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## A Conceptual Paper on Relationship Management Skills: Towards the Development of Students Career Program

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**Abstract:** The world of work is uncertain. Hence, universities and colleges are tasks to help the students acquire vital skills required in the workplace. Preparing students for future career is essential tool for employment success. A career development program has been one of the means in promoting and enhancing positive students' attitude toward school, increasing student engagement, and formulating plans before and after graduation. It is designed to provide students the opportunity to advance themselves academically toward graduation, while providing useful global market information necessary in developing vital skills appropriate in career fields of their choices. This concept paper attempts to explore the role of relationship management skills using the Social Emotional Theory (SEL) as its framework, significantly with a goal of developing an effective career program for students.

**Key Words:** college students, social and emotional learning, relationship management skills, career development program

### 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the tasks for universities and colleges is to assist their students to have good career preparation and planning. It is an important choice of the students that will help them determine their future plans. Super (1957) theorized that career development stages exploration is characterized of developing a tentative career and self-concept that started during the adolescence stage. Whereas Savickas (1999) posited that career development tasks should consist of consistent vocational preferences, narrowing of occupational choices, formulation career goals and engagement in long-term career planning.

The way the students have seen themselves, how do they relate with their classmates and others provides opportunities of good relationship management skills in the future. Several scholars and practitioners in management highlight the significance of Emotional Quotient (EQ) in improving organizational effectiveness. According to Goleman's (1995) EQ identified self-awareness, emotional management, self-motivation, empathy, and

relationship management as key aspects. Relationship management concerns the skill or adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others. Likewise, Salovey and Sluyter (1997) refer relationship management to a disposition toward effectively handling social relationships. Zimmerman (2016) explained that relationship management is in reference to social communication skills and therefore the ability to get the best out of others. The skills can be taught and at the same time can be learn. Further, it involves relationships at work with employees, co-workers, teammates, customers and at home and significant others. Students can acquire and learn employability skills during college. Whilst Wellington (2005) reiterated that technical skills are part of numerous outstanding educational curricula for students' preparations of future career. However, soft skills such as social qualities which are known as people skills and personal attributes that one possesses need a further exploration in the curriculum so that students may learn its importance before they start on a business career. Soft skills are as important as cognitive skills (John, 2009; Zehr,



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1998) and giving students proper preparation on soft skills could make the difference in their being hired for a job in their field (Evenson, 1999). In addition, it has been found that people skills are good foundations of good client service, and client service skills are critical to professional success in any job (Evenson, 1999; Zehr, 1998) and thus promote a positive attitude, effective communication, respectful interaction, and the ability to remain composed in difficult situations (Evenson, 1999).

This context has led to the development of this research paper specifically on students' relationship management skills with the goal of developing a career program. Today many researches shows that relationship management skill as one of the competencies of social and emotional learning has been found to be a good measure for college and career success (National High School Center, 2012). The researcher believes that it is noteworthy to explore the role of relationship management skills in building career program for students given that it is grounded in literature and could help develop an evidence-based program for them. Furthermore, it was also identified that career development program has been one of the means of promoting and enhancing positive students' attitude toward school, increasing student engagement, and future plans before and after graduation (Lapan, 2004). Thus, students will be able to develop career management skills. Such skills or capabilities could underpin a lifelong learning for the students to develop and maintain a good employability (Berdow and Evers, 2011) and may help enhance graduate employment prospects (Pucell, Elias, Atfield, Behle, Ellison and Luchinskaya, 2013). Furthermore, according to Nile and Harries-Bowlsbey (2013) career development program as intervention help empower people to cope effectively with career development tasks. In addition, it help students enhance awareness both self and occupational, help improve technical and soft skills and can even learn how to adjust to occupational choices and coping with job related stress.

## 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### **College Students and Career Development Program**

College life is exciting and full of exploration. Discovering self - emotions, feelings, independence, achievement and future career plans are part of college students' transition in identifying their identity, developing personality and

characteristics. People pursue a college education to make them better wherein university or colleges as a social institution served as a resource for growth and development (Ouano, Buot and Conway, 2014). One of the milestones of college students is their career preparations. Deciding on a career is a developmental process and marked by a significant events and experiences. College life is also a period of critical transition that may bring different changes in the lives of the students (Reynolds, MacPherson, Tull, Baruch and Lejuez, 2011).

According to Hansen (1976), career development is a continuous lifelong method of developmental experiences that focuses on seeking, getting and processing information regarding self, occupational and academic alternatives, life styles and role choices. Nowadays, employers need a comprehensive well-rounded person that adopt easily, work competently and work well with people. Skorikov (2007) reiterated that career planning, career decision making, self-efficacy, vocational identity, and career expectations are interrelated. These are the variables which can be posited as indicator of underlying construct known as career preparation. It has been found in Skorikov that even in high school age youth, career indecision, career planning, and career confidence grew increasingly and has a statistical relations, pointing to the increasing career preparations as a youth move through crystallize vocational choice. Whilst Rice, Gillies, Leahy and Polesel (2015), hypothesized that career development includes all activities that develop student's knowledge, skills and capabilities to plan, make informed choices and manage their careers and career changes. It contains of the following activities that also promotes self-exploration in terms of personal skills, abilities and interests; career exploration which includes having the skill to identify potential pathways and the requirements for pursuing them.

Jackson and Wilton (2017) proposed that students should look for strategies early on in their studies to ensure that they have sufficient time to gain evidence of the required capabilities and skills in their targeted profession. Career development activities that they should be involved in may include interacting and engaging with professionals in the targeted field or undertaking voluntary work or an internship for relevant work experience. Further, Sweet and Watts (2009) emphasized that more than helping the students to make choices about immediate career decisions in college (e.g. subject



and course choice), career development services in schools should also emphasize and develop lifelong skills in planning and decision-making that will support career management and employability across the lifetime.

**Employability Skills and the Role of Relationship Management Skills (SEL Competency)**

Employability emphasizes skills and inclinations that create a person enticing to potential employers and often focusing on short-term employment outcomes (Bridgstock, 2009). It is typically referred to the work readiness on which possession of skills, knowledge, attitudes and even commercial understanding that will enable a new graduate to create productive contributions to the organization after having an employment (Mason, Williams, and Cranmer, 2009).

According to some researches, universities or colleges across the globe are now increasingly producing highly skilled graduates who are able to attend and respond to the changing needs of the contemporary workplace or labour market (Andrew and Higson, 2008; Weil, 1999; Sleezer, Gularte, Waldner and Cook, 2004; Possa, 2006). Similarly, Coopers and Lybrand (1998) explained university today responses to different agenda that typically include modifications to the existing course content that will respond to the employer suggestions. Introduction of the latest courses and teaching methods and delivery of opportunities for work experience intended to enhance development of employability skills are available. Likewise, several university departments now use a mix of embedded and stand-alone teaching methods in their efforts to develop employability skills.

Literature has consistently hypothesized that social and emotional competence is a basic element of academic and workplace success. There is increasing evidence that social and emotional competence is critical to long-term academic achievement and career readiness (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). This idea has long been supported by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) organization which recognized the importance of identifying the aspect of education that promotes academic success and the development of skills necessary for succeeding in school, in the community, in the workplace, and life in general. Their focus is on developing certain competencies or skills that will provide the foundation for young people to have the capacity to maintain high-quality social relationships

and to respond to the challenges of life (Coetzee, Ferreira & Potgieter, 2015). CASEL (2017) described five core social and emotional competencies that are important foundations for young people’s well-being: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Having the fourth competency which is relationship skills permits one to regulate his or her actions as well as expectations so that interactions with different people will turn out well.

According to Abas and Iman (2016), in this period of globalization in the Philippine setting, the higher education concentrated on the development of a whole person –knowledge attributes, and skills expected of them to have by the time they graduated. It aims to motivate and enable a person to develop their capabilities to the highest potential that could help them contribute to the society and be well equipped for work. Their study revealed a moderate relationship between fundamental skills with employees’ contextual performance. It elaborated that being competent in thinking and problem solving skills provides employees with more benefits in performing contextual behavior. Their study also revealed moderate relationship when it comes to personal management skills and contextual employees’ behaviour in which competence in personal adaptability and learning continuously are contributory across all elements of contextual performance. It is also interesting to note in their study that teamwork skills, particularly the skills of working with others, were also moderately correlated with employees’ contextual performance. It implies that graduate competence employability skills give them a due advantage in their perspectives work setting. Moreover, they recommend proper attention on developing competence in employability skills by employers, employees, higher academic institutions, labour agencies, and policy makers may help address the problems with job performance.

**Conceptual Framework**





Figure 1 *Proposed Framework for Students Career Development Program*

Literatures revealed that college life is a transition and a period where students encounter numerous changes and preparations including their future career plans. The Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework demonstrates how it enhances students' capacity to integrate skills, attitudes, and behaviors to deal effectively with daily tasks and challenges (CASEL, 2008). Like many similar frameworks, SEL's integrated framework promotes intrapersonal, interpersonal and cognitive competence. The five core competencies are taught using a variety of approaches: 1) free-standing lessons designed to enhance students' social and emotional competence explicitly; 2) teaching practices such as cooperative learning and project-based learning; 3) integration with academic curriculum areas; and 4) organizational strategies that create a climate and culture conducive to learning. Figure 1 shows the development of specific skills or competencies such as self-awareness (ability to accurately acknowledge one's own emotions, thoughts, and values, and the way they influence behaviour); self-management (ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts and behaviours in different situations); social awareness (ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, as well as those from various backgrounds and cultures); relationship management skills (ability to ascertain and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with various people and group); and responsible decision-making (ability to form constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical, and moral standards, safety issues, and social norms). Literature reveals that SEL prepares students for the workforce and help develop employability skills. Jones, Bouffard and Weissbourd (2013) stated that greater social and emotional competence can increase the likelihood of career success, positive family and work relationships and better mental

health. Whilst in the report of United States Department of Education (2017) it has been found that SEL core skills and core competencies that would help individuals to effectively and efficiently navigate the world of work. This claim was also supported by Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg and Walberg (2004) that the development of social and emotional competence is very important ingredient in order to become successful in school and in life. With these existing evidences of the effectiveness and benefits of SEL, it may be concluded that SEL is part of students' learning.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

After this conceptual paper, a facilitator's manual that will cover the said topic is expected. Using the Social and Emotional Learning Framework (SEL), this paper aspires to create a career development program that will help students acquire effective relationship management skills needed in the industry.

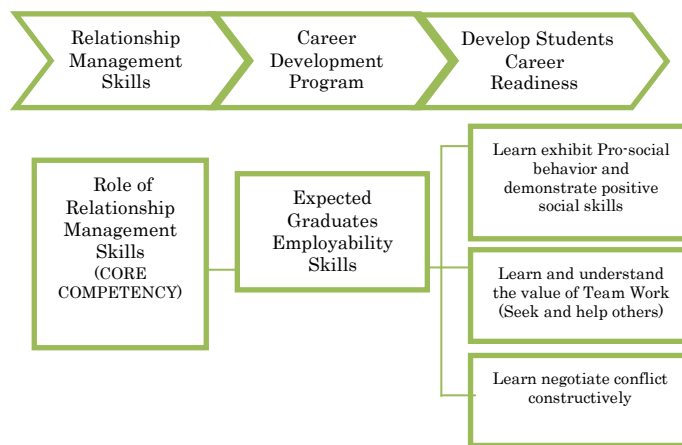


Figure 2 *Conceptual Framework Using Relationship Skills Management as the Core Competency for Students Career Development Program*

According to CASEL (2017) relationship management skills are the ability to ascertain and maintain healthy and regardful relationship with various people and groups. It is composed of communication, social engagement, relationship building and teamwork. It also highlights the



capacity of communicating clearly, listening well, cooperation with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, seek and provide help when needed. Relationship skills also offer individuals with the tools they have to ascertain and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships, and to act in accordance with social norms.

With this proposed framework, the researcher believes that assisting students develop social and emotional competence early on their stay in the university will also help them possess basic competence such as good and effective work habits in the future. It is hoped that students will be able to develop more their ability maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with various people and group. Furthermore, the researcher believes that adopting the Social and Emotional Learning Framework will help achieved competence expected among students and can help highlight their employability skills.

#### 4. IMPLICATIONS TO COUNSELING

The conceptual framework provided by this study can serve as a guide to school counselors in developing a program that will focus on students' employability specifically, focuses on the role of relationship management skills. Literatures posited that college life provide a student number of opportunities for growth and career after college. Creating good career development program will benefit the students. Literatures also pointed out, and linked the importance of relationship management skills as a competency in the everyday lives of students until after college. Thus, it has been found that SEL competency has positive effects in improving students' academic performance, benefits physical health, improves citizenship, and essential to the future career and lifelong process.

Furthermore, anchoring on the Social and Emotional Learning particularly on relationship management skills, this conceptual framework paper aims and hope to create a career development program for students that will cover the following: (1) Understanding the concept and role of relationship management skill based on the SEL Framework (2) Providing the rationale why students need to develop employability skills and why developing relationship management's competence is one of the key components to their future employability and lastly, (3) The modules that will be developed should

contain learning activities that will provide healthy, and rewarding social interactions needed in the competitive global market.

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