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# How vocational education teachers and managers make sense of career guidance

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## ABSTRACT

Efforts to create career learning environments which provide students with work experience, skills for making choices and career guidance dialogues, appear to stagnate in vocational education and training (VET) institutions in the Netherlands. In this case study we explore how teachers and their managers make sense of career guidance. We found varying views of career guidance, which may be contributing to the stagnation. Dialogue between teachers and managers is crucial in coming to a collective sense-making of career guidance, and a transformational management style seems to instigate sense-making and ultimately change. A collective sense-making of career guidance may be an area that needs to be examined for new possibilities of transforming behaviours relevant to providing career guidance to students.

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## Introduction

The twenty-first century workplace is more dynamic than ever and people need to be prepared for multiple career decisions (Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Di Fabio, 2016; Hughes et al., 2014; Reid & West, 2016). Accordingly, schools now have the task of preparing students for shifting careers and lifelong learning (Draaisma et al., 2018; Kuijpers & Meijers, 2017; Meijers et al., 2006; Mittendorff et al., 2010). There is continuing debate as to whether teachers or specialists should be providing career guidance. There is something to be said for either approach but the tendency is that teachers are more often given this task because of their proximity to students (Watermeyer et al., 2016).

Research shows, nevertheless, that schools have difficulty in changing the educational culture from one of information transfer to coaching and dialogue where students learn to take charge of their own career developments (Draaisma et al., 2018; Vähäsantanen, 2015; Winters et al., 2012). There is a need to reconceptualise notions of the teacher's role, moving from "someone who mainly teaches" to an understanding that the profession includes various roles and dialogical relationships with students (Ketelaar et al., 2013). This implies teachers helping students build a self-image by reflecting on their experiences. Based on this self-image, feedback is given for career steps to be taken for meeting job market demands. However, analysis of current career conversations shows that teachers tend to provide information rather than encourage students to talk (Mittendorff et al., 2010; Winters et al., 2012).

A new role can only be taken on once teachers have made sense out of it (Runhaar et al., 2009). Behaviour may otherwise remain the same, such as acting as a career coach while maintaining the

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role of information transmitter. Sense-making comes through discussing new concepts of education to be understood and incorporated into teachers' professional identities (Biesta et al., 2017; Runhaar & Runhaar, 2012; Taylor, 2017; Vähäsantanen, 2015).

Sense-making also needs to be collective. If a whole team has not come to understand a new concept, in the same way, it remains difficult to implement in a meaningful way (Biesta et al., 2015; Runhaar et al., 2009). Educational renewal requires that teachers and their managers actively strive for common sense-making and engage in dialogue about the roles to be played in the process of change (Geijssel & Meijers, 2005; Vloet & Swet van, 2010).

Leadership styles play a role in stimulating and sustaining this discussion so that old habits change and innovative steps are taken (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Oude Groote Beverborg et al., 2015; Runhaar, 2017; Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). Draaisma et al. (2018) observed that a combination of transactional and transformational leadership is the most effective way of stimulating dialogue and team learning to create a career learning environment. Other studies point out the value of implementing teacher-leaders in the sense-making process (Cooper et al., 2016). This study, therefore, takes the sense-making of both managers and teachers into account.

The aim of this study is to gain insight into how the sense-making process may cause stagnation in the implementation of career guidance for VET students. International studies show that stagnation in sense-making of career guidance occurs in many cultures (Ho & Leung, 2016; Hughes et al., 2017; Hutchinson, 2018; Tomaszewski et al., 2017). The context of Dutch VET institutions is examined here, because studies show that despite national efforts to train teachers in this area, career guidance still has not been implemented in many schools to a degree that is satisfactory for students (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2019), nor in a way that research shows to be effective (Draaisma et al., 2018; Mittendorff et al., 2010).

### ***Theoretical framework***

Teachers need to make sense of their role in helping students take charge of developing career competencies (Meijers et al., 2006; Mittendorff et al., 2010). Competencies such as reflecting on motives and capacity, exploring job options, taking career-related action and networking are part of the qualification demands in VET institutions in the Netherlands and are what help students develop their careers in a dynamic and unstable job market (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2017; Meijers & Kuijpers, 2014). Sense-making is the process whereby teachers increasingly experience congruence between their own beliefs and the professional actions they are expected to take (Ketelaar et al., 2013; Luttenberg et al., 2013). If teachers are expected to provide career guidance, they need to make sense of it.

The terms vocational guidance, educational guidance and career guidance have had various connotations over the years and across cultures (Bakshi, 2019). In the context of this study, we define educational guidance to be helping students to meet school requirements, vocational guidance to be teaching students the competencies needed for a vocation and career guidance as referring to counselling students in how to make life-designing decisions. Given these definitions, we contend that teachers make sense of vocational and educational guidance more easily as this often involves a traditional transfer of information and is an obviously important task of schools, whereas career guidance is more abstract and less immediate. Given that teachers' behaviours change when they have made sense of a concept, career guidance needs to be embraced and made sense of to a greater degree (Geijssel & Meijers, 2005; Runhaar et al., 2009; Savickas, 2011; Vloet & Swet van, 2010).

Luttenberg et al. (2013) have distinguished the various ways in which sense is made of a concept, ranging from accommodation, assimilation, tolerance to distantiation. Accommodation is when a new concept is acknowledged as something new and one's frame of reference is adjusted resulting in a change in behaviour. Assimilation is when sense-making of a new concept involves shifting the new frame of reference just enough to incorporate the new concept into one's pre-existing beliefs, risking a lack of significant behavioural change. Toleration is when behaviour may change due to demand of authorities, but no sense has been made of the new concept so change is not sustainable

over time. Finally, distantiation is when a new concept is not accepted and neither beliefs nor behaviour change (Ketelaar et al., 2013; Luttenberg et al., 2013). Not only does the content of career guidance need to be made sense of, but the manner in which it is made sense of also determines how sustainably it is incorporated into the curriculum.

School managers have a role to play in stimulating the dialogue about career guidance for the sense-making process. In order to have meaningful and transformative dialogue resulting in accommodation of the concept, it is necessary for managers to have access to up-to-date knowledge of new insights. Without new knowledge, the same stories get repeated and the tendency is to hang on to familiar practices (Runhaar & Runhaar, 2012).

Besides informed dialogue, studies show that leadership styles can also contribute to teachers' sense-making (Bouwman et al., 2019; Bush & Glover, 2014; Coburn, 2016; Evans, 2014; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). One distinction often made in leadership styles is that of transactional leadership, which is top-down rewarding of teachers for desired behaviour, as opposed to transformational leadership, which is stimulating bottom-up movements and encouraging team members to become leaders. Change can be stimulated with transactional leadership, but sustained change comes with transformational leadership when inspiration and support from the managers results in sense-making on the part of teachers (Runhaar, 2017).

Educational practices change continuously, and this means that teachers' understanding of what their profession entails needs to change along with it. This also means that management needs to support teachers in this transition (Vähäsantanen, 2015). The goal of this study is to explore the process of teachers' and managers' sense-making of career guidance and in what way managers stimulate this process.

## **Research questions**

In this study, we aim to examine the discourse among educational professionals at VET institutions about career guidance and how it is made sense of. The research questions are:

- (1) What is the discourse about career guidance, in terms of making a distinction between career guidance, vocational guidance and educational guidance?
- (2) In what manner is sense made of career guidance in terms of accommodation, assimilation, tolerance and distantiation?
- (3) Under what circumstances does sense-making of career guidance take place?
  - (3a) What role does dialogue between teachers and managers play in this process?
  - (3b) To what extent does leadership style affect the process of sense making about career guidance?

## **Method**

### **Study context and participants**

Career development has been mandatory in Dutch VET curriculum since 2000 (Bom et al., 2003). From 2010 to 2015, a project to stimulate and enhance career guidance was carried out in VET institutions (Bussemaker & Dekker, 2016). The current study was conducted at a Dutch VET institution which had taken part in this stimulation project and reflects the situation in other Dutch VET institutions: A school of approximately 2000 students and 200 teachers in an urban setting, with 10 study departments ranging from Level 1 to Level 4 in the disciplines of engineering, computer science, nursing, welfare, business, commerce, sport and fitness, hospitality, security and logistics.

This institution was selected because moderate efforts had been made to implement career guidance after a wide-scale professionalisation in 2015. The expectation was that career guidance had been developed to a certain extent in each of the 10 teams. Furthermore, organising interviews was simplified by the fact that the first author of this paper is employed at this institution.

Ten managers representing 10 teams and 32 teachers, two or three from each team, participated in the study that took place between October 2018 and February 2019. These participants had experiences ranging from 1 to 21 years of working in an educational field. A third of the interviewed teachers had had specific training in career guidance in the past, another third was trained in more general coaching skills and the rest had no training in any form of coaching, which gave a broad range of sense-making.

### ***Procedure***

In order to select a representative cross section of teachers with various manners of sense-making concerning career guidance, the Educational Needs Coordinator of each team was asked for names of teachers who fit each of the categories described by Luttenberg et al. (2013) (Appendix 1). This helped provide a wide range of discourses on the topic of career guidance. The Educational Needs Coordinators' selections were kept anonymous to the researchers for a more objective interpretation of the discourse.

All teachers and managers were asked to give their consent to participate in this study, with the understanding that all identities would be kept anonymous. Furthermore, every participant was asked to sign a statement agreeing that their answers could be used for this research. Verbatim transcriptions were made of the interviews in Dutch. The quotes used in this paper were translated by the first author.

### ***Data collection method***

A narrative analysis was made of the semi-structured interviews to examine the discourse concerning career guidance. Questions were posed and participants were given the freedom to expound on the subject. Their narratives were then analysed for underlying themes and assumptions.

The interviews were held first with teachers and then with managers. This was in order to avoid influencing the existence and nature of the dialogue about career guidance instigated by managers. To minimise influencing the discourse about career guidance, interviews in each team were all carried out within a month of each other.

### ***Analysis***

Thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) was used to examine the prevalent themes concerning career guidance to discover how teachers and managers make sense of it. These themes were divided into career guidance, educational guidance and vocational guidance. When school achievement or psychosocial factors affecting school work were mentioned, this was coded as educational guidance. If learning a particular trade or line of work was discussed, this was considered vocational guidance. Career guidance was when the narrative was about helping students learn to make career choices and take control of the direction of their study and work.

Other themes were then identified which indicate the manner in which sense is made of career guidance; whether it is accommodated, assimilated, tolerated or distantiated. If dedication to help students make career choices was evident in teachers' answers, they were considered to have accommodated career guidance. If responses had more to do with general coaching skills without specifically mentioning career skills, this was considered to be assimilation. Teachers who gave career guidance only because it is required were categorised as being tolerant and the category distantiation was for teachers who said they prefer not to coach students at all.

Next, the discussion around career guidance was examined as part of the sense-making process. We asked teachers whether they experienced dialogue about career guidance. Their sense-making was then compared with that of their team members to see if dialogue leads to a collective sense-making.

Finally, views on leadership styles were analysed to see if this affected sense-making of career guidance. Management style as experienced by the teachers was coded as transactional or transformational following the definitions of Bush and Glover (2014) and Oude Groote Beverborg et al. (2015). Teachers' sense-making was compared with that of the manager to examine collective sense-making (Appendix 4).

## Results

In order to understand what the process of sense-making entails, we endeavoured first to clarify what the current discourse of career guidance is. The results of coding by career guidance, educational guidance or vocational guidance, show a discourse of career guidance that encompasses all three types of guidance with more focus on educational guidance than career guidance.

### ***What is the discourse among teachers and managers about career guidance, in terms of making a distinction between career guidance, vocational guidance and educational guidance?***

Most of the interviewed teachers acknowledged that career guidance is an important part of teaching. Reactions to this question included statements such as the following, indicating that there was ample recognition that schools have a mandate to provide career guidance:

I think that if you work with students, you also need to be able to coach them. That's part of the job. (Teacher 2)

Teaching is not only about transferring knowledge but also making sure that students develop in personal ways. (Teacher 6)

"This belongs in school, for sure. I think that our aim is to form students so that they fit into society" (Teacher 18). What exactly teachers meant when they expressed this dedication to career guidance was, nevertheless, unclear. Through further questioning, clarification was sought concerning the manifestation of career guidance and the topic of dialogue with students. This further questioning revealed that for well over two-thirds of the teachers, themes related to educational guidance play a role in their sense-making of career guidance. Responses included statements such as, "Career conversations are directed toward behaviour changes (for better work attitudes) and students' school results" (Teacher 4) and, "The teacher should coach the students during the school year with everything that has to do with education and offer them help" (Teacher 10). One-third of the teachers mentioned themes that correspond with the category of vocational guidance, such as "We want to ask more professionals from the workforce to give our students a good picture of what this vocation is" (Teacher 16). Only a third of the interviewed teachers mentioned themes specifically related to career guidance with statements such as:

What we want to achieve is that students learn to ask themselves: What am I busy with? Where do I want to go? How do I get there? What do I need? So when students come into contact with themselves, with that larger picture of where I am in this world and what can I do and what do I want to do, then sometimes they make the discovery that they are in the wrong place and need to make some other decisions. (Teacher 30)

Students need to be given the tools to be able to consciously form their own careers. That's not something that can just be left up to them. (Teacher 21)

The discourse about career guidance among managers also tends to focus on educational and vocational guidance. Only three of the 10 managers talked about the theme of students learning to make career choices and taking charge of their own career with statements such as:

Career guidance is teaching students the twenty-first century skills so they can influence their own careers. (Manager 6)

With career guidance we want students to become conscious of their career path, that they understand very well who they are and what they are capable of and what they want to achieve. We want to make sure that students have some control over the steps they take in the course of their study and beyond. (Manager 8)

What I'd like to achieve (with career guidance) is that students learn to know themselves, know what their talents are, and know how to deal with life events. Also that they know what steps they need to take if they want to make a change in their occupations. (Manager 9)

Managers tended to be more articulate than teachers about the desired results of student guidance and they were better informed about government and school policy. When asked what career guidance should accomplish, many of the managers' responses had to do with measurable student achievements such as passing exams and finding employment, sometimes citing school and government objectives in terms of success rates. None of the interviewed managers mentioned guiding students in making career choices. Examples of managers' responses are:

[... ..] preparing students as well as possible for the world after completing their educations so they can make a good next step such as continuing their education or finding a job. And of course helping them on their way to their diplomas. (Manager 2)

The aim (of career guidance) is making students aware of their educational careers here at our school and being able to find employment in this branch of the job market. (Manager 3)

The result of career guidance should be that students are prepared to work [... ..] that they have learned the right attitude and behaviour. (Manager 10)

### ***To what extent is it evident that teachers and managers more easily make sense of vocational and educational guidance than of career guidance?***

In order to understand teachers' sense-making of career guidance we asked them why it is important and what they aim to achieve with career guidance. It became evident that there is an overlap in the discourse between educational guidance and career guidance because teachers see the students' education as a step in their careers. Some responses were:

Career guidance is about both school achievement and about the future. For first year students career guidance has more to do with how are things going in your vocational education and are you accustomed to attending school here. We don't start in right away with asking 16-year-olds what they want to be later. (Teacher 3)

When I do career guidance, I tell students how I think it is going with them. And I tell students, if they have any questions they can mail or call me. I want to help students with their school subjects as well as with personal development. (Teacher 6)

It has to do with the practical things; what we need to tell the first year students, like let them know what the role of the coach is, tell them about school rules and procedures, those kinds of things. Career guidance is the same thing as coaching. (Teacher 10)

These responses make clear that there is a fine line between educational and career guidance when actually working with students, and that immediate and urgent issues dealt with in educational guidance tend to get precedence. The response, "Coaching is based on what (students) themselves want to develop" (Teacher 2) shows that precedence is given to educational guidance especially when guidance is given based on student demand as students generally ask for assistance in their immediate needs.

Managers' inclination toward educational and vocational guidance, as noted earlier, may be due to the requirement of their job to meet school and government expectations of productivity, and graduation and job placement rates. This tendency among both managers and teachers may colour the discourse concerning career guidance and might be a reason for the stagnation in guiding students to make career choices.

### ***In what manner have teachers and managers made sense of career guidance in terms of accommodation, assimilation, tolerance and distantiatio***

We asked teachers what skills are needed for career guidance and if they feel these skills are a necessary component of being a teacher. If teachers gave answers in which the dedication to coaching



students in making career choices was evident, they were considered to have accommodated career guidance. If responses had more to do with general coaching skills such as being able to listen to students and give them feedback without specifically mentioning the career skills, this was considered to be assimilation. Teachers who mentioned engaging in career guidance because it is a requirement were categorised as being tolerant and teachers who said they prefer not to coach students at all were considered to distance themselves. The responses showed clearly that teachers by and large assimilate career guidance into pre-existing notions of general coaching. Responses to the question about what skills are required for career guidance included:

Listening well, asking the right questions, giving space, getting students to think, those kinds of things. (Teacher 1)

Being open minded about students' ideas. Asking questions and being curious about who the students really are. (Teacher 7)

You have to be sociable and listen well to what the needs of the students are. And also be able to hear between the lines what a student is having difficulty with because sometimes that is hard to say. (Teacher 8)

None of these responses accommodate the notion of guiding students to make career choices.

Only one teacher showed distancing from career guidance by saying that it is not one of the tasks of a teacher. Several, however, expressed traditional views of what the teaching profession entails and a tolerance for career guidance, such as:

I'm not very competent (in career guidance). That's not my strength. I'm not specialised in career guidance. I can't carry on conversations like someone who is trained to be a coach. I can explain grammar very well and someone who has trained to be a coach can't do that. (Teacher 19)

I'm not incompetent, but I don't care about career guidance so much. I'm not a career coach who teaches, it's the other way around. (Teacher 2)

Managers responded to this question similarly. Almost all of them mentioned listening, coaching and empathy and a quarter noted the importance of having knowledge of the job market, without speaking of themes concerning helping students make career decisions. Managers expressed the conviction that coaching students, as opposed to transferring information, is what teaching entails. This view is expressed by the following response:

I believe that teachers have to see coaching as part of their task, and otherwise I won't hire them. If I invite a new teacher (for a job interview) I say, I want you also to be a coach. (Manager 6)

But when pushed to make a distinction between career guidance and educational and vocational guidance, only a third of the managers said they thought that all teachers had made sense of career guidance and are capable of giving quality career guidance to students. The same manager as above said:

Not everyone has efficacy. There are a few teachers at this moment who think career guidance is a stupid task. We have plans to do something about this, like couple them with an experienced career coach. (Manager 8)

Another manager spoke in terms of knowledge concerning career guidance. Knowledge about something is not necessarily the same as making sense of something, but it can be considered a precondition for sense-making. She said:

Knowledge (about career guidance) is not at the same level for everyone. Some know more than I do because they had a training. But there are new teachers who don't have this knowledge. (Manager 1)

It is interesting to note that many of the managers seemed to recognise not having accommodated career guidance. Only three of the managers claimed to have knowledge about career guidance through having had a training in career guidance in the context of Dutch VET institutions or by reading literature about it. The rest admitted to not having enough knowledge about the research



and policy supporting career guidance and said they had not given it much priority with responses such as:

I haven't really looked up what the rules or policy or theories are about career guidance. For me this is at the bottom of the priority list. (Manager 1)

There is no clear culture in our school about how we do career guidance. That means that it doesn't get much priority. Everything is important, math is important, language skills are important, and if a manager thinks something else is more important, then that gets more attention than career guidance. (Manager 9)

This may imply that the majority of managers have not made sense of career guidance to the extent that they accommodate it and fully accept it as a new intervention.

### ***To what extent does dialogue between teachers and their managers contribute to making a distinction between educational, vocational and career guidance and to sense-making of career guidance?***

Teachers of three of the teams indicated that there is dialogue in their teams concerning career guidance. These teachers said their manager is well-informed about the theory of career guidance and they experience leadership in the form of structure and clarity. Responses included:

Every time we have a meeting, career guidance is on the agenda. There is a group of teachers responsible for planning career guidance. (Teacher 27)

Meeting student needs is priority number 1. Career guidance is very important for this. The manager gives the assignment and teachers carry it out. (Teacher13)

He is knowledgeable about career guidance. His priority is that students get their diploma's because that is good for the team but that is also in the interest of students. (Teacher15)

They see, furthermore, that priority is given to the implementation of career guidance.

When dialogue takes place in a team, teachers and managers obviously have a more uniform understanding of what career guidance is. When teachers and managers speak about the same themes using the same vocabulary, this may make clearer to students what career guidance is and how they might profit from it. Dialogue about career guidance may also enable teachers to make enough sense of career guidance that they are able to contribute to its organisation.

Conversely, teachers from teams where career guidance is never discussed conclude that their manager has no knowledge in the area of career guidance. Moreover, these same teachers mention missing leadership qualities such as structure, prioritising and demanding accountability. In other words, a unified sense-making is made possible where there is dialogue about career guidance, because teachers perceive that managers have knowledge about career guidance and they sense leadership, structure and clarity. Where dialogue is lacking, teachers perceive neither management knowledge nor leadership in the area of career guidance, notwithstanding that some of these managers claim to know what it is. Whether or not the manager has knowledge, if this is not talked about there is no grounds for common sense-making among the teachers in their team.

### ***What is the discourse concerning career guidance in teams where there is dialogue about career guidance?***

Dialogue about career guidance does not ensure that a distinction is made between educational guidance, vocational guidance and career guidance. In the teams where dialogue takes place on a regular basis, the sense-making of career guidance seems to lean heavily toward educational guidance. Responses included:

Every teacher has to really invest in each student and have the time and space and tools to make this possible. This is a responsibility of the whole team. If the results of a class lag behind, that is the responsibility of everyone. (Manager 2)

The most important thing is contact with the students. It's about the conversations with the students and that they feel seen and heard ... I take care that the team develops this vision. We do this in team meetings and in conversations with each other. (Manager 8)

Meeting the needs of students and helping them through school is frequently mentioned with very few allusions to developing decision-making skills.

However, in teams where career guidance is on the agenda of team meetings, there is clearly more being done to ensure that students are given guidance. Teacher behaviour seems to be influenced by dialogue. We can say there is more assimilation and accommodation in the discourse about career guidance in teams where this is discussed.

***To what extent does management style affect the process of sense-making about career guidance? How can the management style be categorised in teams where teachers and managers have clearly made sense of career guidance and accommodated it into their professional identities?***

Teachers and managers were asked how much mandate the team is given to organise career guidance (transformational leadership, bottom-up) as opposed to being manager driven (transactional leadership, top-down), for example, by imposing the vision of the school executive management and rewarding teachers for carrying this out. Three quarters of teachers said their manager has limited knowledge about career guidance and they experience that someone besides the manager is given the mandate to organise career guidance. They said the team has complete freedom in organising career guidance, which is both positive and negative. Six said there is too much freedom, leading to a feeling of *laissez faire* where there is no unity and little is accomplished. A collective sense-making can hardly be expected to develop under these circumstances. One teacher said, "No one controls how I do career coaching ... we (coaches) are all different and we have different styles, but we want to have some kind of uniformity, a framework which we can work in" (Teacher 9). A small minority said their manager has a top-down, transactional style of leadership and nearly half said that the manager works together with the team or had appointed responsibility for organising career guidance to a teacher-leader.

The perspective of managers is similar to that of teachers. Most managers could name the five career competencies that are included in the national qualification standards of secondary vocational training in the Netherlands. However, nearly half of the managers admitted to not knowing as much about career guidance as they ought to. Reasons given for this included leaving this to the team, following the textbooks or considering it to have low priority. Many managers said attention for career guidance is a bottom-up movement where the team is given the mandate to make a vision and plans for career guidance. Some went as far as to say the following, implying that career guidance will not happen if it is not organised by the people carrying it out, and accordingly playing no part in giving form to career guidance:

The most important thing is that teachers themselves want to (do career guidance). If they don't, then it's not going to happen [...] Team learning and initiatives from the team are leading in what happens in the team. (Manager 9)

This can hardly be categorised as transformational leadership but seems to be more a lack of leadership. The team is given the autonomy to act on their own, but without direction. However, half of the managers said there is a mix of top-down and bottom-up organisation, with the managers' role being that of interpreting the school vision, making career guidance a point on the agenda in

team meetings and managing teacher talent to make sure career guidance gets attention. This coincides with the view teachers had of the style of management.

Teachers were then asked whether leadership given by their manager had helped them make sense of what career guidance is. Half of the teachers said the freedom is expedient for being able to organise career guidance in the way students need it and making sense of it in that way. The other half mentioned needing more structure, clarity about expectations, priority, guidance and evaluation when new practices are implemented in order to make sense of them.

Teachers said they work best under a transformational leadership style where the manager gives a lot of support, usually with an appointed teacher-leader, and there is often dialogue about career guidance. A third of the teachers said this is the case in their team. These same teachers responded positively to questions about career guidance being part of their professional identity and feeling competent. It is interesting to note that these teachers also expressed a desire to continue developing their skills in career guidance.

Of the teachers who experienced no leadership in career guidance, more than a third said they do not feel competent in career guidance and that it is not a part of their professional identity. Several others who experienced no leadership said career guidance is part of their own professional identity, but thought not all of their team members saw the value of career guidance. Some teachers did not mind having no management interference, but many teachers said they are not happy with a lack of leadership, mentioning needing more structure, clarity and accountability.

One teacher mentioned that appointing teacher-leaders in her team works because her team members generally have a higher level of education and are interested in and able to take initiatives in career guidance. The implication is that teams consisting of teachers with relatively lower levels of education might need a more transactional style of management. She said;

I like the leadership we have. If something is necessary, I feel the freedom to do something about it. I can explain why I do things, of course, and that might make a difference. We have a team of all well-educated people and that is different to other teams. We all have higher vocational education or university degrees, so everyone is capable of doing her own thing. That might be different in another team. (Teacher 2)

One of the interviewed managers has leadership over two teams, one of which consists mostly of teachers with higher educational levels and the other of teachers with a vocational education. This manager said about this last team that career guidance had a very informal character and that not much development was possible in this area without a top-down approach. She said of the teachers of this team:

They are all MBO (intermediate vocational education) so that is a different experience of being a teacher than if you have a university education. You (with a university education) have a different world view and a larger understanding of society and the idea that you don't only want to teach your subject but also show how to be a good citizen, and that it is handy to know what's in the news, and to have a decent job, etcetera. (Manager 9)

This indicates that an effective leadership style for developing sense-making among teachers may depend on the educational level of team members.

When asked what more they needed in order to have a better understanding of how to carry out career guidance, many teachers responded with remarks that had to do with needing more dialogue and ways to make sense of career guidance. Responses included:

We need someone who makes sure that we continue to develop career guidance. We already have so much knowledge here at our school ... (Teacher 1)

I appreciate the freedom we have, but on the other hand I would like it if the coaches could talk together more often about how we all do things. (Teacher 4)

It might be good to make career guidance a theme for the whole school for one year. We could share best practices across teams. (Teacher 5)

Model behaviour would be good. If teachers experience it themselves maybe you see it coming back in the classrooms with students. Teachers could have career conversations so you have a sort of parallel in the organisation. (Teacher 7)

This subject is not on our agenda. We need to talk about this. Our manager needs to understand this. (Teacher10)

Our coaches need to know facts about why something works and why is it better than the old way because change always takes time and energy. Coaches need to be convinced that this is a good thing to do. (Teacher 16)

We need time to learn new behaviour because this is a different way of talking with students. If you are used to talking with students about school results, then you will have to learn to talk with students about making choices. Your role as a teacher is different than it was 15 years ago. (Teacher 26)

It is clear that teachers feel the need to pay more attention to career guidance.

## Discussion

### *Career guidance, educational guidance and vocational guidance*

This study shows that the great majority of teachers and managers see coaching as an integral part of the VET curriculum, but that the distinction is often not made between educational guidance, vocational guidance and career guidance. These are terms which have developed over time to mean different things in various contexts (Bakshi, 2019). Traditionally, vocational guidance was based on finding a match between a person and a work environment and involved self-research and discovering what vocational opportunities were available. Schools have taken on this task since the beginning of the last century (Bakshi, 2019; Savickas, 2011). Teachers have also increasingly seen their role to be one of coaching and guidance juxtaposed with providing information (Ketelaar et al., 2013; Vloet & Swet van, 2010). However, more is required of teachers for guiding students to develop a career identity and career competencies. Teachers need to help students examine their qualities and ambitions which prepare them for working in a dynamic job market and coach them to make career choices (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2017). Stagnation in the implementation of career guidance may be caused by managers' and teachers' inclination toward educational and vocational guidance, colouring the discourse concerning career guidance.

### *Assimilation, accommodation, tolerance and distantiation*

Because teachers and managers have often not made a clear distinction between the different forms of guidance, sense-making stagnates at the level of assimilation and the full concept of career guidance is not accommodated. Teachers think that career guidance is something they already do and they have often not recognised and learned new behaviour. Stagnation in sense-making of career guidance may also be due to managers tolerating it because it is required, but not accommodating it into the curriculum because of their focus on meeting school and government expectations of productivity.

### *Dialogue*

Dialogue needs to happen on a regular basis, based on knowledge of new insights into career guidance, for a clear and more committed, common sense-making. Managers are aware of a school vision and research concerning career guidance, but results of this study show this may be insufficiently communicated to teachers. School vision and current research is something that needs to be included in team discussions to make sure there is new input in the dialogue leading to better sense-making of career guidance.

## **Management style**

The lack of leadership experienced by some participants of this study was positive in some cases, allowing teachers freedom to make sense of career guidance in their own way. Nevertheless, other teachers felt there was too much freedom and there was no uniformity in the sense-making within the team. Therefore, some form of leadership seems necessary. A teacher-leader was preferred above a manager as a source of leadership.

## **Limitations**

There may be other factors besides dialogue and leadership style that can contribute to making sense of career guidance, such as the presence and perspective of an institutional vision on career guidance, the time invested by managers in the sense-making process in a team, and the extent to which teachers receive career guidance themselves. As this study focussed on processes within teams, these other factors were merely touched upon. We recognise, however, that they may not only contribute to sense-making but also influence teachers' willingness to learn new behaviour. Further study may need to pay more attention to these factors.

Management styles proved to be difficult to examine. It was hard to see the difference between transactional and transformational leadership as managers themselves had a limited concept of what career guidance entails. It is evident that in teams with a recognisable teacher-leader who takes responsibility for the implementation of career guidance, other team members make more sense of it. Further examination of the influence of management styles on making sense of career guidance is necessary.

The scope of this study was limited to one VET institution with a limited number of participants. This presents examples of factors which influence the sense-making of career guidance and can give input for more expansive research in this area.

## **Conclusion**

One of the findings of this study was that teachers make sense of career guidance more easily in teams where there is regular dialogue than in teams where it is never talked about. This means that in further studies the content, intensity and time frame of dialogue might be examined to investigate what impact this has on the process of sense-making, as well as the role Human Resources Development might play in forming this discourse.

## **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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## Appendices

### ***Appendix 1: criterion for selecting teachers to be interviewed***

Teachers who have accommodated career guidance: take an active role in giving form to career guidance in the team, articulate that career guidance is about coaching students in their career decisions, and show quality career conversations performance.

Teachers who have assimilated career guidance: are committed to coaching students but do not make a clear distinction between educational, vocational and career guidance. Do not plan or carry out any extra activities to help students work on career competencies.

Teachers who tolerate career guidance: go through the motions of career guidance as agreed upon in the team because it is required, but are not intrinsically committed to giving career guidance and do not feel competent doing so.

Teachers who distance career guidance: would rather not do career guidance, do not think career guidance lessons or conversations are necessary, do not think all teachers should have to do this and express own feeling of incompetence in carrying out career guidance.

### ***Appendix 2: interview questions for teachers***

What career guidance entails:

- (1) What do you do for career guidance?
- (2) What is the purpose of career guidance? What do you hope to achieve? (solve a decision problem, growth and development, comply with regulations)
- (3) What form does career guidance have in the curriculum? (separate classes, integrated throughout the curriculum, incorporated into general coaching or citizenship lessons)
- (4) Are teachers trained to give career guidance and if so, how?
- (5) What capabilities should a teacher have for giving career guidance?

Value given to career guidance:

- (1) How often do you have career conversations with students?
- (2) How is attention given to the five career competencies?
- (3) Do all teachers give career guidance or is this the task of specialists?
- (4) Do you think giving career guidance is important? Is it an integral part of being a teacher?
- (5) How competent do you feel in giving career guidance?
- (6) Why do you give career guidance to students? (school or government guidelines, you believe it is important, you try to avoid doing so)

Dialogue about career guidance:

- (1) Do teachers in your team talk about career guidance?
- (2) Is dialogue about career guidance encouraged by your manager or a teacher-leader in your team?
- (3) What may a teacher decide about how to give career guidance and what not? (Whether or not there are career conversations? The frequency? Content of career guidance lessons? Assessment of career guidance?)
- (4) Who makes policy concerning career guidance? Are results of research taken into consideration when making policy?
- (5) Is dialogue about career guidance ever on the agenda of team meetings?

Leadership style:

- (1) What does your manager know about career guidance?
- (2) Is career guidance a priority for your manager?
- (3) How does your manager control how career guidance is carried out? (Are there checks on content and frequency of career conversations? Do team members have leadership roles in this area? Are there professional learning communities?)
- (4) Does this form of control give freedom, or does it give clarity and structure? (transactional vs. transformative leadership)
- (5) What other management do you need in the area of career guidance for students?

**Appendix 3: interview questions for managers**

What career guidance entails:

- (1) What is the purpose of career guidance?
- (2) What should be done for career guidance and what should teachers be able to do?
- (3) Who should give career guidance to students?
- (4) What training (formal, informal, individually or as a team) do teachers need in order to improve the quality of career guidance?
- (5) Is the professional quality of teachers as it should be at your school in the area of career guidance for students?
- (6) What form does career guidance have in the curriculum?

Value given to career guidance:

- (1) Do teams have the task of organising career guidance, and if so what is the effect of this on career guidance?
- (2) Are individual teachers autonomous in carrying out career guidance or are they required to follow government policy or use only evidence-based interventions? What is the effect on career guidance of this policy?
- (3) How important is career guidance? How much priority do you give this in your team?
- (4) Is career guidance for students as it should be? Do you need anything else to give leadership in your team in this area?

Dialogue:

- (1) One theory says that the behaviour of professionals can only change if they have made sense of that behaviour. What would the effect on teachers' sense-making of career guidance be if there was dialogue about career guidance?
- (2) What would the effect on career guidance be if teachers see this as being part of their professional identity?
- (3) What are government guidelines for career guidance?
- (4) What do you know about research in the area of career guidance?

Leadership style:

- (1) Changes in education can be brought about by top-down or bottom-up management, or something in between such as naming "teacher-leaders" or setting up professional learning communities. How is change in the area of career guidance brought about at your school and in your team?
- (2) Is there a school vision concerning career guidance and if so what is that?
- (3) What is your role as the team manager in implementing and improving career guidance? Do you have an obligation to share the school vision on career guidance with members of your team?

**Appendix 4: data coding**

**Coding scheme for teacher interviews**

Codes	Sub-codes
<b>Distinguishing between various types of guidance</b>	
Sense is made of career guidance if teachers state that:	Students are encouraged to think about their futures after graduation. Students are guided in making career choices. Students are helped to reflect on what their own strengths and interests are and what this means for career directions. Students are coached in developing a network.
Educational guidance is meant if teachers mention:	Students are helped to reflect on what their strengths and interests are without linking these to a career. Students are coached in learning and study skills.
Vocational guidance is meant if teachers mention:	Students are taught skills needed for a particular occupation. Students are coached in appropriate attitude for a particular work environment.
<b>Degree of sense-making</b>	
Accommodation	Teachers express the belief that it is important to guide students in making career choices.

(Continued)

**Appendix 4:** Continued.

Codes	Sub-codes
	Teachers give examples of how they contribute to a strong career learning environment.
Assimilation	Teachers say career guidance is nothing new, it is just another name for what they have already been doing.
Toleration	Teachers talk about coaching students without mentioning career conversations. Teachers say they do career guidance because it is a requirement. Teachers say they would rather leave career guidance to others. Teachers say they would rather concentrate on transferring information to students.
Distantiation	Teachers refuse to do career guidance and feel it is not important.
<b>Leadership styles</b>	
Transactional leadership	Deciding what career guidance should be. Rewarding teachers for carrying out career guidance as prescribed.
Transformational leadership	Appointing a teacher-leader. Encouraging the team to formulate a vision and organise career guidance. Giving career guidance priority by putting it on the agenda of team meetings. Encouraging dialogue about career guidance.

**Coding scheme manager interviews**

codes	sub-codes
<b>Distinguishing between various types of guidance</b>	
Sense is made of career guidance if managers state that:	Career guidance should help students think about their futures.
	Career guidance is for guiding students in making career choices.
	Career guidance helps students to reflect on what their own strengths and interests are and what this means for career directions.
	Career guidance involves coaching students to develop their networks.
Educational guidance is meant if managers mention:	Career guidance helps students reflect on what their strengths and interests are without linking these to a career.
	Career guidance is to guide students along the way to earning their diplomas.
Vocational guidance is meant if managers mention:	Career guidance is organised to teach students skills needed for a particular occupation.
	Career guidance is for coaching students in appropriate behaviour and attitudes for a particular work environment.
<b>Degree of sense-making</b>	
Accommodation	Managers express the belief that it is important to guide students in making career choices
	Managers give examples of how they stimulate their team to create a strong career learning environment.
Assimilation	Managers say career guidance is nothing new, it is just another name for what is already being done.
	Managers talk about guiding students to completion of their study course or employment, without mentioning career conversations
Toleration	Managers say they include career guidance in the curriculum because it is required.
	Managers say it is not a priority for them but they leave this up to teachers to do what is expected.
	Managers say their focus is more on meeting requirements of school inspection.
Distantiation	Managers say career guidance is not necessary.
<b>Leadership styles</b>	
transactional leadership	Managers have a clear and rigid idea of what they want career guidance to be, and expect teachers to carry this out.
	Managers praise and/or reward teachers for carrying out career guidance as prescribed.
transformational leadership	Managers appoint and support a teacher-leader who is dedicated to career guidance.
	Managers encourage the team to formulate a vision and organise career guidance.
	Managers give career guidance priority by putting it on the agenda of team meetings.
	Managers encourage dialogue about career guidance with and among teachers.