dimensions were named *role of social media*, *function*

**TABLE 1**

**Career Practitioners' Ways of Experiencing Social Media in Career Services**

| Dimension of Variation | Category | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Role of social media | Useful tools | Viable alternative | Space for career services | Participatory social space |
| Function of social media | Delivering information and advice | Delivering career services | Collaborative career exploration | Cocareering |
| Attitude | Reserved | Careful | Adaptive | Proactive |
| Rationale | Visibility | Accessibility | Interactivity | Influence |
| Perception | Challenge | Change | Opportunity | Reform |
| Intervention paradigm | Individual face-to-face intervention | Individual intervention | Group intervention | Coconstructed intervention |
| Nature of interaction | Practitioner → individual | Practitioner ↔ individual | Practitioner ↔ individual/ group | Individual ↔ community members |
| | | | Individual ↔ peers | Individual ↔ practitioner |
| Practitioner's role | Expert role | Reflexive role | Facilitating role | Participating and engaging role |

*Note.* 1 = means for delivering information; 2 = medium for one-to-one communication; 3 = interactive working space; 4 = impetus for paradigm change and reform.

of *social media*, *attitude*, *rationale*, *perception*, *intervention paradigm*, *nature of interaction*, and *practitioner's role*. Each category is further detailed in the following paragraphs. Excerpts from relevant interview transcripts are included to illustrate key aspects of the categories. It is important to note that this categorization represents collective rather than individual experiences of social media in career services.

## Description of the Categories

*Category 1: Social media as a means for delivering information*. In the first category, social media was experienced as a means for delivering information in career services. Practitioners considered social media as *useful tools* for *delivering information and advice*, but were not convinced of its potential for any other types of guidance intervention: (a) "I somehow just always want to remind people that it is just a tool," (b) "Mainly I just deliver information there," and (c) "It gives . . . some kind of instant help . . . but I don't see that any kind of deep guidance intervention is possible with [social media]."

Practitioners were *reserved* in using social media and used it in accordance with their existing practices. The rationale for using social media in career services was *visibility*. In this category, social media provided an effective way of making information and services more visible to a defined group of people. Furthermore, practitioners believed that social media may serve as a way to lead people to career services: (a) "I am there just in case some people try to find me through that channel, so I am involved there"; (b) "[Social media] expands information delivery enormously. It cannot be known how much a message ultimately spreads"; and (c) "[Social media] is used as . . . kind of like the first step to something real/proper."

Practitioners perceived the use of social media for professional purposes as a *challenge*. These challenges were related to time consumption, a choice of tools and resources, and the transparent and open nature of social media, with the primary concern being a perceived lack of control over content. Practitioners believed that their professionalism was more easily questioned than ever before and were concerned about the accuracy and validity of the information they presented: (a) "This is a big challenge for traditional career practice . . . you need a bit of encouragement to post your knowledge" and (b) "The document will stay there in view, and you are liable for each word you write or don't write there."

A preference for *individual face-to-face intervention* was evident in this category. The interaction between a career practitioner and an individual was predominantly described as a *one-way* activity. The practitioner was regarded as an *expert* who provides credible messages and information to the person served. Participants stated the following: "I do feel that being face-to-face is kind of more important" and "The fact that writings go somehow through your sieve. You have the possibility to correct the worst distortions from [Facebook writings] and kind of like look after [students'] writings a bit."

*Category 2: Social media as a medium for one-to-one communication*. In the second category, social media was experienced as a medium for one-to-one communication in career services. Unlike in the previous category, practitioners considered social media as a *viable alternative* to traditional face-to-face, on-site services and were using it for *delivering career services*: (a) "So people do have possibilities in terms of different ways of utilizing guidance" and (b) "We use social media to conduct the work we do."

Although social media was recognized as a useful communication channel, practitioners were *careful* in using this type of media, and they used it to communicate in a private, closed manner. The rationale for using social media in career services was *accessibility*. Social media provides convenient and accessible career services to individuals, in particular to those who may find it difficult to access face-to-face services. The anonymity afforded by social media was also emphasized. Participants commented, "You really have to think very carefully about how to express yourself, and about what you actually say here, like in writing"; "so that this easy and accessible opportunity for communication is available"; and "Anonymity allows them to ask questions they would perhaps not ask in a face-to-face interaction."

In this category, practitioners perceived the use of social media for professional purposes as a *change*. These changes were related to new aspects that social media brings to career service practices, such as how to establish and maintain relationships online and how to do things if and when communication is done via writing. Practitioners must adapt to new ways of doing things and integrate these new practices with traditional methods. Participants stated, "As a career practitioner, you really have to consider a lot of aspects you are not normally aware of"; "How do I integrate these new practices into an old, established work routine?"; and "You separate yourself from the body language . . . you focus on how to do things."

A preference for *individual intervention* was also revealed in this category, with expansion from previous face-to-face interventions to other methods of individual career intervention. The role of the individual shifted from recipient of information to that of an active participant in the career service relationship, and the *two-way* nature of the interaction was now apparent. The practitioner's role was now regarded as a *reflexive role*. Practitioners assisted individuals in understanding, exploring, and overcoming their difficulties: "We want them to be able to guide and help themselves reflect, help them find their way."

*Category 3: Social media as an interactive working space*. In this third category, social media was experienced as an interactive working space in career services. Practitioners considered social media as a *space for career services* and used it to empower *collaborative career exploration* among individuals who share a common question or aim. Participants stated, "Well, especially through Facebook, it is a strong and growing community and the career services target group uses it—so that made it a somehow obvious direction to go" and "[Social media] provides possibilities to kind of, like, bring together people who are wrestling with the same problems and well, er, bring them into the domain of informed guidance and interaction with each other."

These practitioners were *adaptive* in using social media and used it in a semiopen manner. The rationale behind using social media in career services was *interactivity*. Social media provided a way to facilitate interactive communication and information sharing and to experience this exchange among peer group members. Practitioners believed that it could increase awareness of any misunderstandings and displeasure that might exist via interactive communication: (a) "I think that social media just, like, brings it to this new technological environment where discourse can take place" and (b) "As they share their experiences or their wonderings and questions, we try to get others to comment and by doing so get the maximum out of them about the topic."

Although in the previous category the practitioners considered social media merely as a change in their working practices, in this category, the practitioners perceived social media as an *opportunity* for novel professional practices. These opportunities stem from features of social media that support increased user engagement with both career professionals and career information, such as increased use of interactive and multimedia content. Furthermore, opportunities referred to redirecting the process of career learning toward more collaborative practices. Participants stated, "Social media provides . . . new ways and new dimensions to career services" and "so maybe [social media] is one way to move on from . . . clearly written culture, and maybe widen that a little bit."

In this category, the career intervention shifted from one-to-one intervention to *group intervention*. Individuals were seen as active information developers and sharers *interacting with practitioners and peers*. Although practitioners guided the discussions, they also recognized and fostered a group's own ability to direct and interact among itself. The practitioner's role was regarded as a *facilitator* who ensures that the group activities are conducted in accordance with the delivery goals of career service. Participants stated, "In a peer group that works actively, the practitioner may stay more in the background and only give support when needed, at least on some points" and "The [role of the] practitioner is to ensure that activities are on track toward specific objectives so that things don't zone out too far from the main point."

*Category 4: Social media as an impetus for paradigm change and reform.* In this fourth category, social media was experienced as an impetus for paradigm change and reform in career services. Practitioners considered social media as *participatory social space*, where expertise sharing and meaningful coconstruction on career issues, *cocareering*, take place with and among community members. Participants noted the following: "When you go into social media, you accept that it is social media, and social media works in social ways" and "Or if you are having difficulties in knowing what to do, you share your thoughts through social media, and you'll have reflection from other community members."

Practitioners were *proactive* in using social media and were forging ahead with this new approach to career services. They experimented and used social media through different, innovative ways in an open manner. For these practitioners, the rationale for using social media was *influence*. Social media provided them a way to enhance the direct and indirect influence of career services by operating as members and facilitators of communities of individuals. By monitoring and participating in social media, career practitioners could more readily take steps to address and respond to career-related issues. One participant stated, "We need to create a completely new way of thinking in [social media]." Another particpant noted,

> So, if you are good at this, you'll have the capability to make something so interesting that other people will like to share it: the questions or the answers. . . . And that's how one uses social media for career services on a much larger scale than just spreading good answers and/or good questions.

Practitioners perceived the use of social media in career services as *reform*. They indicated that the participatory culture fostered by social

media forced them to rethink the whole ideology of career practice. This related to both practice and organizational culture alike. The emphasis changed to community building, supported through a fresh approach to interaction and communication dependent on citizens' needs. One participant stated,

> This is also changing the rules—career services can't make social media behave as career services would like it to; instead, career services have to change the way career services work so they will work through social media. That is a big challenge because we have to rethink the whole idea of career services.

Another participant stated,

> It can't be only information, because then it is just another newsfeed that, you know, they won't even read. There has to be something that keeps triggering them, makes them wanna take a stand for, wanna answer to what we say. We have to challenge them to make it a success. I really think so.

In this category, there was a paradigm shift in the intervention to a *coconstructed intervention*, whereby *community members and the practitioner* were actively participating and engaging in conversations in which meanings and understandings were coconstructed. The perspective of delivery also shifted from the service deliverer and career practitioner to the user's perspective and moved toward career services that enable delivery as an on-demand service. Participants stated the following: "We will work under the premise of social media by being social"; "Social media actually is on citizens' terms"; and "They are contacting us, not the other way around."

### Relationship Between the Categories

The categories of description were delimited from one another and organized hierarchically through dimensions of variation that emerged from the data. Because of the structural hierarchy of inclusiveness, some conceptions can be seen as more complete and more complex than others (Åkerlind, 2005a).

The career practitioners' views of the role of social media in career services expanded across the categories of description. In Category 1, where social media was experienced as a means for delivering information, social media were generally considered as useful tools in career services. The viability of social media as an alternative communication channel was emphasized in Category 2, where social media was experienced as a medium for one-to-one communication. A turning point was Category 3 because it marked a shift in social media's role from being an alternative channel to being a space for career services. In Category 4, where social media was experienced as an impetus for paradigm change and reform, practitioners perceived social media as a participatory social space in which expertise sharing takes place with and among community members.

Shifts in the function of social media were the transitions from delivering information and advice to cocareering. The most distinctive difference in Category 1, in relation to the other categories, was that social media was merely used for delivering information and advice,

whereas, in more complex categories, social media was presented as also usable for the independent delivery of career services. A turning point was again found in Category 3, where social media was experienced as an interactive working space, because this marked a change from career service delivery to collaborative career explorations. In the most complex category (Category 4), the emphasis was on cocareering, in which expertise sharing and meaningful coconstruction on career issues take place with and among community members.

In terms of attitude, the transition across the categories was from reserved to proactive. In the first two categories, where social media was experienced as a means for delivering information and a medium for one-to-one communication, respectively, the attitude was clearly more cautious than in the last two categories. We discerned a shift from reserved (Category 1) and careful (Category 2) to an adaptive attitude in Category 3, where social media was experienced as an interactive working space. In the most complex category (Category 4), where social media was experienced as an impetus for paradigm change and reform in career services, the attitude moved to a proactive one.

Shifts in rationale for using social media in career services moved from increasing outreach to enhancing the influence of career services. In the least complex categories, the main rationale for using social media was to make career information and services more visible (Category 1) and accessible (Category 2) to individuals. A turning point occurred in Category 3, where social media was experienced as an interactive working space, because this marked a change in the underlying rationale for using social media from enhancing access to enabling interactive communication and information sharing. In the most complex category (Category 4), the potential for greater indirect and direct influence of career services provided the rationale for using social media.

The perceptions regarding the use of social media varied across the categories. In Category 1, where social media was experienced as a means for delivering information, social media was perceived as a challenge. A more neutral stance, perceiving it as a change, was distinguished in Category 2. In the most complex categories, where social media was experienced as an interactive working space and an impetus for paradigm change and reform, respectively, social media was perceived more as an opportunity (Category 3) and a reform (Category 4).

Shifts in the intervention paradigm were the transitions from individual face-to-face intervention to a coconstructed model of intervention. The distinct difference in Category 1, in relation to other categories, was an expressed preference for individual face-to-face career intervention. We discerned enhancements from one-to-one interventions to group interventions in Category 3, where social media was experienced as an interactive working space. We discerned a shift to a coconstructed model of intervention in Category 4, where social media was experienced as an impetus for paradigm change and reform.

In terms of the nature of interaction, the transition across the categories was from practitioner-led interaction to individual-led interactions. A practitioner-led, one-way interaction that positioned the client as a passive recipient was dominant in Category 1. We discerned a change from one-way transmission to two-way interaction in Category 2, where social

media was experienced as a medium for one-to-one communication. In the most complex categories, the nature of interaction extended to include many-to-many, peer-group interaction (Category 3) and interaction between community members (Category 4), with or without a practitioner.

Shifts in the practitioner's role appeared as transitions from an expert role to a participating and engaging role. In Category 1, the practitioner was seen as an expert who provides the credible messages and proper information to individuals. Category 2, where social media was experienced as a medium for one-to-one communication, was a turning point because this category marked a change from a directive expert role to a reflexive role that is based on dialogue with individuals. In the most complex categories, greater emphasis was placed on the group's ability to direct and interact among itself. The practitioner's role was regarded as that of a facilitator (Category 3) who encourages constructive thinking and conversation and is an actively participating and engaging (Category 4) member of communities of individuals where meanings and understandings are coconstructed.

## Discussion

The present study identified career practitioners' different ways of experiencing social media in career services in four distinct categories of description that ranged from means for delivering information to an impetus for paradigm change and reform. We identified eight dimensions of variation: role of social media, function of social media, attitude, rationale, perception, intervention paradigm, nature of interaction, and practitioner's role. The findings show similarities with earlier studies, but they also provide new insight into an understanding of how practitioners experience social media in career services. The main similarities with earlier studies (e.g., Dyson, 2012; Osborn & LoFrisco, 2012) can be found from the first three categories, where social media in career services was experienced as an alternative medium and an interactive working space. The findings also further support Watts's (1986, 1996, 2010) earlier observation that information and communications technologies in career services are continuously viewed as a tool, an alternative, or an agent of change.

The current findings indicate that ways of experiencing social media are interrelated with models of career intervention. This result is consistent with Kettunen et al.'s (2013) phenomenographic study on career practitioners' conceptions of social media in career services. Ways of experiencing social media solely as a tool/medium for the delivery of information and services seem to be closely linked to a strong preference for individual, face-to-face, or one-to-one career intervention. A similar relationship seems to hold between the ways of experiencing social media as an integral part of career services and a more collaborative model of career intervention with an impetus for paradigm change and reform. One can see a move toward a more open professional model (Watts, 2002) and a shift in the locus of control from the experts to a blend of expert- and user-constructed knowledge (Sampson & Osborn, 2014). The most complex category (Category 4) supports Watts's (2010) notion that the potential of information and communications technologies to act as an agent of transformational change is now greater than ever before. In this category, the participatory culture fostered by social media

was embraced, cocareering was first mentioned, the greater potential for influencing career services via social media was articulated, the emphasis was placed on rethinking the whole ideology of career practice, and a more conscious involvement in communities of individuals where meanings and understandings are coconstructed was proposed. Barnes et al. (2010) described this paradigm shift as an evolution from "provider-led" to "user-led" (p. 30) guidance services.

The findings of this study show that if social media is to play an increasing role in career services, it is important to expand the awareness of the varying models of career interventions with online technologies. The findings show agreement with the discussion of, for example, Hooley (2012), who suggested that it is not sustainable to continue to perceive online technologies solely as a tool; rather, there is a need to see them as an integral part of the social fabric and to recognize that they provide a major context in which career development is enacted.

Successful integration of technology and social media in career services depends not only on the skills or technical facilities available but also on practitioners' willingness to accept the changes that new technology may bring to service delivery. On the basis of our findings, we argue that it is important to develop preservice and in-service training of career practitioners and provide them with opportunities to experiment and practice using social media in a broader way. In other words, career practitioners should be exposed in training to situations in which they will become aware of the variations in their current ways of experiencing social media and the more advanced ways they may be moving toward. The hierarchical structure of the findings may serve as a tool to enable career practitioners and trainers to deepen their ways of experiencing and understanding social media in career services by using the critical aspects that we identified. Because social media may be more frequently integrated into career services, it is important that practitioners function and use it in their practice within their scope of comfort and competence.

This study has some limitations. Participation in the study was voluntary and data collected at a single time period may not represent all of the critical aspects from the perspective of the entire career service sector. Further studies on the current topic are therefore recommended. Another intriguing area of future phenomenographic research would be to investigate the issue of the skills and competencies required for the development and successful use of social media in career services.

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# III

# Career Practitioners' Conceptions of Competecy For Social Media in Career Services

by

Jaana Kettunen, James P. Sampson Jr. & Raimo Vuorinen, 2015

British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, vol 43, 43–56

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# Career practitioners' conceptions of competency for social media in career services

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This article reports findings from a phenomenographic investigation into career practitioners' understanding of competency for social media in career services. Sixteen Danish and Finnish practitioners with experience using social media in career services were interviewed in focus groups. Competency for social media in career services was conceived as (i) an ability to use social media for delivering information, (ii) an ability to use social media for delivering career services, (iii) an ability to utilise social media for collaborative career exploration and (iv) an ability to utilise social media for co-careering. The findings can be used to develop pre-service and in-service training of career practitioners and support for the deepening of their competency, using the critical aspects that were identified.

**Keywords:** career services; career practitioners; competency; information and communication technology; phenomenography; social media

The exponentially increasing use of social media across the career service sector has placed an increasing demand upon career practitioners' ability to be innovative and to take advantage of and fashion novel career service delivery formats with online technologies (e.g. Hooley, Hutchinson, & Watts, 2010a, 2010b; Watts, 2010). In career services, social media is fast becoming as much a necessity as an opportunity and competency to work in this new mode is an area of increasing importance. To many, social media is simply a collection of online tools used to share information, communicate and socialise with one another. In the broader sense, social media is defined as a process in which individuals and groups develop common understandings and meanings with contents, communities and Web 2.0 technology (e.g. Ahlqvist, Bäck, Heinonen, & Halonen, 2010; Kolbitsch & Maurer, 2006). Thus, it primarily refers not to a particular set of technologies but to types of practices (Bonderup Dohn, 2009). In order to consider the usefulness and potential of existing and emerging technologies, it is essential that career practitioners be appropriately trained in this area (e.g. Bimrose, Hughes, & Barnes, 2011; Osborn, Dikel, & Sampson, 2011; Watts, 2010). There is an urgent need for competency training to be firmly grounded in a framework of career practice and for an emphasis to be placed on adopting a more developmental approach to capacity building (Bimrose, Barnes, & Atwell, 2010). It is also very likely that

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practitioners working in this area need to be trained differently than for the traditional face-to-face service mode (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013).

Considerable research has been conducted to identify the skills and competencies that practitioners require in order to use existing and emerging technologies in career services (e.g. Barnes, La Gro, & Watts, 2010; Barnes & Watts, 2009; Bimrose et al., 2010; CEDEFOP, 2009; Cogoi, 2005; Pyle, 2000). Careful consideration has also been given to ethical issues related to the use of technologies in career practice (e.g. Barak, 2003; Malone, 2007; Sampson, 2002, Sampson & Makela, 2014). According to Pyle (2000), the competencies needed for career practitioners using information and communications technology (ICT) in career service delivery include knowledge of computer-assisted software and websites, the ability to diagnose client needs, the ability to motivate clients, the ability to help clients process data and the ability to help clients create and implement an action plan. Cogoi (2005) identified three purposes for ICT in guidance, each of which might require practitioners to develop specialised/specific competences: as a resource, as a medium for communication and for material development. More recently, Barnes and Watts (2009) mapped ICT-related competences for guidance practitioners under two broad units: competence for using ICT to deliver guidance and competence for developing and managing the use of ICT in guidance. The first set of competences is comprised of using ICT to deliver guidance to meet clients' information needs, experiential learning needs, constructivist learning needs and communication needs. The second set of competences is comprised of not only developing the use of ICT-related guidance solutions but also managing the use of ICT-related solutions in a service context. Bimrose et al. (2010) emphasised that the skills and competences required for Internet-based career guidance need to be regarded as two separate but interrelated domains. One domain relates to the career practitioners' ICT user skills and competencies, while the other relates to more generic career guidance skills and competencies.

Recent studies have revealed that in career services, the models of career intervention and ways of experiencing and conceptualising social media appear to be intertwined (Kettunen, Vuorinen, & Sampson, 2013, in press). The findings indicate that if career field social media is to play an increasing role in career services, it is necessary to expand career practitioners' awareness of the varying models of career interventions with online technologies. However, no research has specifically analysed career practitioners' conceptions of competency for social media in career services. Throughout this article, the term competency will be used to refer to a combination of the relevant attributes that underlie the aspects of successful professional performance (Moore, Cheng, & Dainty, 2002).

## Aim and research questions

This phenomenographic study sought to examine the conceptions of competency for social media among career practitioners who have experience in using social media for career services. The main aim is to discover and describe the qualitatively different ways in which practitioners understand competency for social media in career services. The key research questions are as follows: (i) What are the career practitioners' conceptions of competency for social media in career services? and (ii) What are the critical aspects that differentiate qualitatively varying ways of understanding competency for social media? The ultimate aim of describing the variation is to expand the career practitioners and trainers understanding of critical aspects in the development and successful use of existing and emerging technologies in career services. The results may support and

provide an impetus for the development of pre-service and in-service training of career practitioners while also contributing towards quality assurance in training.

## Methods

This study examined the career practitioners' conceptions of competency for social media in career services using a phenomenographic approach (Åkerlind, 2005b, 2012; Marton, 1981, 1986; Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Pong, 2005). Phenomenography is a qualitative research approach that seeks to explore variations in how people experience or understand a particular phenomenon. The primary outcome of a phenomenographic analysis is a hierarchically structured set of logically related categories that describe, on a collective level, people's qualitatively different ways of experiencing or conceptualising the phenomenon in question (Marton, 1986). Marton and Booth (1997) emphasised that the categories of description should meet the following three quality criteria: each category should describe a distinctly different way of experiencing the phenomenon; a logical relationship between each category should be hierarchically represented; and there should be a limited, parsimonious number of different categories that describe the variation across the sample. The process used to ensure quality descriptions in this study is described in the data analysis section.

### Participants and the context of the study

The participants in this study were 16 Danish and Finnish career practitioners with experience using social media in career services. Of the 16 participants, 7 were from Denmark and 9 were from Finland. There were 10 females and 6 males, who represented the age range from 30 to 59 and whose career service experience ranges from 2 to 17 years. In keeping with phenomenographic techniques (Åkerlind, Bowden, & Green, 2005; Marton & Booth, 1997), variation within the participants was deliberately sought out in order to yield as much variation as possible in the understandings of competency for social media in career services. Emails inviting practitioners with experience using social media were sent to a variety of Finnish professional guidance bodies and training units. An email was also sent to eVejledning, a national eGuidance centre in Denmark that provides services via various virtual communication channels and social media settings. Experiences concerning the use of social media guided the identification and selection of the interviewees, and purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to ensure the use of information-rich cases with the potential to produce significant amounts of data relevant to the research investigation. In previous phenomenographic studies, it has been suggested that as long as the sample is selected so as to maximise variation, between 10 and 15 subjects is normally sufficient to capture the variation (Åkerlind, 2008; Trigwell, 2000). The study participants represent the guidance community from a variety of settings, including comprehensive, secondary and higher education, as well as public employment services in both urban and rural settings.

### Data collection

The data for the study were gathered using the focus group interview methodology (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999; Krueger, 1997a, 1997b, 1998). Because the aim of this study was to investigate a range of understandings of the same phenomenon, focus groups were considered an effective method for encouraging the

participants to express their thoughts and experiences through interacting with each other. Furthermore, focus groups were considered appropriate because phenomenographic research aims to capture collective rather than individual accounts of people's experience and understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Three focus groups, one in English with Danish career practitioners and two in Finnish with Finnish career practitioners, were conducted between February and May 2012. The focus group interviews were semi-structured and consisted of questions designed to direct the interviewees' focus towards the target phenomenon. The following five questions were asked: 'What is the role of the career practitioner in meeting career services goals?', 'What is the role of social media in career services?', 'What is career service like in social media?', 'What are the skills needed for social media in career services?' and 'How can social media be best utilised in career services?'. The interviews were informal and conversational, allowing the interviewees to discuss their current understandings of and experiences with the phenomenon as fully and openly as possible. Neutral follow-up questions were used to encourage the participants to elaborate on or clarify their responses, examples of which include the following: 'Could you tell a bit more about that?', 'Could you describe it/explain it a little further?' and 'Could you give an example of it?' were used to encourage the participants to elaborate on or clarify their responses. When asking follow-up questions, the facilitator was careful to avoid leading the practitioners' responses. Digital recordings of the focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

### Data analysis

Phenomenographic data analysis strategies vary (Åkerlind, 2005b, 2012). Bowden (1995, 2000b) has advocated for transcript analysis, whereas Marton (1986, 1994) has utilised segments from transcripts and preferred to explore smaller section analysis. The approach taken in this study followed the guidelines and examples offered by Åkerlind (2005a, 2005b), Bowden (2000a), Bowden and Green (2010) and Marton (1986), and sought to consider the transcripts as a whole. The purpose of using the entire transcripts or large sections of each transcript was to increase the accuracy of the interpretation of the answers (Åkerlind et al., 2005).

The first phase of the analysis focused on identifying and describing the career practitioners' ways of understanding competency for social media in general terms. Repeated reading afforded greater familiarisation with the data, and by focusing on the similarities and differences in the expressed meanings cases of variation or agreement were identified and grouped accordingly. Gradually, by comparing similarities and contrasting differences, a draft set of descriptive categories for collective meanings was developed, defined and named.

The second phase of the analysis focused on delineating the logical relationships and the structure between the various categories. Common themes of variation in the career practitioners' ways of understanding competency for social media were identified and used to structure the logical relationships both within and between the categories (Åkerlind, 2005a). The aim was to reveal variation among the key aspects in terms of how one way of seeing a phenomenon differs from another, more complex one (Åkerlind, 2005a; Marton & Booth, 1997).

To ensure a robust analysis of the interview data, the data were first analysed by the first author, and then, a second opinion was sought from research colleagues with whom the first author met several times in order to discuss and revise the categories and their

structures. This was done in an attempt to ensure that each category would confirm the validity of the interpretations of the data. Iterative re-reading and redrafting continued until saturation occurred, that is, until the re-reading no longer produced any significant change in the categories of description (Bowden & Green, 2010).

## Results

The analysis of the data revealed four distinct categories of description reflecting the career practitioners' conceptions of competency for social media in career services (Table 1). Each category adds to or deepens the previous category. Competency for social media in career services was conceived as (i) an ability to use social media for delivering information, (ii) an ability to use social media for delivering career services, (iii) an ability to utilise social media for collaborative career exploration and (iv) an ability to utilise social media for co-careering. The formed categories were nested in hierarchies expanding from the least understanding to the most complex understanding. The phenomenal aspects differentiating the categories are known as dimensions of variation. They comprise the critical aspects for expanding a more sophisticated or complete level of understanding. These dimensions were named: *approach to social media, function of social media in career services, online skills, ethical principles* and *personal characteristics*.

Table 1.   Career practitioners' conceptions of competency for social media in career services.

| | CATEGORIES | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DIMENSIONS OF VARIATION | Ability to use social media for delivering information | Ability to use social media for delivering career services | Ability to use social media for collaborative career exploration | Ability to use social media for co-careering |
| Approach to social media | Technology focused | Content focused | Pedagogically focused | Systemically focused |
| Function of social media in career services | Means for delivering information | Medium for one-to-one communication | Interactive working space | Impetus for paradigm change and reform |
| Online skills | Media literacy | Online writing | Online discourse | Online presence |
| Ethical principles | Accuracy validity | Privacy | Confidentiality | Professional proficiency |
| Personal characteristics | Motivated | Patient | Confident | Innovative |

Each category is described in more detail below. Excerpts from relevant interview transcripts are included to illustrate the key aspects of each category. It should be noted that this categorisation represents collective conceptions of competency rather than individual conceptions of competency for social media in career services. Thus, at an individual level, some practitioners hold more than one conception of a given phenomenon.

### Description of the categories

*Category 1: Competency for social media in career services is an ability to use social media for delivering information*

In the first category, competency for social media is conceived as an ability to use social media for delivering information. The practitioners' approach to social media is *technology focused*, meaning that emphasis is placed on the operational understanding of various social media tools and ways of using these tools as a *means for delivering information*:

> We have to know how social media tools, sharing and 'likes' work. I am talking about Facebook, but also Google+ and the other ones.

Practitioners regard *media literacy* as a key online skill for social media use. In this category, they emphasise that the ability to be an active and safe participants in social media requires proficiency in locating, evaluating and using various types of online content and services in a critical and active manner. Furthermore, the ability to support individuals in this area is highlighted:

> Because career practitioners need to obtain an awful lot of timely information, I'd say that having good media literacy is kind of like general knowledge, all-around education.

> You can find so much information from the Internet, but if you don't know which of them to pick from, then you'll just be lost.

Practitioners express ethical concerns about the *accuracy* and *validity* of information, especially with respect to the information they present and share online. Practitioners anticipate that their professionalism is more easily questioned or challenged in open social media settings and they highlight the importance of the professional tone and accuracy of information:

> You have to balance with making good posts and being right all the time.

> I asked some of my colleagues before I posted it; yes, I had to feel sure that it was all right.

Personal *motivation* is considered to be a key factor for adaptation and participation in social media. Practitioners state that interest in experiencing and participating in social media is essential in order to learn what does and what does not work in social media settings:

> Technical know-how, it is not a threshold question … I mean that if there is motivation, for sure one will manage.

*Category 2:Competency for social media in career services is an ability to use social media for delivering career services*

In the second category, competency for social media is conceived as an ability to use social media for delivering career services. The approach to social media is now *content focused*, meaning that emphasis is placed on content-centred communication and ways of

using social media not just for delivering information but also as *a medium for one-to-one communication*:

> It is not the [social media] technology that is the main role; I mean that we should be using it in such a way that the content rises in the focus.

Practitioners regard *online writing* as being a key skill for social media use. They emphasise that the ability to be a versatile writer and develop a style that meets the needs of the individuals they are trying to reach or serve requires various types of writing skills and a readiness to do things in new ways. Furthermore, thoughtful and careful word usage is highlighted because the interpretation of the meaning, intent and tone might rely solely on the typed words:

> In terms of online writings skills, I mean that you must be able to write with such a language in there [social media] that you will be taken seriously. Literary language may not quite be the thing.

> The power of [typed] words and the attitudes that come across there [social media] such as the choice of words, do I call myself 'unemployed' or am I "between jobs?" Oh, well, I do reflect upon these things.

In this category, practitioners' ethical concerns extended from the accuracy and validity of information to *privacy* issues in social media. Practitioners are especially concerned with ensuring that communication with individuals is protected to the degree they desire. The importance of understanding the privacy provisions and privacy settings of various social media tools is highlighted. Additional concerns exist regarding the line between personal and professional lives, which might get blurred in social media settings:

> You have to also be aware of the risks, like the issues that we discuss with individuals, with students, they are very private and if that would go public, I mean, it could do a lot of harm.

Practitioners express that the implementation of social media is an ongoing process that requires not only motivation but also *patience* and perseverance. Experimenting with and integrating social media is a step-by-step process, and it takes time to establish a positive awareness before individuals find and engage with career services:

> Conducting career services in social media requires patience.

> One has to understand that it is not sealed and delivered at once but continues to evolve over time.

### Category 3: Competency for social media in career services is an ability to utilise social media for collaborative career exploration

In this third category, competency for social media is conceived as an ability to utilise social media for collaborative career exploration. The practitioners' approach to social media is *pedagogically focused*, meaning that emphasis is placed on the methods, techniques and activities that foster collaborative processes in career learning among peer group members. While in the previous categories social media functioned merely as an

alternative channel, here practitioners perceive social media as an *interactive working space* and an integral part of career services:

> You need to be able to break the content into smaller segments and it is about making it a process, and then individuals can create content and contribute.

> And at its best we are able to get the students to reflect on their own views and by doing so they become producers of information themselves.

> So, if you are good at this, you'll have the capability to make something so interesting that other people will like to share it: the questions or the answers.

Practitioners in this category regard *online discourse* as being a key skill for social media use. They emphasise that the ability to generate and maintain an engaging and constructive online discussion with individuals and groups requires appropriate structuring and active facilitation in terms of guiding and shaping the discourse. Furthermore, the practical understanding of the methods for enhancing participation and interaction in online discourse is highlighted:

> To my mind, skills for online discourse and know-how for the interpretation of the online discussions are also strongly needed.

> You don't feed facts. You ask questions. So, actually, we should be very good at doing social media.

Practitioners have ethical concerns related to *confidentiality.* The importance of preserving confidentiality while creating maximum value from the utilisation of social media is highlighted. Especially when working with a group, emphasis is placed on ensuring that participants understand and respect the confidentiality of the other group members:

> You must be able to build a certain level of confidentiality so that they dare to share their thoughts. It seems to me kind of like a key factor at the start or otherwise the group won't function so well.

Practitioners state that establishing a presence and voice in social media requires personal *confidence*. The willingness to throw oneself into an open social media space, share information and participate in online discourse takes courage:

> You need confidence to do things in social media.

> You need courage. It is important. Your counselling competence can be questioned at any time. That's new.

*Category 4*: *Competency for social media in career services is an ability to utilise social media for co-careering*

   In this fourth category, competency for social media is conceived as an ability to utilise social media for co-careering where shared expertise and meaningful co-

construction on career issues take place with and among community members. The practitioners approach to social media is *systemically focused*, meaning that emphasis is placed on rethinking the organisational culture of career services, as well as the ideology and methods of practice and training. Unlike in previous categories, social media now functions as an *impetus for paradigm change and reform* in career services:

> This is also changing the rules: career services can't make social media behave as career services would like it to. Instead, career services have to change the way career services works so that it will work through social media. That is a big challenge because we have to rethink the whole idea of career services.

Practitioners regard *online presence* as being a key factor and skill for social media use. They emphasise that the ability to project oneself as reliable and real in communities where shared expertise and meaningful co-construction regarding career issues are present requires a cognisant, properly managed and monitored online presence. Furthermore, the practical understanding of methods and strategies for enhancing the sense of being with others and being present via an online medium is highlighted:

> I think that in social media you have to put in significantly more effort to be present and 'switched-on' than in live meetings.

> And presence in social media, it has to do with understanding how to behave there in such a way that you are treated as an equal and reliable.

In this category, practitioners ethical reflections and concerns moved from privacy and confidentially issues to *professional proficiency* in open social media settings. Practitioners highlight the importance of ensuring that work-related activities in open social media settings come across as professional. The emphasis is placed on well-structured and well-thought-out professional goals and strategies that fit those goals:

> I perceive that part of professionalism is that before you go there [social media] you know what you are and what you want to bring out through this forum.

Practitioners state that the utilisation of social media requires an *innovative* approach. Due to the collaborative and social nature of social media, practitioners must reframe their practice and both invent and design new ways of doing things:

> We need to create a completely new way of thinking in there [social media]

### Relationship between the categories

The categories of description were distinguished from each other and organised hierarchically through dimensions of variation that emerged from the data. Due to the structural hierarchy of inclusiveness, some conceptions can be seen as more complete and more complex than others (Åkerlind, 2005a).

The career practitioners' *approach to social media* changed across the categories of description. In Category 1, where competency for social media is conceived of as an ability to use it for delivering information, the distinct difference in relation to other

categories was the *technology focused* approach to social media. A shift from technology to a *content-focused* approach was discerned in Category 2, where competency for social media is conceived as an ability to use it for delivering career services. A turning point occurred in Category 3. This marked a change in approach as the emphasis shifted from being mainly technology focused and content focused to being *pedagogically focused*. In the most complex category, where competency for social media is conceived as an ability to utilise it for co-careering, a shift to a *systemically focused* approach was discerned.

In terms of the *function of social media in career services*, the transition across the categories was from the *means for delivering information* to an *impetus for paradigm change and reform*. The most distinct difference between Category 1 and the other categories was that social media functioned merely as a *means for delivering information*, while in the more complex categories, the viability of social media as an alternative communication channel and working space was also emphasised. A change from emphasising the information transmission function to viewing social media as a *medium for one-to-one communication* was discerned in Category 2, where competency for social media is conceived as an ability to use it for delivering career services. A turning point was again seen in Category 3, as it marked a shift in the function of social media from being an alternative information and communication channel to being an *interactive working space*. A significant shift where social media began to function as an *impetus for paradigm change and reform* in career services was discerned in Category 4, where competency for social media is regarded as an ability to utilise it for co-careering.

Shifts in *online skills* appeared as transitions from media literacy to an online presence. In Category 1, *media literacy*, the ability to locate, evaluate and use various types of online content and services in a critical and active manner was considered to be a prerequisite skill for social media activity, whereas in Category 2, versatile *online writing* skills with a style that meets the individuals' needs were emphasised since the interpretation of the meaning, intent and tone may rely solely on the typed words. In Category 3, where competency for social media is conceived as an ability to utilise it for collaborative career exploration, online skills are extended to participating in *online discourse*, which requires appropriate structuring and active facilitation in terms of guiding and shaping constructive discourse. In the most complex category, the emphasis was placed on *online presence* skills.

*Ethical principles* regarding the use of social media varied across the categories. In Category 1, where competency for social media is conceived as an ability to use it for delivering information, the ethical concerns relate to *accuracy and validity* in obtaining and sharing information online. In Categories 2 and 3, where competency for social media is regarded as an ability to use it for delivering career services and collaborative career exploration, the ethical concerns shifted to *privacy* (Category 2) and *confidentiality* (Category 3) issues in social media. In the most complex category, ethical reflections and concerns moved to those regarding *professional proficiency* in open social media settings.

The *personal characteristics* of practitioners who work with and in social media were characterised differently in all categories. In the least complex categories, the identifiable characteristics were *motivation* (Category 1) and *patience* (Category 2). Being *confident* was defined as a key characteristic in Category 3, where competency for social media is conceived as an ability to utilise it for collaborative career exploration. In the most complex category, where competency for social media is conceived as an ability to utilise it for co-careering, *innovative* behaviours and characteristics were emphasised.

## Discussion

This study identified career practitioners' different ways of understanding competency for social media in career services in four distinct categories of description that ranged from an ability to use social media for delivering information to an ability to utilise social media for co-careering where shared expertise and meaningful co-construction on career issues take place with and among community members. Five dimensions of variation were identified: approach to social media, function of social media in career services, online skills, ethical principles and personal characteristics.

The findings show similarities with earlier studies on competencies required by career practitioners to use ICT in career services; however, this study's results also provide some new insights into those discussions. The main similarities with earlier studies (e.g. Barnes & Watts, 2009) can be found in the results from the first three categories, where the conceptions of competency for social media in career services include the ability to deliver information and career services, as well as collaborative career exploration. That finding is also in accordance with Cogoi's (2005) earlier observation that guidance practitioners may require competences for using ICT as a resource, as a medium for communication and for material development. The most complex category in this study revealed an additional competency, an ability to utilise social media for co-careering, which has not previously been discussed. In this category, the systemically focused approach to social media was first articulated; social media became an impetus for paradigm change and reform, and the emphasis was placed on methods and strategies for creating a cognisant, properly managed and monitored online presence. The findings also further support the observations regarding ethical issues related to the use of technologies in career practice (e.g. Sampson & Makela, 2014) and Bimrose et al.'s (2010) notion that the career practitioners' ICT user skills and competencies, as well as their more generic career guidance skills and competencies, need to be regarded as two separate but interrelated domains.

The findings of this study show that competency for social media in career services is not only about a particular set of new skills. Success in developing competency for social media in career services is a dynamic combination of cognitive, social, emotional and ethical factors that are interwoven. On the basis of our findings, we argue that it is important to develop pre-service and in-service training of career practitioners and support for deepening their competency for social media by using the critical aspects identified in this study. There is an urgent need for both the pre-service and in-service training curricula to be updated to include this knowledge. Career practitioners and trainers should recognise the variety that exists in understanding competency for social media in career services and they should understand the critical differences between their current conceptions and the more advanced ways of conceptualising competency that they can potentially move towards. A major task in training is to bring about learning experiences that provide practitioners with the opportunity to discern the critical aspects needed for expanding both their practical and conceptual understandings of competency in the use of social media. The hierarchical structure of the findings can serve as a pedagogical tool for trainers of career practitioners, enabling them to ground and convert these new competences in the future practice and continuous development in it. This is crucial if career practitioners are to successfully adjust to the paradigm shift in career services that is emerging along with the current use of social media (Kettunen et al., in press). This topic, like the reaffirmation or revision of the role of guidance, is needed

within training. Further research and experimentation regarding the pedagogical use of the results are needed.

## Acknowledgements

## Notes on contributors

Jaana Kettunen works as a researcher at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research of the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her current research focuses on social media in career services and aspects that are seen as critical in the successful use of these new technologies in career services.

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**NEW TECHNOLOGIES** and social media offer important opportunities for improving career services. However, they also create demand for new competency among career practitioners.

This study presents an overarching examination of career practitioners' varying conceptions of social media and competency for social media in career services. Knowledge of such variation can support successful use of social media in career services by informing theory, practice, and training in the field. The study addresses practical and policy implications, as well as directions for future research.

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