

## Using Cognitive Information Processing within Career Services

Cognitive information processing builds upon the work of researchers who share a common paradigm. Like behaviorists, CIP theorists are concerned with observable behaviors. Unlike behaviorists, they use those behaviors to make inferences about underlying mental processes that are not directly observable. The choice of a CIP-centered model is to help students make appropriate career choices now, while also teaching improved problem-solving and decision-making skills for their futures.

Career problems tend to be complex with many factors such as the economy, the labor market, the availability of educational and training opportunities, and family issues interacting with the student's personal values, interests, skills, and financial resources. Often an individual is overwhelmed with cues, some distinct and some ambiguous, that a career problem exists that needs solving. For example, a two-career couple who are balancing career and relationship issues during their final year in college may hear numerous and conflicting messages from friends, family, college faculty and staff, and potential employers. They may likely perceive that they have career conflicts that need to be solved.<sup>1</sup>

With career problems, there is rarely one correct solution. Several possible solutions typically exist, each offering distinct and often overlapping advantages and disadvantages. For example, a college student, who has the ultimate goal of establishing his own clothing business, could major in fashion design, management, or many other fields and still achieve his goal. The routes to achieving this goal may vary, but the ultimate goal could still be achieved.

In addition, there is no guarantee that the choice of a college, occupation, or job will ensure success and satisfaction. A student who has chosen to become an Emergency Medical Technician may have been admitted to a training program and may have been encouraged by teachers, parents, and peers to make this choice. There is no guarantee, however, that she will graduate and find a job in her field or be satisfied being an Emergency Medical Technician. She needs to make the best informed choice possible and then commit herself to exerting her best effort to maximize her chances of success.

Major career decisions often present new set of problems that must be solved to make the initial decision effective. For example, the decision to attend a community college brings forth a new set of issues related to financing, transportation, living arrangements, and the establishing of new peer relationships. It is unlikely that all of the subsequent problems can be known or anticipated. Thus, in order to be effective career problem solvers and decision makers, we need to develop the capability for effectively locating and processing relevant information. Applying the CIP paradigm to career problem solving helps instructional and advising staff support student career development because the model reinforces informed career planning, choice, and reflective planning skills.

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<sup>i</sup> Adapted from: Sampson, J. P., Jr., Peterson, G. W., Lenz, J. G., & Reardon, R. C. (1992). A cognitive approach to career services: Translating concepts into practice. *Career Development Quarterly, 41*, 67-74. Copyright © National Career Development Association.