

1 Introduction

People think I'm successful. I'm well paid, have a nice house and I'm good at my job. But I feel more and more dissatisfied with what I do.

I can't take a year off. How will it look on my CV? Employers will think I've been wasting my time.

Everyone's telling me I've got a lot of potential; but I've lost interest in studying.

When I married Sam, I thought he would be such a good provider. Now he's been made redundant.

The key words in these statements – successful, wasting, potential, provider, redundant – reflect a valuing of success and achievement. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that many people who approach a career counsellor, influenced by this pressure to succeed, may feel to some degree a failure in the eyes of partners, peers, employers or parents.

These assumptions, influences and values raise a number of considerations for career counsellors. Clients may want to turn their feelings of failure into a successful solution fairly urgently – to put things *right*, to find the *right* career, to feel all *right*. Their need to get things right may be transferred into expectations of the career counselling process to come up with the right answer, and to focus on extrinsic aspects of job satisfaction, such as money, status and working conditions, rather than considering their personal strengths and weaknesses.

Additional external pressures, such as keeping up the mortgage payments, saving face with friends or getting into the best college course tend to discourage clients from addressing any personal, and perhaps painful, emotional issues. These include understanding, accepting and building on changes in personal values, and coping with any negative feelings such as the loss and anger so often felt after losing a job.

What is career counselling?

Many people, if asked to define career counselling, would probably opt for something resembling the approach proposed by Parsons, as long ago as 1909. He wrote:

In the wise choice of vocation, there are three factors.

- 1 A clear understanding of yourself
- 2 A knowledge of the requirements and prospects in different lines of work
- 3 True reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts.

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This approach is based on the measurement, through testing, of the client's aptitudes and interests, followed by a recommendation by an 'expert' on occupations which provide a match in terms of the aptitudes and interests required. This process of 'talent matching' (sometimes known as the 'test and tell' approach) was the predominant form of assistance available to people seeking career help until the 1960s. For a number of reasons, we believe that career counsellors should not accept their clients' demands and expectations for 'advice on the best career'.

Firstly, making appropriate occupational decisions calls for the assistance of skilled and sensitive counselling: to reach the point where a rational decision can be made, emotional issues such as managing relationships, coping with loss and change and recovering from damaged self-esteem may first have to be addressed.

Secondly, since a 'job for life' is no longer a reality, lifelong decision-making skills are more conducive to the continuing challenge of making appropriate life and occupational choices, which are themselves increasingly interdependent.

Thirdly, employers require an increasingly flexible approach to their changing requirements, expecting employees to take responsibility for managing their own development, which might mean creating or accepting a 'development opportunity', such as a secondment, rather than waiting for promotion. There is also an increasing recognition that individuals themselves progress through a number of life stages (Super, 1980) and changes in their role requirements and responsibilities (Herriot, 1992).

Fourthly, making decisions is very much a matter of personal responsibility. A counselling approach empowers people to take such responsibility where they, not the counsellor, are the 'expert'.

The career counsellor, like all other counsellors, provides time, support, attention, skill and a structure which enables clients to become more aware of their own resources in order to lead a more satisfying life. We see career counselling as a *process which enables people to recognise and utilise their resources to make career-related decisions and manage career-related issues*. Although focusing on the work-related part of a person's life, it also takes into account the interdependence of career and non-career considerations.

This book focuses on the practice of career counselling. Figure 1.1 illustrates the overlap of career counselling with personal counselling, careers guidance and coaching. The larger 'Career counselling' circle indicates that the focus needs to remain on the *career* aspects of the client's life and the approach is primarily one rooted in *counselling*.

'Coaching' means different things to different people. People coming for career counselling are often unclear about their career direction. Coaching aims to enable people to become more effective in their current careers. There is overlap, but there is also a distinction.

In 1991 Hawthorn described 'guidance' as 'help for individuals to make choices about education, training and employment'. Today, the terms 'advice' and 'information', as well as 'guidance', are as commonly used to describe what careers services offer to potential users. We see this as a positive sign, being a move away from the directive and prescriptive connotations of the term 'guidance'. The *activities* of those involved in providing information, advice and guidance will involve counselling, as well as coaching, teaching, assessment and advocacy.

Figure 1.1 How career counselling overlaps with other forms of help

In addressing personal concerns regarding redundancy, retraining, relocation, retirement, relationships at work, promotion, career breaks and stress, career counselling necessarily overlaps with personal counselling.

The provision of career counselling in the UK

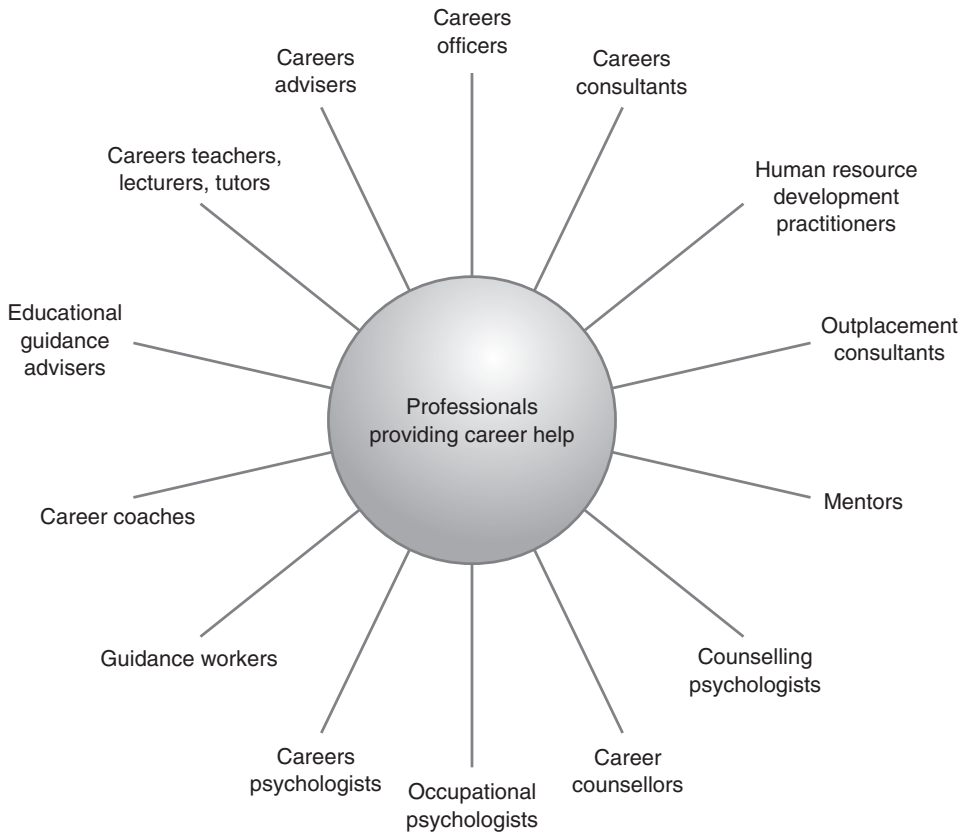
Unfortunately, in England the provision for adults seeking career help is very fragmented and largely uncoordinated. There is provision over much of the country, but it is not easy for anyone needing help to know what is on offer and who it is available for. It is unlikely that trained career counsellors staff the services. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is the national funding body for adult information, advice and guidance (IAG) throughout England. Local services vary from area to area, as services are delivered via IAG partnerships in each local region. IAG partnerships can include, for example, higher and further education careers services, voluntary bodies, private-sector providers and unions. There is no standard answer to how much services cost, or indeed whether they are free. Eligibility, too, varies, as some services are open to anyone, whilst others cater for those up to a certain level of qualification.

The national initiative 'Jobcentre Plus' is being created to integrate job centres, which give job advice, with benefits provision, by 2006. 'Learndirect' offers advice and information on education and training courses and is available to all nationally via the world wide web and telephone. 'Learndirect-futures' has online tools for career choice, as well as access to advisers. 'Waytolearn.co.uk' has been developed by the DfES to bring together information for people who want to learn (see Appendix C).

Help for young people in making career decisions is offered by careers teachers in schools and professionally qualified staff employed by the local Connexions partnership or careers service. In England, the 'cut off' age between services for

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Figure 1.2 Who provides career help?



young people and adults is 19, whereas in Scotland, for example, an integrated service is available to people of all ages.

The various professionals involved in helping others to face career dilemmas are shown in Figure 1.2. All UK public universities provide a free careers service for their current students. Some also provide services to students once they have left, for which fees are usually charged. The University of London has a fee-charging careers service – C2 – available to *any* graduate, and at any stage of their career. For a more detailed study on careers services for employed people, see NICEC (2001).

The Department for Work and Pensions has 'Programme Centres' which offer the 'New Deal', a programme providing job search sessions, access to the internet and CV support, usually for a 13-week programme. Access is normally restricted to those unemployed for at least six months. Some services, known as 'Gateways', are available for people unemployed for less than six months.

An increasing number of employers offer career help to their staff, for example:

- career development discussions to clarify career direction and/or development plans;
- workshops for 'high potential' people to assess and reflect on their suitability for general management or partnership;
- career support for specific groups, such as graduates, women or ethnic minorities;
- career management 'centres' or 'clinics', available for all on a confidential basis;
- learning and development advice, information and counselling, to support career development;
- outplacement help with job hunting for people whose jobs are being made redundant;
- career counselling for 'redeployees' at a time of restructuring;
- pre-retirement planning services;
- advice, information and self-assessment exercises via an Intranet site; and
- coaching and mentoring.

See Chapter 7, *Career Counselling in Organisations*, for a more detailed look at this area. See also the NICEC report (2004) on managing careers in large organisations.

Some national organisations, for example, the Armed Forces, the Law Society, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, the Institute of Public Relations and the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, also offer career help to special groups.

Because government-backed career counselling provision for adults in the UK continues to be so fragmented, there has been a mushrooming of independent services, staffed by specialist career counsellors, occupational psychologists and counselling psychologists. These services differ in their use of psychometric tests. There are some services which still offer a 'test and tell' approach, in which the client is given a series (or 'battery') of tests measuring aptitudes, occupational interests and aspects of personality, the results of which are then interpreted by a consultant psychologist and a report with recommendations subsequently written. Other career counsellors may make little or no use of tests, but use counselling skills to assist clients to make sense of occupational and other aspects of their lives. The connection between work and non-work life has increasingly become the focus of anyone helping adults with career dilemmas, whether it be the burnt-out executive who wants to spend more time with the family or the single mum trying to make ends meet.

Outplacement consultants offer specific help to executives and others facing a job loss. This may involve some counselling to assist recovery from the trauma of the redundancy, but more usually focuses on coaching and support in job hunting. Such services are often paid for by the company as part of a severance package. Outplacement companies are now broadening their services to include career reviews and career-planning workshops, although the traditional job search activities remain the core of what they offer. They are also increasing the provision of services via the Internet, and setting up advisory centres 'in-house' for staff below executive level.

Confusingly, some practitioners who describe themselves as career counsellors are not doing career counselling in the sense that they subscribe to a counselling philosophy or have training in counselling skills.

Although traditionally offered on a one-to-one basis, career counselling is increasingly being offered in groups. There are a number of advantages of working in groups:

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- they are economical to run;
- a group provides a wider range of resources, ideas and information;
- participants realise that they are not alone, as others are facing similar issues;
- mutual support is readily available both during and after the group's existence;
- there is less dependency on the career counsellor as 'expert'; and
- groups provide more opportunities to use active techniques such as coaching in job-hunting skills.

Many such groups are run within employing organisations, and may be focused primarily on occupational issues, more broadly on life and career development, or may form part of a positive action programme, for example, directed at supporting minority groups. Some independent agencies offer 'open' career and life-review workshops, whilst there is government backing for projects to assist the long-term unemployed to assess their job-related skills and receive support and coaching in job hunting. A combination of group and individual approaches may be used as part of a career counselling programme. For example, the administration of psychometric tests can be done in a group, followed by individual feedback and counselling, followed by interview practice in a group. Most of the approaches and techniques described in this book are amenable to either a one-to-one or group approach.

What characterises an effective career discussion was an issue addressed through research conducted by Hirsh et al. (2001). They highlighted how important the approach of clients receiving career counselling is to the success of it: they should 'try to be as objective and realistic as possible, being open to feedback ...'.

Box 1.1 summarises the services which professional career counsellors may offer.

Box 1.1 The services which may be offered by career counsellors

One-to-one career counselling:

- one-off consultation;
- a series of one-to-one meetings without assessment;
- a series of one-to-one meetings with questionnaire and test administration, feedback and counselling;
- a series of career counselling meetings with written assignments (but no tests); and
- a series of career counselling meetings with tests and written assignments.

Group career counselling:

- career development workshops (also known by other titles, such as career planning, review workshops or self-development groups).

Access to careers, learning and development information via a library or the Internet.

Coaching in job-hunting techniques, including CV writing and interview practice: this may be one to one or group based.

The majority of career counsellors provide their clients with access to careers information in some form. An approach to providing occupational information which is consistent with a counselling ethos is examined in detail in Chapter 5. Some career counsellors make use of web-based occupational information and other careers guidance tools. This is a specialised topic for which there is no space in this book, although Appendices C and D refer to useful resources. Job-hunting techniques are not the domain of this book, but are detailed in Floyed and Nathan (2002).

Who should read this book?

This book will assist anyone offering career support, from specialist career counsellors and advisers to line managers. The skills and techniques will also be of value to other practitioners who encounter people who need help in choosing, changing or developing their careers. Practising counsellors and psychotherapists, whether they are working with individuals or groups, will find the structured approach and the specific occupational considerations of benefit when a job-related concern is affecting a client's well-being. Other professionals who use career counselling skills and techniques, or who offer career counselling within another role, will find the book a thorough and practical guide to the process of career counselling and the different techniques available. This group includes human resources and training managers, recruitment and outplacement consultants, careers officers and learning and development advisers, who may need to assist staff and clients in addressing career-related issues as part of their role. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, throughout the book we refer to 'career counsellors' to cover all categories.

Although the main focus is on work with adults, the book will also be valuable to anyone helping young people to make occupational decisions. Abbey and Graham (1996) focus more specifically on careers work with young people. This book is a manual, not an exposition of theory. A detailed consideration of career choice and development theories will be found in Arthur et al. (1989).

Our approach to career counselling

This book is based on our own experience of providing and teaching career counselling. We draw on the work of several counselling theorists, including the client-centred approach of Carl Rogers (1965), the staged approach of Gerard Egan (2002), and some solution-focused techniques (for example, O'Connell, 1998). Krumboltz (1976) described some behavioural approaches which challenge, for example, a client's 'self-limiting beliefs'. Our approach is also influenced by some of the key career theorists, including Holland (1983), Super (1980) and, more recently, the work of Cochran (1997). For readers interested in psychodynamic approaches in career counselling, see Jacinto et al. (2000). This book does not describe the particular theories in detail, but will refer to them at different points in the text to illustrate how they relate to practice.

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Taylor (1985) identified a number of critical questions applicable to the practice of career counselling:

To what extent should the client's feelings be expressed and dealt with, or is the focus on the rational aspects of decision making? It is unrealistic to expect that all clients will be ready to consider rationally the choices available. Career counselling should allow clients' feelings to be expressed where such expression will further the goals of career counselling.

For some people, the degree of anxiety felt about a work or non-work problem will need to be addressed either prior to or concurrent with career counselling. For example, a divorcee may need to address feelings of loss while seeking to support herself financially.

For other people, various 'self-limiting beliefs' may be contributing to unproductive behaviour not only in making rational decisions about a career, but also at work (see Chapter 4).

Who should collect or provide the information – client, counsellor or both? We believe that this is a joint responsibility. The two main types of information the client needs in order to make an occupational decision are personal information and information about the nature of different jobs and work environments.

Our practice is to make use of various sources of information about a client, including self-assessment exercises, psychometric tests, and information emerging from discussion in counselling sessions. Both the counsellor and the client are information collectors, although the collection belongs to the client.

Our contract is that the client is responsible for researching information about jobs and work environments, whilst the counsellor points the client towards sources (see Chapter 5).

Who is the expert (that is, who should be in charge, deciding how the issues raised should be handled) – client, counsellor or both? We believe that clients are very much the experts as far as handling their own problems is concerned. It can be easy for clients to give up their power to the career counsellor and adopt a passive approach to the 'expert advice giver'. We like to involve clients in choosing whether to take tests. We also encourage clients to listen as active participants to and reflect upon tape recordings of feedback discussions and researching options. Whilst some counsellors and clients may have misgivings about the tape recording of sessions, we have found this to be a powerful and effective tool (see Chapter 5).

Who should have the responsibility for making the decision – client or counsellor? What we are describing in this book is an approach to career counselling firmly rooted in a counselling, not a didactic or advisory, ethos. The responsibility for decision making is therefore with the client, whilst the counsellor is responsible for facilitating the process.

What should the predominant counsellor style be – directive, collaborative, interpretive or reflective? Career counsellors need to be able to adapt their styles according to the needs of the client and the stage of the career counselling process (see Box 1.2). A prescriptive style is inappropriate to the approach described in this book. A reflective style may well be appropriate early in the career counselling, but may also be appropriate together with tentative interpretations and a more challenging style later on. In the final stages of career counselling, when action is probably being addressed, a coaching style may be appropriate.

Box 1.2 Stages of Career Counselling

Stage	Client tasks	Counsellor tasks
Screening, contracting, exploring	<p>Making a preliminary assessment of the suitability of career counselling.</p> <p>Undertaking written preparation.</p> <p>Testing out readiness for and appropriateness of career counselling.</p>	<p>Educating and informing clients about career counselling, through written, spoken and face-to-face communication.</p> <p>Evaluating the client's readiness for and appropriateness of career counselling, suggesting more suitable forms of help, if necessary.</p> <p>Building rapport, facilitating exploration.</p>
Enabling client's understanding	<p>Openness to exploring presenting concerns and influences on career and educational development and choices.</p> <p>Clarifying expectations of career counselling.</p> <p>Discussing and agreeing contract.</p> <p>Considering the questions: Who am I? Where am I now? What do I want? Where do I want to be?</p> <p>Completing self-assessment exercises, psychometric tests and questionnaires, as appropriate.</p> <p>Being prepared to tackle the question 'What's stopping me?'</p> <p>Researching information on work opportunities.</p>	<p>Establishing contract (i.e. confidentiality, structure etc.).</p> <p>Facilitating exploration of feelings and beliefs associated with career concern/issues.</p> <p>Helping client to identify important themes and integrate self-understanding.</p> <p>Making appropriate use of self-assessment exercises and psychometric tests and questionnaires.</p> <p>Helping client to overcome blocks to action, using challenging skills, if appropriate.</p> <p>Signposting information on work possibilities.</p>
Action, outcome and endings	<p>Completing decision-making and action-planning exercises.</p> <p>Developing options and choosing between options.</p> <p>Putting decision into action.</p> <p>Agreeing research tasks, if appropriate.</p> <p>Addressing fears of change.</p> <p>Evaluating need for continued support.</p> <p>Reviewing progress made towards objectives during career counselling.</p>	<p>Enabling clients to generate ideas and choose between them.</p> <p>Supporting client in developing and monitoring action plan.</p> <p>Agreeing research tasks, if appropriate.</p> <p>Helping clients face ambivalence about the future.</p> <p>Exploring client's need for continued support.</p> <p>Stressing importance of maintaining momentum.</p> <p>Helping client to identify resources and sources of support.</p>

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The solution-focused approach can be very effective in career counselling. Being *solution-* rather than *problem-*focused, it can be especially relevant when the client in career counselling is ready to *do* something, but needs help in describing, and committing to, the small steps required to get going (see Chapter 4).

The entire career counselling process can facilitate clients' in managing their careers more effectively. Since some clients who come for individual career counselling undervalue their strengths and skills, a supportive style can affirm their intrinsic value. When it is appropriate, a cathartic style may enable clients to free themselves from negative emotions through, for example, crying and expressing anger. See Heron (1990) for a fuller discussion on styles of intervention.

What should be discussed in career counselling? The client's personal/emotional problems, self-appraisal, decision making, test results, information on options, evaluating options, job hunting? Career counselling recognises the interdependence of problems and that personal issues need to be addressed within the career counselling process. The question of when personal counselling is more appropriate than career counselling is addressed in Chapter 7. Similarly, a career counsellor will need to use a coaching approach when addressing job-hunting issues, or refer appropriately (see Figure 1.1).

Summary of the contents

Chapter 2 examines the kinds of issues and dilemmas that clients commonly bring to career counselling. These include issues associated with particular life stages and events; the balance between work and non-work aspects of life; challenges in making or implementing career decisions; disruption brought about by change in organisations; and performance-related issues. In each case we discuss the different kinds of concerns presented, any underlying issues and the implications for career counsellors.

The next four chapters are concerned with the stages in the career counselling process, which are summarised in Box 1.2, together with suggested 'tasks' and responsibilities for both the career counsellor and the client.

If clients are thoroughly briefed about the nature of the service, and can decide for themselves whether career counselling is appropriate, they are more likely to gain from the career counselling than if they had arrived with little or no preparation. Chapter 3 addresses the important but often underemphasised screening and contracting stages, during which the client can become clear about what to expect from career counselling, and the counsellor can explore the likelihood of being able to help this person meet his or her expectations. An initial meeting can be used as a preliminary discussion, without full commitment on either side, and can fulfil a number of purposes:

- it allows clients to 'opt out' without further commitment;
- it enables career counsellors to evaluate the readiness of clients for career counselling;

- it educates clients about the career counselling process, beyond any written documentation; and
- it allows both counsellor and client to discuss the most appropriate 'contract', including the usefulness of assessment tests for this person.

The development of self-understanding is central to Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 looks at the process of enabling clients to address the questions 'Who am I?', 'What do I want?' and 'What is stopping me?' For some clients, greater self-understanding is all that is needed, and this may promote new energy or a change of attitude. For others, self-understanding is just the first stage. They want career counselling to help them make decisions or formulate action plans. Chapter 4 also addresses the crucial stage between promoting self-understanding and taking action – that of enabling clients to reduce the effects of any blocks to action. In particular, we look at the importance of assisting clients to evaluate the impact of self-limiting beliefs and values. The chapter presents many in-session approaches, as well as between-session home assignments, and shows how these can be woven into career counselling.

Chapter 5 describes how psychometric tests and questionnaires can aid the career counselling process. Tests can be appropriate and beneficial if they are administered sensitively and at the right point in the career counselling. If tests are used together with other tools, such as interest questionnaires and self-assessment exercises, they contribute towards, but do not dominate, any feedback discussions. All 'data' produced during the career counselling process can be of value. Data may include written preparation by clients, feedback by the counsellor and responses by clients to such feedback. Chapter 5 also looks at the role of occupational, and other, information in career counselling, and the kinds of information that career counsellors need to know.

Many counselling practitioners find it hard to enable their clients to move on from the exploration and clarification stages of the career counselling process to the 'decision-making' and 'action' stages when these are appropriate. In Chapter 6, practical techniques of encouraging clients to make and follow through their decisions are described. These include exercises for choosing between options, completing action plans and addressing fears of change. Chapter 6 also considers the value of 'follow-up', an aspect of career counselling which is often overlooked.

Chapter 7 looks at the reasons why career counselling is increasingly made available by employers, and the kind of areas that are addressed in such 'career conversations'. A key section of this chapter considers the dilemmas facing career counsellors working within an organisational context. These include 'Who is the client?', aspects of confidentiality and the question of the use, and potential misuse, of power in the career counselling relationship.

The boundary between career and personal counselling, the question of referral, and working with 'third parties' such as employers or partners, are some of the key issues for career counsellors which are explored in Chapter 8. Career counsellors need general counselling skills. These are summarised in this chapter, together with a description of some of the areas of specialist knowledge useful for career counsellors, for example, an understanding of factors relevant in career management.

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Like all counsellors, career counsellors must maintain good professional practice in order to maximise the quality of the service provided, the protection of clients and their own well-being. The elements of monitoring and evaluation, non-managerial supervision and counsellor self-management are described in Chapter 9.

The book is illustrated throughout with case-study examples which are derived from individuals who have presented their concerns to a career counsellor. Names and identifying material have been changed to safeguard client confidentiality. Many of the practical exercises illustrated throughout the text can be found in Appendix H, for ease of use.