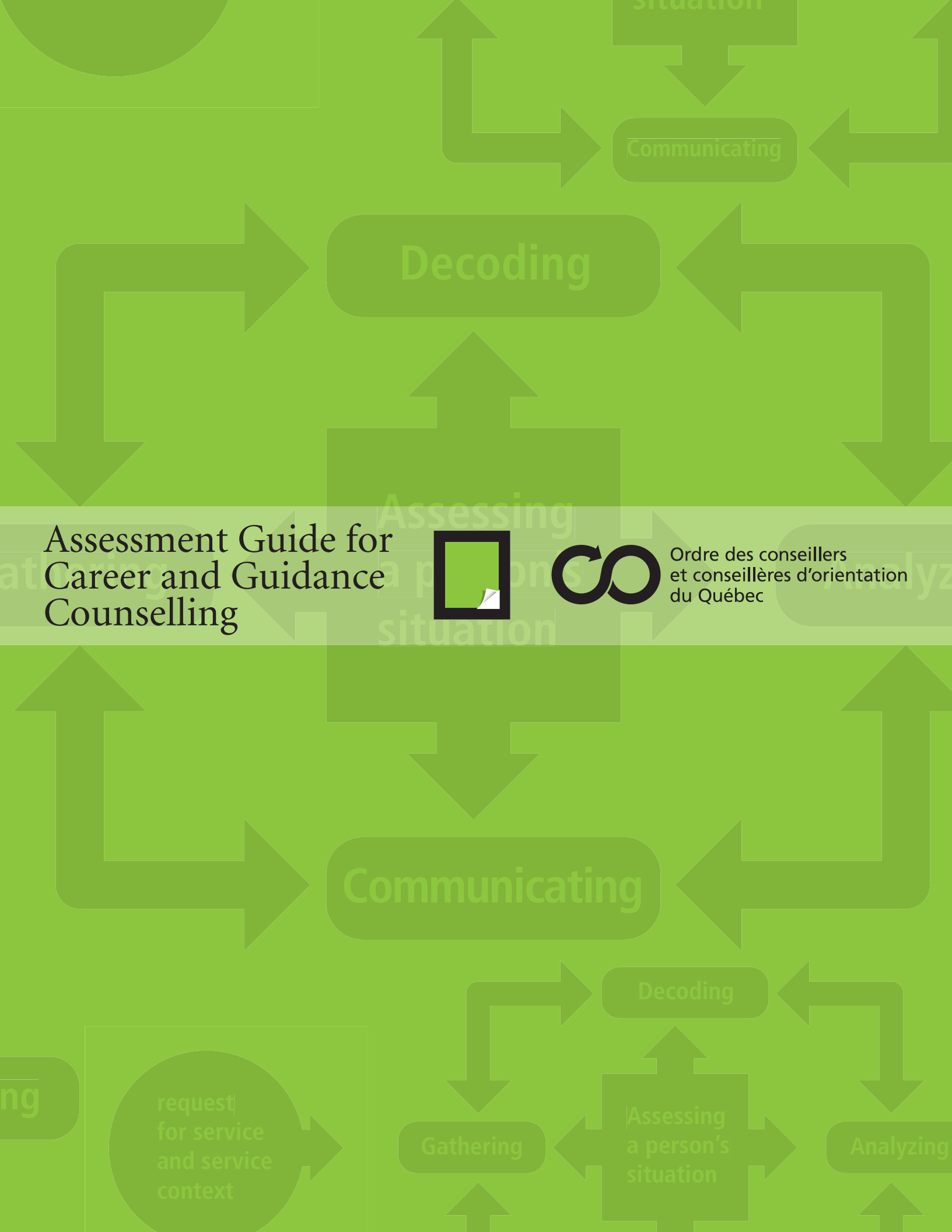


# Assessment Guide for Career and Guidance Counselling



Ordre des conseillers  
et conseillères d'orientation  
du Québec



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# Introduction and word to the reader

Assessment activities are key components of career and guidance counsellor practice, regardless of their specific area of activity. In view of the modernization of professional practices in the mental health and human relations sectors and the revised scopes of practice, the *Ordre des conseillers et conseillères d'orientation du Québec* (OCCOQ<sup>1</sup>) produced this Guide to offer career and guidance counsellors a frame of reference for assessment practices. This includes information as well as guiding principles to help clarify career and guidance counsellor assessment practices. Readers should keep the following points in mind:

- The Guide provides career and guidance counsellors with a general frame of reference to help delineate all aspects of the assessment and evaluation process and associated issues.
- The Guide seeks to clarify professional assessment and evaluation practices without specific reference to a particular conceptualization or approach, in order to respect counsellor theoretical choice.
- The Guide also aims to contribute to the maintenance and development of career and guidance counsellor knowledge and skills within their scope of practice and in relation to the legal foundations of their practice.
- The Guide deals with career and guidance counsellor assessment practices. It should not be confused with the interpretation guide for the *Loi modifiant le code des professions et d'autres dispositions législatives dans le domaine de la santé mentale et des relations humaines* (An Act to amend the Professional Code and other legislation in the mental health and human relations sectors)<sup>2</sup>.

This Guide is comprised of four sections. Section 1 addresses assessment as an essential feature of career and guidance counsellor practice. It is specifically concerned with how assessment contributes to professional judgment within a scope of practice, to knowledge and skills, to reserved activities of career and guidance counsellors and to ethical responsibilities. Section 2 defines assessment in regards to three main dimensions of scope of practice: psychological functioning, personal resources, and environmental conditions. Section 3 introduces the process of assessment, which is defined as involving four steps: gathering, decoding, analyzing and communicating information. Finally, Section 4 raises some considerations that allow career and guidance counsellors to better situate themselves in relation to the role of assessment in the context of career and guidance counselling.

<sup>1</sup> The OCCOQ is Québec's professional order (college) of career and guidance counsellors. All practising career and guidance counsellors in the province of Québec must be members of the Order.

<sup>2</sup> Reflecting legislation currently in effect, this Guide uses the term "Bill 21."

# Assessment: a professional responsibility

Assessment is part of the responsibilities laid out by the scope of practice for career and guidance counsellors, the reserved activities for career and guidance counsellors and the ethical guidelines. As such, assessment tasks are a recognized professional activity within the competencies of career and guidance counsellors.

## Assessment: scope of practice

Bill 21<sup>3</sup> identifies the specific scope of practice for career and guidance counsellors:

Assess psychological functioning, personal resources and the conditions of the milieu, respond to needs with regard to identity, and develop and maintain proactive adjustment strategies with a view to helping a person make personal and vocational choices throughout life, regain socio-vocational autonomy and carry out career projects in interaction with his environment.

This definition suggests that in order to empower individuals to make life-long personal and professional choices, to restore their socio-vocational autonomy and to achieve their career plans, career and guidance counsellors intervene on matters relating to the identity of human beings in interaction with their environment, so as to enable them to develop and maintain active coping strategies. To live up to their mandate, career and guidance counsellors must be able to simultaneously assess a person's psychological functioning, personal resources and environmental conditions.

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## Assessment: competency profile

Representing the cornerstone of career and guidance counsellors practice, the general competency profile also underpins OCCOQ's principal mission. In order to protect the public, the *Ordre* must be able to guarantee the competency of its members. The general competency profile therefore serves as a frame of reference to assess career and guidance counsellor initial training as well as to verify professional practices through general monitoring and special investigations. Members of the *Ordre* may also find the competency profile a useful tool for their own professional development. Although each of the six areas of competency covered in OCCOQ's general competency profile are relevant to assessment activities, this Guide specifically focuses on the area concerned with the rigorous assessment of a person's situation. Thus, it refers to the assessment of the following points:

3 National Assembly (2009). Bill 21. Loi modifiant le Code des professions et d'autres dispositions législatives dans le domaine de la santé mentale et des relations humaines. Introduced March 24, 2009; concept endorsed June 12, 2009; enacted June 10, 2009, and assented to June 19, 2009. Quebec Official Publisher, Government of Quebec.

- The request for help or the problem situation
- Individuals' psychological functioning, including their interests, abilities, and cognitive and affective functioning, taking into account the state of their mental health, including risk of suicide or homicide
- Normal functioning and pathological functioning taking into account psychological, social and physical factors
- Issues regarding the interaction between people and their environment
- Resources and limitations associated with the environment
- The person's situation based on appropriate theoretical and practical knowledge

## Assessment: reserved activities

4 The report of the *Comité d'experts pour la modernisation de la pratique professionnelle en santé mentale et en relations humaines* (report of the expert committee for modernizing professional practice in the mental health and human relations sectors)<sup>4</sup>, chaired in 2005 by Jean-Bernard Trudeau, identified guiding principles, proposed scopes of practice, and defined reserved and shared activities for the professions in the mental health and human relations sectors. Career and Guidance counsellors were invited to join this committee based on the criteria that a given professional activity can only be performed by persons possessing the required knowledge and skills. Indeed, career and guidance counsellor professional practice includes activities that carry a risk of harm; since their specialized training reflects the complexity of these activities, they are authorized to perform them. Bill 21 changed the scope of practice and reserved some activities that are also shared with other professionals. Section 1.3.1 of Bill 21 introduced four reserved activities to the career and guidance counselling profession:

- Assess a person suffering from a mental or neuropsychological disorder attested (validated) by the diagnosis or evaluation of an authorized professional
- Assess mental disorders, provided a training certificate has been issued to the member by the *Ordre* pursuant to a regulation under paragraph *o* of section 94
- Assess mental retardation
- Assess a handicapped student or a student with a social maladjustment with a view to formalizing an individualized education plan in accordance with the Education Act

4 *Partageons nos compétences. Modernisation de la pratique professionnelle en santé mentale et en relations humaines. Sommaire, Rapport du Comité d'experts.* (Sharing our skills: Modernizing professional practices in the mental health and human relations sectors. Summary report of the committee of experts). The document (in French) may be accessed at [www.opq.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/docs/PDF/Rapport-sante/Rapport\\_Sante-ment\\_Sommaire.pdf](http://www.opq.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/docs/PDF/Rapport-sante/Rapport_Sante-ment_Sommaire.pdf).

## Assessment: code of ethics

Career and guidance counsellor professional autonomy, along with its specific responsibilities, is legally recognized in Quebec. When performing assessments, career and guidance counsellors are required to remain within the boundaries of their competence and observe a strict code of ethics. Various sections in the *Code de déontologie* (Code of ethics) that deal with the quality of practice and competence explicitly mention assessment activities, for example:

- Members must practise their profession in keeping with good practice and the generally accepted standards of practice of the profession (Section 43).
- Members must ensure the quality of their professional services offered to the public, in particular, by ensuring that their level of competence is kept up to date, maintained and developed; by assessing the quality of their evaluations and actions; and by promoting education and information measures in the field in which they practise (section 44).
- Members must refrain from giving opinions, recommendations or advice that is contradictory or incomplete. To that end, members must endeavour to gain sufficient knowledge and understanding of the facts (Section 47).
- Members who produce a written or oral report must limit its content to the interpretations, findings and recommendations based on their professional expertise (section 48).

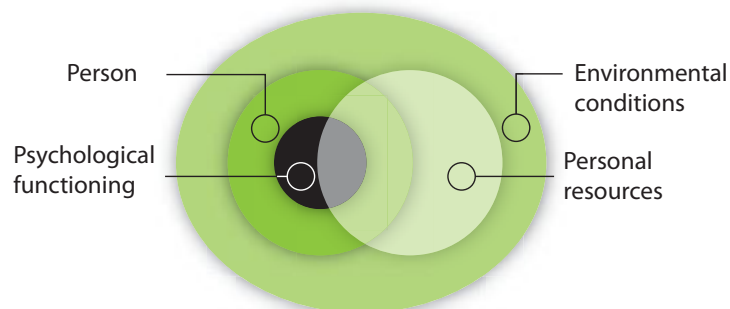
Professional judgment must be based on objectivity, relevance, and the ability to gain a comprehensive understanding of an individual and his or her situation. As such, when making judgments, career and guidance counsellors must demonstrate integrity, honesty, confidentiality, ethics, independence, respect for professional standards, perceptiveness, and critical thinking. The sections of the *Code* cited are a reminder of the ethical obligations that govern the assessment of a person's situation. To this end, in addition to developing rigorous practices concerning assessment activities, career and guidance counsellors must ensure their standards of practice are current and, when necessary, should pursue relevant further training. Furthermore, in their interventions, they must sustain their concern for ethical considerations throughout the assessment process. Professional judgment entails making decisions based on information collected by various methods, justifying the choice of methods used in relation to the objectives or intentions of the intervention, and sharing the results, in order to provide professionally expert help (training and experience).

## Assessment: defined

As defined in Bill 90<sup>5</sup>, assessment entails making a clinical judgment of a person's situation based on available data, and communicating the conclusions derived from this judgment. Professionals perform assessments in their respective scope of practice, and those practices that are reserved can only be performed by authorized professionals.

The assessment process includes the collection of information using various methods and tools that can be justified by the objectives of the intervention. Assessment also entails making a clinical judgment that appraises and appreciates a person's situation within a rigorous, comprehensive, and systematic framework. This makes it possible to share results and highlight relevant issues. Figure 1 below illustrates the structure of assessment in career and guidance counselling from the perspective of scope of practice.

**Figure 1** Assessment process in the context of the scope of practice of career and guidance counselling



For the purposes of this document, the assessment of a person's situation is organized into three areas: psychological functioning, personal resources, and environmental conditions. In the following sections, these three areas are presented in more detail.

## Psychological functioning<sup>6</sup>

In reference to the scope of practice, psychological functioning entails the consideration of a person's characteristics (for example, interests, values, abilities, personality traits), the dynamic organization of his or her experience (for example, beliefs, thoughts, emotions, behaviours), as well as the effects these have on everyday life (for example, self-regulation and self-help modalities, level of self-esteem and confidence, coping strategies). A person's psychological functioning is influenced by biological, psychological, and social factors. Assessing psychological functioning also involves considering the existence of mental or neuropsychological disorders, situations of disability, adjustment difficulties in educational or work environments, or other disorders that can be identified through recognized standards in mental health.

<sup>5</sup> Bill 90 (2002, Chapter 33). *Loi modifiant le Code des professions et d'autres dispositions législatives dans le domaine de la santé* (An Act to amend the Professional Code and other legislation in the health sector). National Assembly: Quebec Official Publisher.

<sup>6</sup> The scientific literature does not agree on a generally applicable definition of psychological functioning, which, in the absence of a theoretical basis, amounts to an approach or specific conceptual model. For pragmatic reasons, we propose the following definition of psychological functioning.



## Personal resources

In the context of the scope of practice, personal resources refer, among other things, to the person's knowledge and level of being informed about areas such as: self-awareness, knowledge of the labour market and available training options, and knowledge of available services and opportunities in a given context. Personal resources can also refer to skills and formal and informal knowledge acquired through experience at school or work, or through social involvement or any other personal activity. Furthermore, personal resources include the qualifications required for integration into certain school and work contexts: educational achievement, area of expertise, specialized qualifications, languages spoken, computer skills, certificates of qualification, etc. Finally, personal resources include physical and psychological health factors as well as sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, legal status, civil status, and marital, parental or family responsibilities. Financial resources and transportation may also be considered as personal resources.

Individuals develop, use and transfer personal resources in a range of situations throughout their personal, educational and professional career paths. They can mobilize personal resources in various ways and degrees and during different periods in their lives. In the case of persons with a diminished capacity, the mobilization of their personal resources can only be assessed on the basis of their remaining functional abilities.

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## Environmental conditions

In the context of the scope of practice, environmental conditions refer to the possibilities and constraints in relation to a person's situation. As such, it is important to understand a person's relationship with his or her environment. Individuals and their environment constantly influence each other in accordance with the actions and changes they or their environment perform. Whenever a person seeks a change, his or her psychological functioning and personal resources must be considered against the prevailing structural, economic, and specific conditions of his or her environment.

Environmental conditions relate to the intimate spaces in which a person maintains relations with family and friends, as well as their educational, professional or social groups and environments. These conditions exert influences that are dependent on the quality of contacts, shared interests, and the received values and role models that affect individual behaviour. Environmental conditions also include structural conditions, such as a person's socioeconomic status, his or her parents' levels of education and gainful activities, social representations of gender roles and other social stereotypes, and the characteristics associated with certain professions. In a wider sense, environmental conditions may also pertain to the structural and functional conditions that almost imperceptibly direct and control individual lives: economic situation, law and regulations, social and employment policies, culture and customs, conceptions of the role of work in an individual's life, labour market changes, technological developments, globalization, and the meaning associated with social belonging. Throughout their lives and in any given sociohistoric context, individuals construct

themselves and evolve, based on their personal experiences, circumstances, encounters, and significant personal, educational and professional transitions. All of these factors affect people’s environmental conditions, which in turn influence their choices, plans, coping strategies, and approaches to personal development, and therefore their educational and professional career paths.

Presented in Table 1 are some dimensions of psychological functioning, types of personal resources, and environmental conditions that can be discussed with individuals in a career and guidance counselling process.

**Table 1** Some of the indicators in the three areas of assessment

<b>Psychological functioning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temperament</li> <li>• Interests and values</li> <li>• Beliefs</li> <li>• Personality</li> <li>• Basic needs</li> <li>• Sensitivity</li> <li>• Self-esteem and confidence</li> <li>• Coping strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation</li> <li>• Locus of control</li> <li>• Assertiveness and self-expression</li> <li>• Plans and aspirations</li> <li>• Initiative, autonomy and responsibility</li> <li>• Rigor and discipline, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Personal resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-awareness</li> <li>• Life experiences, work experiences, educational experiences</li> <li>• Knowledge</li> <li>• Aptitudes, abilities, performance</li> <li>• Generic skills, people skills, technical skills</li> <li>• Formal and informal knowledge</li> <li>• Social contacts and networks</li> <li>• Social support</li> <li>• Physical and mental health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender, age, physical appearance, disability situation</li> <li>• Diplomas and specialized skills</li> <li>• Qualifications and certifications</li> <li>• Languages spoken</li> <li>• Driver’s license, transportation</li> <li>• Income and financial assets</li> <li>• Knowledge of the labour market</li> <li>• Knowledge of communication and information technologies, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental conditions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family, peer groups, colleagues at work or school, supervisors, teachers: values, norms, interpersonal relationship, various influences</li> <li>• Educational and employment opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sociocultural, institutional and organizational contexts</li> <li>• Economic conditions</li> <li>• Social, educational and employment policies</li> <li>• Other labour laws and regulations, etc.</li> </ul>

Due to the complex nature and dynamics of individuals, any assessment must take into account the interdependence between psychological functioning, personal resources and environmental conditions.

# Assessment: a process

As shown in the table below, the assessment process may occur at different points: **BEFORE**, at the **BEGINNING** of, **DURING**, at the **END** of, or even **AFTER** the counselling process. An assessment BEFORE the intervention can be performed to identify potential client resources and limitations in order to offer them specially tailored services. In such cases, assessments are often performed with psychometric instruments or interviews. In some cases, no subsequent counselling process is required, just a single assessment is conducted, for example, in the case of selecting someone for a job or program of study.

Performing an assessment at the **BEGINNING** of a career and guidance counselling intervention can serve to facilitate a person's self-exploration or professional exploration. Assessment at the **BEGINNING** also can serve as a reference point for gauging a person's progress towards achieving a specific goal.

**Tableau 2** Assessment process in the career and guidance counselling intervention

	Before	Beginning	During	End	After
Purpose-oriented assessment instruments (psychometric test, assessment interview, etc.)	Select someone for a job or course Identify resources and limitations in order to offer specially tailored services, etc.	Facilitate self-exploration Facilitate self-awareness Facilitate professional exploration, etc.	Organize self-awareness components Organize personal characteristics in order to identify professions or suggest jobs Progress follow-up (levels of indecision, motivation, self-esteem), etc.	Validate choices made Validate ability to achieve identified plan Validate ability to implement action plan, etc.	Assess effects of process Assess effects on psychological functioning Assess resources acquired, etc.

Systematic application of a purpose-oriented assessment process



Assessment is a systematic and ongoing process which inevitably requires that counsellors simultaneously perform all four activities in the course of their interventions with clients. In the following paragraphs, each of the four assessment phases is more explicitly addressed. It goes without saying that these assessment phases require that a collaborative relationship be established and maintained with the person, throughout the assessment process.

## Request for service and service context

Career and guidance counselling services made available to individuals, groups or organizations are provided in a given context in response to a request for service<sup>7</sup>. The performance of assessments throughout the four phases must consider a person's informed consent in relation to the nature of the services to be provided. The request for service is based on an explicit understanding between the career and guidance counsellor and the person requesting the service. It should be noted that the person requesting the service may be the person seeking career and guidance counselling or a third party. The request for service outlines the framework in which the assessment and career and guidance counselling intervention will be performed. Furthermore, the context refers to all components of the person's situation, including the explicit aspects of the service request as well as other more implicit aspects, which the career and guidance counsellor must explain to the person requesting the service.

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## Gathering information

Gathering is the collection of sufficient information relevant to a person's situation. The exploration and explanation of how the person understands his or her situation (including, in particular, the factors creating the problem, personal difficulties and personal needs) offers relevant information to assess the person's situation. Gathering involves taking into consideration information from different spheres of the person's life. It is important to obtain sufficient information for meeting the objectives of the assessment.

Data collection makes it possible to substantiate, explain and enhance the subsequently decoded, analyzed, and reported information. This is why, rather than getting a partial picture established in the early moments of the counselling relationship, the information is collected and processed back and forth, allowing for it to be qualified and transformed and thereby getting closer to the person's experience of his or her actual situation. Based on their clinical judgment, career and guidance counsellors may also look into other aspects of the person's experience or attempt to establish connections between elements of the person's psychological functioning, personal resources and environmental conditions. Another way of gathering information, if necessary, is to use recognized psychometric instruments that are without risk of harm to the person. This provides a means to counterbalance the career and guidance counsellor's bias and enhance the collected information through interpersonal communication.

7 The term "mandate" is also used in this situation.

A number of other quantitative and qualitative methods may assist in the gathering of required information throughout the assessment process. Some examples follow.

#### Gathering of personal and sociodemographic data

- Gather information based on the person's educational, professional and sociodemographic indicators: age, educational achievement, status, socioeconomic situation, support system, state of health and medication use, work experience, duties performed, personal achievements, education and career paths, etc.

#### Intervention-based self-exploration and self-awareness

- Gather information using a person's present, past or anticipated experiences to access subjective and intersubjective data. Gather information based on both verbal and non-verbal content (cognitive, affective, somatic, behavioural, relational or contextual) in the responses provided.

#### Observation of relational dynamic

- Gathering information based on what is happening in the client-counsellor relationship in order to comprehend the person's subjective and intersubjective dynamics: interpersonal attitudes, resistances, relational deadlocks, transference and countertransference, etc.

#### Self-awareness-focused self-assessment exercises

- Gathering information while the person performs self-assessment exercises aiming to develop self-awareness of him or herself, to understand his or her interaction with others and with his or her socioenvironment.

#### Exploration activities

- Gathering information by reviewing exploration activities and comparing the perceptions and representations associated with the educational or professional environment may also serve to enhance self-awareness of the person and his or her way of responding to extraneous information.

### Psychometric instruments <sup>8</sup>

- Gathering information by using psychometric instruments aiming to evaluate educational and work interests, personality traits, values, talents, attitudes, cognitive abilities, knowledge, intelligence, etc.

### Strategies for mobilizing cognitive, emotional and behavioural resources

- Gathering information through the implementation of simulated or real strategies to stimulate cognition, emotions and behaviours: role play, empty chair technique, dialogue technique, imagery, improvisation, behaviour test, journal writing, visualization, job interview simulation, etc.

### Reviewing experiences in the field

- Gathering information by reviewing a previous educational or professional exploration activity experienced in the field: meeting with an employer, visits to companies, attendance at a presentation or open house, telephone communications with institutions, job-seeking approaches, etc.

### Observation in the context of educational and work situations

- Gathering information by observing the person in a real-life educational or work situation: internship, training for a trade, work placement, etc.

### Assessments and interviews reports provided by other professionals

- Gathering information based on the findings of other experts that have worked or are working with the person, for example, in the case of multidisciplinary teams.

### Documents related to educational and professional evaluations and experiences

- Gathering information by examining report cards and transcripts, competency cards or certificates of competence, diplomas, CVs, employer evaluations, exam results, personal work results, portfolios, etc.

To sum up, the selection of an appropriate method for gathering information requires rigorous standards, an open mind and creativity. While it is desirable to address the specific requirements of all aspects of the problem for each person being assessed, at this stage in the process, the advantages and risks associated with the collection of information must be taken into account.

<sup>8</sup> The role of psychometrics in career and guidance counsellors' assessment activities is described in more detail in the last section of this Guide.

## Decoding information

Decoding is the transformation of information collected in the course of an assessment into clear and purpose-oriented language. Given that each person's reality is subjective and unique, career and guidance counsellors recognize the importance of filtering or categorizing the information gathered, a task that requires rigorous standards and intersubjective sensitivity. Based on the information collected, career and guidance counsellors attempt to express the person's reality using professional reference points (theoretical approaches and conceptual frameworks). They must be careful to avoid allowing the decoding of information to be influenced by their own values, conceptions and cultural interpretations. Some sample methods to facilitate the decoding of information are provided below.

### Use of theoretical and conceptual interpretation references

- Decoding information using a rigorous theoretical or conceptual framework allows for the transformation of divergent and sometimes conflicting elements into a clear and coherent whole, expressed in language that is relevant to the field of career and guidance counselling. The decoding may also be based on a judgment of the value, effect or relevance of a particular piece of information by positioning it in relation to a recognized reference tool: e.g., descriptions of work tasks, labour market indicators, education system, admission criteria and prerequisites for training programs, specialized knowledge, etc.

### Re-evaluation of the request for service

- Decoding information through an empathic confrontation of the elements provided by the person against the initial formulation and agreement of the objectives contained in the request for service.

### Consideration of the sociocultural context

- Decoding information based on an understanding of the person's sociocultural anchors patterns and the potential gaps between these and those of the career and guidance counsellor.

To sum up, decoding allows for the collected information to be formalized and integrated into the assessment process and to establish connections with issues that may be affecting the intervention.



## Analyzing information

Analyzing is the systematic and methodical examination of the collected and decoded information in order to gain a sufficient understanding of the person's situation. Based on the information collected and decoded, career and guidance counsellors endeavour to connect the different components to each other so their meaning can be interpreted and used to guide the intervention process. Preceding the communication of the information, this analysis makes it possible to anticipate potentially favourable or unfavourable impacts of the assessment, and disclose or respond to certain areas related to psychological functioning, personal resources or environmental conditions. In order to analyze the collected information and its preliminarily decoded meaning, the following factors should be taken into consideration.

### Understanding the influence of individual and sociocultural differences

- When analyzing information, any potential personal and social issues must be examined against the meaning derived from the collected and decoded information: cultural and linguistic differences, cognitive limitations, disability, socioeconomic situation, time-dependent or temporary situations, physical and psychological health at the time of data collection, physical and environmental conditions in which the informations were collected.

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### Examining the person's ability to understand his or her situation

- When analyzing information, it is important to examine the manner in which the information was reported, as this plays a significant role, and, depending on the person's language ability, culture and customs, mental health, age, educational achievement, etc., may even affect the assessment process. The language career and guidance counsellors use must be clear and accessible and without risk of producing errors in the person's comprehension.

### Consulting other professionals

- When analyzing information about the person's situation, career and guidance counsellors can consult colleagues in order to integrate their comments and feedback into the process of verification, examination, and improvement, or when they call into question their own conceptions of the factors influencing the problem.

### Establishing and verifying relevant connections between different informations

- This entails analyzing the collected and decoded information by adapting it to the areas relevant to the objectives of the career and guidance counselling intervention: programs of study, professions, professional interests and values, career issues, etc.

### Interpreting psychometric results

- When analyzing data, career and guidance counsellors must carefully consider the quality of the collected information in terms of the instruments used (reliability) and the quality of the results obtained (validity), as well as in terms of the normative sample used as an initial point of comparison to judge the meaning and value of the results. The analysis of the information obtained depends on career and guidance counsellor precision as well as their ability to justify the reasons for choosing a specific instrument for its psychometric qualities. This analysis must also consider the person's characteristics, the nature of the service request, and the significance of the results for the assessment process.

To sum up, analyzing information enables career and guidance counsellors to organize or reorganize the collected information in terms of their own theoretical and conceptual references in order to clinically judge the person's situation. This judgment can subsequently be reported to the person.

## Communicating information

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Communicating is the written or oral expression of the information resulting from the career and guidance counsellor's professional judgment of the person's situation. This step considers the framework and context of the request for service. Career and guidance counsellors judge what elements of the information are relevant and how they should be expressed to ensure the person can sufficiently comprehend the information. Examples of communicating methods used in the context of assessment are presented below.

### Oral summary or report

- When communicating information to the person or, when authorized, to a third party, the information conveyed must be clear.

### Professional opinion

- Communicating a professional opinion on the person's situation with explicit reference to an assessment request solicited by the originator of the request. It should be noted that the communication of a professional opinion constitutes in itself the purpose of the intervention.

### Personalized education and professional information

- Communicating educational and professional information with due consideration to the nature of the person's situation.

### Psychometric results

- Communicating results and their interpretations with due consideration to the standards and practices in effect.

## Written report

- Communicating information on the person's situation in the form of a written report requires a clear presentation of the initial request by the person, the request for service agreed to by the originator of the request, the formal process, as well as the results and the conclusions formulated by the career and guidance counsellor, who must take care that the release of written information concerning the person does not cause him or her any injury. When the originator of the request is a paying third party, the assessment report must first be presented to the person concerned.

To sum up, communicating information helps achieve the objectives of the assessment of the person's situation while also supporting the person's personal and professional development.

## Assessment: a few considerations

This section contains suggestions to help delineate the concept of assessment and its specific applications to career and guidance counsellor practices.

### Assessment: a regulated professional activity

Several frameworks of regulations governing the career and guidance counselling profession refer to assessment, whether in terms of the scope of practice, the general competency profile, reserved and shared activities, or, more comprehensively, in the *Code de déontologie* (Code of ethics). When assessing a person's psychological functioning, personal resources, and environmental conditions, the knowledge and skills of career and guidance counsellors find expression in their professional judgment. When performing assessments, they ensure to maintain a sufficient degree of autonomy and are aware at all times of the potential reach of their actions with regard to the potential risks and harm to persons, while also considering the environment in which their interventions take place. As such, career and guidance counsellor actions conform to the fundamental values that underpin all professional actions: respect and human dignity, the right to privacy and self-determination, professional integrity, self-criticism of one's actions and decisions, and social responsibility. In the event that career and guidance counsellors face limitations or difficulties in bringing their professional interventions to term, specifically the tasks associated with assessing persons, they must ensure they take measures to direct any affected individuals toward resources that are better able to assist them.

## Assessment: a clinical activity

The assessment of psychological functioning, personal resources, and environmental conditions materializes as a systematic investigation of a person's unique situation. As pointed out earlier, such assessments are concerned with the situation of individuals in a specific context and interacting with their environment. By virtue of people's experiences and events in their lives, the transitions and spheres of life affected by their situation, their resources, or the influence at any given time of other persons in their lives, not only are these persons unique but so is, above all, their situation. In short, assessments are performed on persons considered to be unique in terms of identity and situation.

## Assessment: an activity affected by interpersonal influence

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Given that career and guidance counsellors are essentially their own professional instrument, from the moment they provide services to a person, they need to be aware of the interpersonal dimension of their work, as well as the influence wielded by their role and attitudes and all of their assessment activities. Their concern for integrity ensures they have clarified the objectives of their assessment and are aware of their subjective and intersubjective methods when gathering and analyzing information and judging the results obtained. They are also conscious of the fact that the person they are helping may also influence their (the counsellor's) professional activities. As such, career and guidance counsellors must take the necessary measures to ensure that this influence serves the individual's personal and professional development. Career and guidance counsellors performing assessments try to influence the person by fostering a relationship of trust and optimum collaboration. Furthermore, their sustained application of relational competencies (e.g. paraphrasing, open-ended questions, strength challenges, confrontation, interpretations) helps support the person's personal and professional development.

## Assessment: a rigorous, systematic and comprehensive activity

Assessment is based on a process that ultimately allows career and guidance counsellors to justify their assessments and conclusions. To this end, they must do rigorous work and perform a systematic analysis of the different information relating to the multiple aspects of a person's situation. While unable to completely grasp the objective information as well as the person's subjective and intersubjective experience, career and guidance counsellors must ensure they implement multiple parameters and variables that make it possible to perform the most comprehensive assessment possible (e.g., the history of significant events; expressed need(s); the urgency of the request for service; personal and environmental resources and limitations; psychological functioning; environmental conditions; family situation; and the relational, organizational, normative and legal frameworks in which the assessment place).

## Assessment: an ongoing non-linear activity

Assessment is an ongoing nonlinear activity, even when performed at a specific point in time in a person's personal and professional career. As such, it is necessary to pay attention to new information throughout the assessment process. By making continuous adjustments, career and guidance counsellors, as well as the person being assessed, realize the need to review previous information in the light of new information on aspects already covered. Although an assessment may be performed without the person's participation in a counselling process, it remains an integral part of a personal and professional career path. Furthermore, in the event that the person decides to participate in a counselling process, the assessment results will become part of his or her world of self-concepts. This is one of the reasons why it is important for career and guidance counsellors to continuously appraise the effects of their professional interventions while trying to adjust the objectives of the assessment process along with the required tasks.

## Assessment: risk of bias

The assessment process is not immune to bias. The quality of the methods and tools employed or their context of application can compromise the quality of an assessment. Career and guidance counsellors themselves, in various ways, may contribute to a biased assessment: confirmation bias, distortion bias and bias relative to cognitive efficiency strategies. A confirmation bias relates to inferences in which the assessor's implicit theories, beliefs and prejudices confirm his or her expectations: selective choice of information, high priority accorded to assessment components. A distortion bias, on the other hand, occurs when the assessor profiles a person from memory, resorting to traits and behaviours based on implicit theories. The effect of this is to generate a cognitive distortion of relevant information. And finally, a bias relative to cognitive efficiency strategies refers to the use of heuristics (quick reasoning based on stereotypes and prejudices and therefore the resulting consequences) in order to function with less cognitive effort. For example, rather than limit oneself to a restrictive assessment based on past pitfalls and opportunities, it is possible for a career and guidance counsellor to examine a person's potential without falling victim to their own stereotypes and prejudices.

# The role of psychometric instruments in assessment

Psychometric instruments play an important role in the assessment process. Specifically, they help enhance the understanding of a person's situation by providing information that would otherwise be unavailable. Moreover, the use of sound, reliable psychometric instruments strengthens the objective perspective while assessing a person's situation. Using these instruments entails the application of certain operational rules that consider a number of variables in order to qualify the person's characteristics through the use of characteristic indicators (e.g., demonstrations of intelligence or behaviours that reveal personality traits). It goes without saying that the use of psychometric instruments requires knowledge and skills to administer, interpret and report results in a constructive way and without risk of harming the person. The use of these instruments calls for an approach that considers at least the following three considerations:

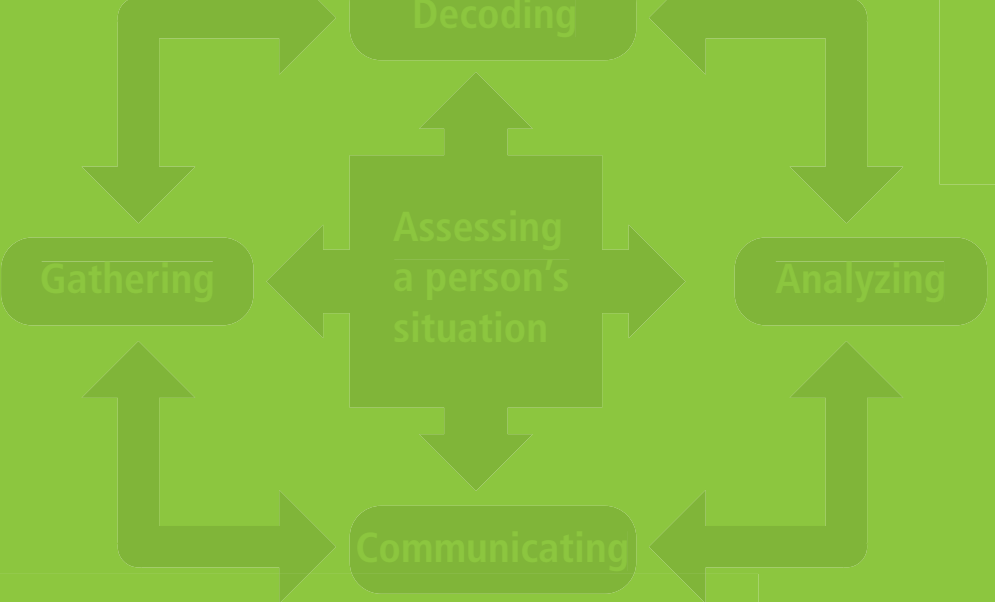
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<b>Choice of instrument</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identification of the areas to assess in relation to the objective of consultation</li><li>• Adequacy of the instrument's structure and content in relation to the person's personal situation: type of questions or items, language complexity, cognitive complexity, etc.</li><li>• Results observed concerning the tool's standardization, validity and reliability</li><li>• Knowledge of the meaning associated with the construct by the instrument's developer</li></ul>
<b>Context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Person's understanding of how the collected data will be used: informed consent</li><li>• Environmental conditions for the instrument's use: individual or group, available space and time</li><li>• Person's psychological and physical conditions: mistrust, fatigue, anxiety, fears, familiarity with the instrument, medication, physical limitation or any other cognitive, affective or behavioural aspect that might interfere with the process. The same applies to career and guidance counsellors (e.g. personal concerns about being sufficiently available for the person, halo effect)</li></ul>
<b>Interpretation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ability and ease of communication of the psychometric measurement results to the persons concerned in order that they may obtain information that is clear and of constructive use to them</li></ul>

Choosing an appropriate psychometric instrument is a crucial step in the assessment process, as is the moment when interpreting preliminary results or when interpreting the results as soon as they are produced. When using psychometric instruments, the assessment context as well as the context of the person being assessed must be taken into consideration throughout the various steps in the process.

## Conclusion

This Guide deals with career and guidance counsellor professional competence, which involves the rigorous assessment of a person's situation. The Guide is intended as a reference to help career and guidance counsellors in their assessment practices, whether these are part of a wider process of intervention or simply serve as a specific recommendation or reference. As such, the Guide is designed to be useful to all members of the profession, regardless of their theoretical or conceptual preferences, and can serve as a memory aid that can be consulted at any point in their practice. The Guide includes information and guiding principles to explain career and guidance counsellor assessment practices, which are an essential feature of their practice. The Guide also includes information on: how assessment affects professional judgment, the three main areas of assessment as defined by the profession's scope of practice, a model of the assessment process, as well as some guidelines related to this process.



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