

# Intercultural Career guidance

Guidelines for First Contact  
Internal Version

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# 1 What Happens Before Career guidance

Even before the actual career guidance starts, there are factors which contribute to the decision whether career guidance takes place at all. "The shorter the application procedure, the more direct the connection to the native career guidance officer, the more personal the clarification of the rules of career guidance, the easier one was able to ask questions, the simpler the step to the initial interview" (Demmer-Gaite/ Friese 2004, 199). A few concrete ideas for establishing contact can be derived from this statement:

- An easy, transparent application procedure, best with a secretarial assistant with knowledge of the clients' native tongue
- Short waiting periods and "open office hours", i.e. opportunities to get to know the potential career guidance officer on an informal basis. It would also be possible to arrange events involving the clients' parents to facilitate informal talks.
- Good accessibility of the respective career guidance centre and directions written in multiple languages or at least in simple words with drawn directions (cf. *ibid.*)

Getting into contact via telephone deserves special attention, since potential clients might only have a vague idea of what career guidance actually is, e.g. if comparable institutions or troubleshooting strategies do not exist in their home country. However, the consultants might also be concerned with a variety of fears: "Where did we go wrong? Who of our relatives might be dishonoured or imperilled if we talk about such intimate things? Will information be passed on to the aliens' authority, the employer, or the police? Are we allowed to confide secrets to a stranger who might be a member of another religion?" (von Schlippe 2004, 79)

These concerns should be addressed in a natural way "Many people who come here ask themselves..." In order to relieve pressure and to provide space for decisions, career guidance officers as well as secretarial assistants should emphasize that the decision on further steps will only be made after an initial interview. The status of the institution should also be clarified during the first contact (as opposed to agency, hospital with respective implications – e.g. costs, registration, anonymity).

Important questions for first contact via telephone are:

- "What is it about
- Who do you live with, what are the respective names, who should be invited? ...
- What about comprehension? Is there need for an interpreter?
- Scheduled appointments, financial rules if necessary ...
- Address and call-back number
- Assure discretion
- Anything else can be discussed later." (von Schlippe 2004, 101-102).

## 2 Initial Interviews in Intercultural Context

Career guidance takes place between two poles: stability (clear general agreements, reliability) and instability (uncertainty because of changes brought about by career guidance, requires courage, but also causes fear) (von Schlippe 2004, 76). This is why the creation of a trustful atmosphere is important. It has to provide the basis for a kind of communication in which participants understand each other. This process is also called "joining," as it seeks to join career guidance officers to the system of consultants.

There are certain peculiarities in intercultural career guidance, since the common basic understanding about which rules “fit” communication has to be developed first and thus cannot be taken for granted. This concerns such simple things as eye contact: “Is it alright if a male therapist directly looks and smiles at a woman in the presence of her husband? Is it correct that the same thing can be performed by a female therapist without trouble – however, only as long as she does not smile at the husband? What does it mean if a friendly glance is not returned? When is it appropriate to emphasize communication by means of physical contact, a phenomenon that – among men! – occurs in many Arabic cultures, and when would this be considered a blatant faux pas?” (ibid.) The approach to problems can be different as well, e.g. open questions are permitted/proscribed, personal recounts are desirable/undesirable. Behaviour towards strangers or authorities, respectively, is likewise to be addressed, or else participants come to an understanding of misunderstanding which is derived from such rules of communication like “to object is impolite”, or “a kind nod signals understanding” (Eberding 2004, 96).

Joining is not only about the organisation of communication but also about uncovering the respective identity. Different means can be used in order to achieve this: e.g. by showing one’s origin on a large world map, showing symbols, singing songs or by bringing along or preparing food.

However, cultural localisation also poses the challenge to confront cultural stereotypes, since stereotypes, be they positive or negative, have to be reckoned with on both sides. Both parties are influenced by this or the expectation of certain stereotypes the other party (presumably) has. In this case it is important to address this issue and ask if a certain expectation is met in order to arrive at a discussion about the actual reality. For example: “One may formulate a stereotype and ask if it applies to the family: ‘My concept of Turkish families is that women have little or nothing to say. Is this the case in your family?’ Likewise one can ask which stereotypes the family has already been confronted with, even which stereotypes they themselves have concerning German interlocutors.” (von Schlippe 2004,89)

The genogram might already be of use in the initial interview. It sheds light on family constellations as well as the extended family which can be important. The question arises whether relatives should be included to anchor the solution within the family, or if one-on-one interviews would prove to be more useful at the beginning, since conflict-laden topics can rather be addressed in this constellation.

### 3 Language

Native language career guidance officers would be preferable – however, this is a service that only few information centres offer and that cannot cover all languages. That is why the consultation of interpreters in career guidance situations would be appropriate. The process of translation has a momentum of its own which should also be considered.

- *Not just literal translation but with consideration of figurative meaning.* The Turkish language, for example, allows for different translations of the expression “to be ill”. There is a “I am ill” in the somatic sense, a “my soul is bored” for psychological causes of disease such as “anxiety, anger, sullenness”, a “I am ill” “in terms of feeling agitated, uneasy, indisposed with an exterior cause”, a “my morale is broken”, which expresses “sadness, lack of perspective, and psycho-social conflicts”. Furthermore, there are a number of metaphorical expressions like “rotten liver”, which represent specific concepts of disease that are further

affected by region and gender. This example shows that it is not just about mere "translation" and that the difficulty of understanding is much more profound. (Kronsteiner 195, 178)

- *No translation via family members or kitchen or cleaning staff.* It happens frequently that other relatives (especially children, or, in the case of women, their husbands) are drawn on due to a different form of language acquisition. This involves specific problems, since children and juveniles are confronted with problems that are not age-specific. In addition to the question whether they are able to translate correctly in terms of content (since they do not (yet) possess the respective experiences), children and juveniles will not translate questions about subjects causing them or their parents to feel embarrassed. Personal consternation might confuse untrained persons unknown to the family and cause them to provide inadequate translations.
- *Considering the special constellation with interpreters.* Difficult subjects might not be broached in the presence of an interpreter of the opposite sex. During an interview, the interpreting person should be seated next to the client in order to enable eye contact. (von Schlippe 2004, 80-83)

## 4 Concrete Advice for First Contact and Interview

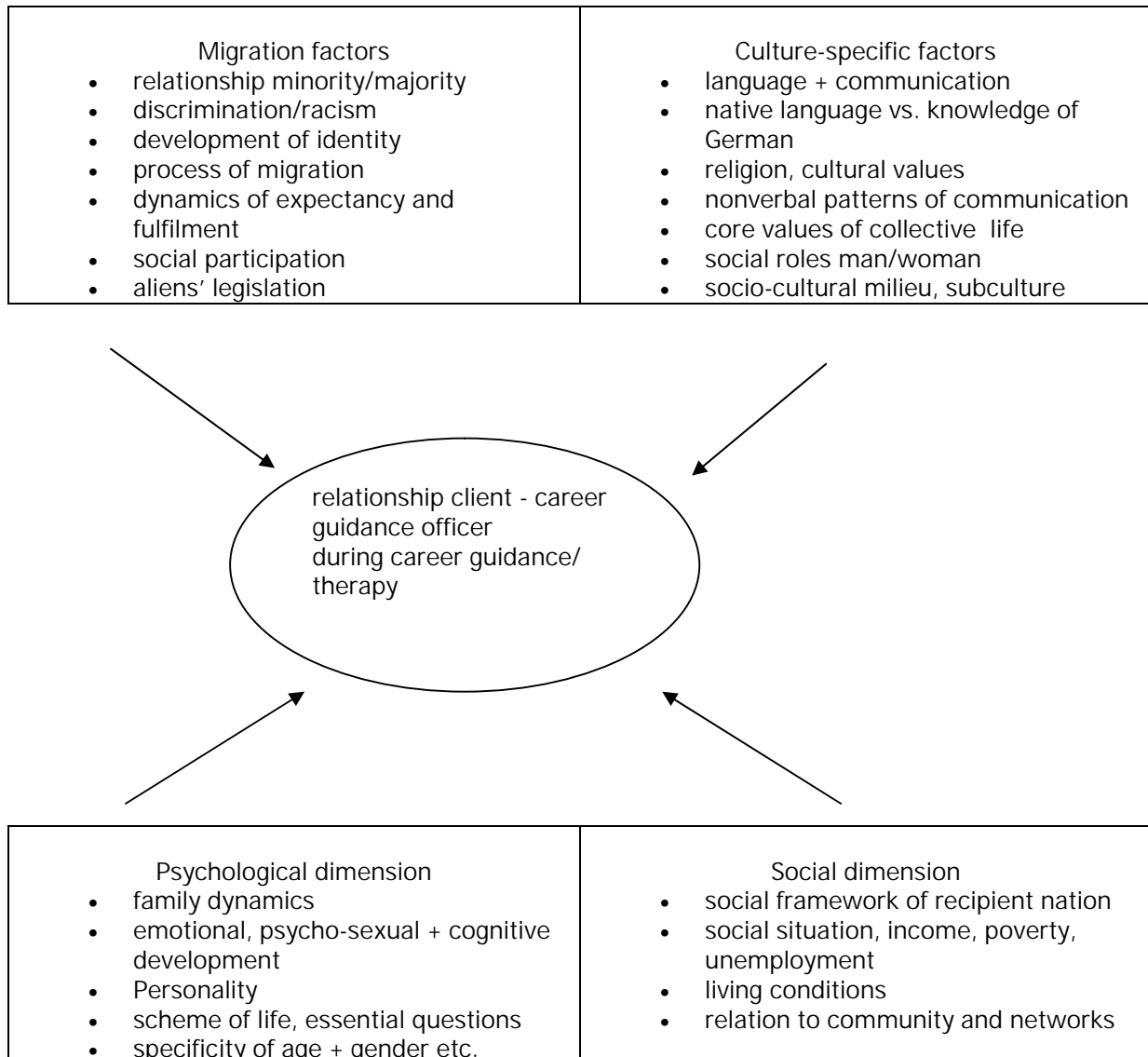
The following list provides a chronological overview of relevant topics in the course of an initial meeting.

- **Preparation** (Developing an awareness of first hypotheses, images, fantasies, experiences concerning the clients' culture, the context of establishing contact, parallels to personal history and possible migrational experiences)
- **Contact phase**
  - Part 1
    - "Reducing tension, creating relief, anchoring" (reception, ask for name and precise pronunciation, create informal contact to daily routine)
    - "Exchange information about the family's country of origin", clarify competence of respective language, if the family has lived in a town or the country, what social stratum they belong to, convey appreciation)
  - Part 2
    - "Clarification of framework" (time, expectations, problem definition by each person, "Discussing expectations of clients",
    - Role of institution "Who would you have contacted in your home country with this problem? What sort of support do you think you would have received?"
- **Interview phase** ("Gathering information", use genogram, "clarification of migrational history: who came first, who followed? Who came willingly/unwillingly?", perceive the system, allow communication among each other, permit different perspectives, circular and direct questions, "Defocusing", "offer new frames of reference"
- **"Contracting phase"** (Ask about contentment, or what could provide contentment, what could be further attended to, who should be present at the next meeting – could also be achieved symbolically by an empty chair, ask whether clients could imagine a second initial meeting, clarify formal issues (e.g. room, time, money, participants, possible homework)

- **Conclusion** (clear ending, determine unmentioned topics, repeat arrangements, maybe also in written form, parting according to the custom of the country)
- **Evaluation** (protocol, flow of ideas, hypotheses, create genogram, write down arrangements, discussion) (von Schlippe 2004 102- 105)

## 5 Case Analysis: What Is It About?

First contact focuses on the analysis of the case, condensed in the question “what is it about?” The challenge of intercultural career guidance is to grasp the meaning of migration as well as culture-specific factors, psychological, and social dimensions instead of attributing problems to one factor only. A further aspect is the specific dynamic of the career guidance line-up (sex, origin, career guidance officers and clients’ age). The following chart illustrates this situation.



Model of multidimensional case analysis according to Demmer-Gaite, Friese 2004

## 6 Further Reading

Further literature on intercultural communication or intercultural social work, respectively, is more numerous in areas like public health, education, and management. Comparatively little reading exists on career guidance and social work in areas like occupation. Nevertheless, here are some suggestions: Kumbier/Schulz von Thun 2006, Kumbruck/Derboven 2004, Baumer 2002, Fischer/Springer 2005, Freise 2005, Götz 2003, Hegemann /Lenk-Neumann 2002, Thomas 2003, Treichler/Cyrus 2004.

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