

THE NECESSITY OF COUNSELLING AND VOCATIONAL ORIENTATION IN STUDENTS' CAREER MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: *This paper contains a research study about the necessity to provide counselling services in universities and the utility of such services for students and graduates. A qualitative research study based on semi-structured in-depth interviews was conducted, having as main objectives to identify students' opinions regarding the personnel recruitment process, the compatibility with a job and utility of counselling and vocational orientation services. The results revealed that students appreciate such services, they want to benefit from them, but they do not know about their existence. Therefore, a better promotion of these services and a genuine involvement of universities for providing them to the students are the best future strategies.*

Key words: *career counselling and orientation, marketing research, in-depth interviews, professional guidance report.*

1. Introduction

Career management is a very used concept, as all people go through several periods during their life and need to perform some jobs according to their personality and personal interests. In this respect, a proper career development should start from a detailed planning, which has to start from school. This planning could help young people to choose their study programs in accordance with their individual vocation.

Talking about higher education, the most recent trends reveal the need to customize the study programs according to the requirements of the labour market. On the other hand, students should begin their career planning before the faculty degree in order to find out their compatibility with various types of jobs. The next step is to benefit from proper counselling services

that help students perform their career planning.

Starting from the above considerations we conducted a qualitative research study among the students of Transilvania University of Brasov. The main aim of our research was to identify the students' opinions regarding the necessity of counselling and vocational orientation for their career management. We started the research from the hypotheses that students appreciate such services, they want to benefit from them, but they do not know about the existence of either counselling centres in the university or outside this one.

The research was completed with a literature review in order to have a comprehensive image of the necessity to develop counselling centres within the university.

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The outcomes of our research could be used by the university to improve its counselling services, but also to identify the directions that should be followed by the implementation of a project financed from European funds. This project is called "VIA - Vocation, Interests, Self-knowledge and Development, the road to professional success" and has as main objective the counselling of students for their future careers.

2. Literature review

The success of an organization is determined by the quality of its human resources and, in order to obtain such quality, it is necessary to attract, develop and maintain the personnel within the company [1]. In literature, it is argued that the overall economic performance of developed countries is directly related to their knowledge stock and learning capabilities [2]. In this context, managers consider that people are "the best asset" in an organization; it is known, however, that human resources are unique concerning their growth and development potential. Thereby, it is important for them to know and defeat their own limits. Human resources are the only resources capable to produce and reproduce all the other resources available to an organization [3].

Expert G.A. Cole observes right from the beginning of the 90's (as opposed to the 70's) that the labour market belongs to the buyer (the employer), being essentially different from the seller market (the employees), as it was 30 years ago.[4]

Talking about an individual career, this concept covers and identifies different roles in which the individual is involved, like: student, employee, community member, parent, etc., the way he acts around family, school and society, as well as the stages of life [5].

The professional career on the other hand, represents the professional evolution of an individual during his entire life. Within the

same profession, different events could appear in the career of an individual, such as: specializations, improvements, professional promotions [6].

Career management

Career management can be viewed as the ability to build a career, as an ongoing process of engaging in reflective, evaluative and decision-making processes using skills for self-management and career building. Career management involves the interdependence between certain self-management skills (knowledge, values, abilities, aptitudes, interest, work/private life balance) and career-building skills (finding and using information about the labour market, applying for jobs, learning at the work place, building professional relationships etc.) [7].

Career development is considered a long run process that starts with a proper career planning, which is sustained by the career management on the entire life period. Sometimes this process involves a revisit of career options and the establishment of another plan meant to modify the career path as a result of the environment changes, mergers and acquisitions, job changing etc. [8]

A shortcoming of career management could be considered the low integration of individual needs and organizational demand. It is known that organizational demands are often quite different from individual needs and career goals. Whereas companies are interested in productivity, profits, efficiency, the individuals are interested in their self-fulfilment and self-actualization [9]. For this reason, a high degree of integration is necessary and this one could be obtained starting from the identification of the individual needs and a proper career planning based on how these needs fit different demands of companies.

Vocational orientation and counselling

As it is stated in literature, career planning is very important for the future

career management and for obtaining a high degree of job satisfaction. But for the success of this planning, the majority of career beginners need to benefit from a counselling and orientation process.

The professional orientation is the process of guiding a person towards a profession or a group of professions in accordance with his aptitudes and particularities, but also depending on the social standards. This is conditioned by the economic offer and the level of development (work force requirement) [10].

The orientation process should start in schools in order to make individuals aware of their future carrier-path. When we talk about higher education, the involvement in developing the graduates' employability skills becomes very important due to a higher degree of expectations both from employees and employers. Students have to benefit from modern and innovative teaching methods, but also from tools meant to develop their employability [11]. In literature, it is stressed that universities must engage in student's career building and self-management skills. Such programs should involve academic staff, industry partners, careers service staff and students [12].

But common programs addressed to all students are not enough, as the counselling and vocational orientation are meant to discover the path from potential to successfully accomplished work for every individual, with an individual plan being

established for the career and professional development. Thus, an individual approach is necessary in order to identify the best plan for every student.

The role of personality in counselling and professional orientation

Personality traits represent the main structure of an individual's general behaviour and workplace behaviour.

Donald Super is the founder of the self-image theory involved in specific behaviours when choosing a profession. From his perspective, an individual's option is influenced by self-image and the information he has about the profession's world. Super starts from the fact that an individual's option for a certain occupation is a process and a succession of choices and intermediary decisions made gradually during life, related to various growth stages, development, learning and practicing aptitudes, abilities and skills in different activity situations or work.[13]

In the 1950's, Donald Super proposed a model, initially called "vocational maturity", known nowadays as "career maturity (CM)". This model describes people's career-related behaviours in developmental terms, advocating that occupational choice should be viewed "as an unfolding process", not a point-in-time event [14]. Donald Super thinks that the career development process has five stages that come in chronological sequence (see fig. 1).

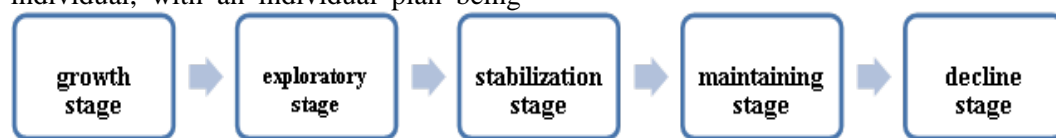


Fig. 1. *The stages of the career development process*

Source: Jigău, M., (coord.): *Consilierea carierei. Compendiu de metode și tehnici. Editura Afir, București. 2006.*

Jigău et al. provide a short description of the above stages developed by Donald Super: [15]

□ **Growth stage** (until 14 years) – the self-image is outlined as a result of the

identification with significant persons from the child's life, the social interaction increases and a development of skills and aptitudes takes place;

□ **Exploratory stage** (15-24 years) – is characterized by self-knowledge and experimenting different roles; the following phases arise:

- a. Attempts – choosing an occupation;
- b. Transition – first work experiences;
- c. Job trial and accepting the job as a permanent one;

□ **Stabilization stage** (25-44 years) – within the desired job, it has as specific elements keeping the position or, if the job does not correspond to the aspirations, changing it;

□ **Maintaining stage** (45-64 years) – the employee seeks to maintain a stable and secure position within the professional life;

□ **Decline stage** – (over 65 years) – the person assumes other roles, moving away from the professional life.

In conclusion, as specialists in human resources management suggest, career management represents a pattern that implies multiple interdependencies between individual career planning, organizational career planning and career development [16].

3. Research objectives and methodology

In order to identify students' opinions regarding their future professional career and the necessity of counselling and vocational orientation for their career management, we conducted a qualitative research study based on individual semi-structured depth interviews. The research took place in April 2012, on a sample of 17 students in economics and business administration from Transilvania University of Brasov-Romania. The objectives of this research include:

1. Finding out respondents' opinions regarding the process of selection/recruitment of personnel;
2. Identifying respondents' opinions regarding the compatibility with a certain job.

3. Identifying students' opinion regarding career counselling and orientation activities.

The discussions were conducted based on an interview guide, and every interview lasted about 30 minutes. The discussions were recorded and the results were obtained using the content analysis.

The research being exploratory, the sample is not representative for the entire community of students, but the results could give us some further research directions and guidance for establishing an effective counselling and vocational orientation process.

4. Research outcomes

The research outcomes are grouped on every objective.

4.1. Students' image regarding the personnel selection/recruitment process

With respect to the human resources selection process, the respondents think that the most important abilities needed for a job are: stress resistance, team spirit, experience, communication, sobriety, punctuality, involvement, availability, perseverance, responsibility, creativity. At the same time, the respondents consider that it is necessary to have computer skills, to have communication abilities in a foreign language and the extracurricular activities are a plus. Most of the students think that the abilities, competences and needs that must be met differ from one domain to another and from one company to another.

Regarding the selection methods, the respondents admit that recommendations and relations are important. Most of them consider that the selection methods begin with the CV selection, followed by abilities and knowledge testing, individual or group interviews, trial period (3 months) or trainings.

4.2. Students' opinion regarding job compatibility

Most of the respondents consider that the main reason for not being compatible with a job is the un-motivating wage. Also, the compatibility profession-personality and the poor educational system are among these inconsistencies with the job. Other reasons could be: the lack of experience, lack of seriousness from both employer and employee or the change in mentality. Personal reasons are also causes of incompatibility.

Most of the respondents consider that the labour market offers jobs unrelated with the subjects they study in faculty. Also the lack of experience and the employer's increased demands cause problems for most of them. The respondents consider that there should be special programs for just graduates as the implementation of more internships in several companies. They believe that the wages are too low. Also, the selection process is too difficult and they are not trained in college to cope with these long processes.

The respondents think that continuous professional training is beneficial and helps them adapt to the society's evolution. Students believe that it is necessary to participate in trainings meant to prepare them for various domains. The motivation provided by companies has to be relevant for the efforts made by employees and most of them think that they should enjoy the work. This continuous professional training helps students get rid of the daily routine.

4.3. Students' opinion regarding career counselling and orientation activities

Most of the respondents do not know about the existence of career counselling and orientation centres. Also, with respect to these centres, most of the students think that the services are useful, even necessary. They offer support for choosing the vocational path, but unfortunately, they are not promoted enough. The respondents

consider that the advice they receive could be very useful.

The participants stated that they could be helped in choosing the right profession through counselling. Also, they want to have the opportunity to do more internships, in various companies and domains (in order to be oriented towards the right career). Most of the respondents consider that they should have the freedom to decide the subjects they want to study in faculty and more than half think that the university should provide tests that help them in their professional orientation.

A small number of respondents believe that the career guidance report should be applied to all students, preferably in the 1st year of college. The respondents also thought that: the guidance report should be conducted by a psychologist or a recruitment firm. Besides this report, internships should be made available in all domains of interest. There are also conflicting opinions. Most respondents think that the report is useful, but a small part thinks that it is insufficient. The research revealed that these reports must be accompanied by counselling and methods of improving students' performance.

The interviewed students do not have information about the existence of certain entities or programs involved in students' counselling and professional orientation. After a short presentation of such a program, students considered it attractive and very useful. There are some respondents who believe that such programs should also be conducted in high-schools, for better results. Most of the students want to participate in such a project, but, besides the guidance report, they also want counselling classes and opportunities for internships.

In conclusion, the research has reached its goal, namely to obtain students' opinions regarding their future professional career, which could help the decisional

factors from universities to find out the necessity to establish a counselling and vocational orientation program and the best ways to develop this one in the future.

5. Counselling and vocational orientation in universities

The counselling and vocational orientation in universities has become a necessity in the new context of the Bologna process, which focuses education on the graduates' competences and the relationship between the education results and the requirements of the labour market. Such services have to provide students with the information necessary for planning their career in accordance with their personal goals and psychological profile. The establishing of counselling and orientation centres in universities is stated by the Romanian Education Law, as part of the lifelong learning program [17].

The Career Development Offices have been created in Romanian universities quite recently, as a result of the national regulatory system laid out after 2005. In this context, Transilvania University of Braşov has developed management instruments meant to improve the career services for students. One of the university's entities in charge with such services is the Information, Counselling and Career Orientation Office (CICOC), which performs several types of activities like: counselling in career planning, organizing workshops, trainings and career fairs, disseminating career opportunities to the students etc. [18].

Other career services have been developed with the support of the European funds. Such a strategic project has been implemented since 2010 by SC Profiles International SRL, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports and SC Multi Consulting Group SRL. The project called "VIA - Vocation, Interests, Self-knowledge and Development, the road to professional

success" is co-financed from the Social European Fund through "The Sectoral Operational Program for Human Resources Development 2007-2013-Invest in people".

The general objective of the project aims at ensuring the premises for the transition of the pupils and students towards the superior levels of education or labour force by having access to information and orientation and counselling activities [19].

The program addresses senior students and includes an individual report for vocational orientation. This report helps students identify career possibilities in different activity sectors that correspond to their own style of thinking, behavioural traits and occupational interests. The students pass a test, which contains questions with psychological elements. According to the answers provided, a student profile is generated, revealing the temperament, personality, thinking capacity, numeric ability etc. With the help of a software program, and based on the personal profile, the compatibility with the activity sectors is accomplished (for example: if the test results show that the individual got a high score at numeric ability, the compatibility with the accountant position is very likely). In order to be considered compatible with the job, the compatibility percentage must be over 70%. Besides this guidance report, the student will benefit from counselling.

Transilvania University of Braşov has been selected by the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports to take part in this project, which means that a number of 100 students can benefit from a free of charge counselling and vocational orientation in the period 2012-2013, the cost being covered from European funds.

VIA project is implemented by SC Profiles International SRL, a member of Profiles International Company, the world leader in evaluating human resources, with more than 70 regional offices and over

50.000 clients worldwide [20]. The branch from Romania was first opened in 2003. It promotes the implementation of a psycho-aptitude and professional evaluation system comprising advanced tests certified by the American Psychologists Association, validated for the entire population. It is a premiere for Romania that this type of evaluation systems can be found on the Internet.

Profiles International Romania's portfolio has 5 product categories: pre-screening, promotion, recruitment, career guidance; evaluation, training and manager's diagnosis; personal development and last but not least team development.

All profiles evaluation and development instruments are available within an online integrated system, which can be used from any computer with internet access. For each client, an exclusive system is created, with secure access based on username and password.

The assessment tools offered by Profiles International in VIA project help respondents to measure the compatibility between an individual and the focused job. Based on these results, the named person could receive counselling for his/her future career.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Employment tests are nowadays used more and more. This is due to the financial crisis, started in 2008, which has forced employers to become more responsible regarding human resources. This is because any person hired on the wrong job costs firms time and money. In this way, the need for assessment before hiring has arisen. It has been proven that companies in which the hiring decision making is based only on interviews choose the right person in only 14% of the cases.

Because of this fact, other evaluation instruments have been created, highly specialized, which involve tasks, as well as many other conditions or requirements,

especially application and interpretation. The surveys evaluate the candidates' personality, so that the result helps the employer. Even if the candidate is not hired, the test results are however useful.

As a result of the research conducted among students, it was clear that most of the respondents do not know about the existence of the career counselling and orientation centres.

The respondents consider that they can be helped when choosing a career path through counselling; but especially through the opportunity of several internships, in various companies and domains.

With respect to the selection process, students feel that the most important abilities are: stress resistance, team spirit, experience, communication and seriousness.

Most of the respondents consider that the labour market offers jobs that do not correspond to the domains they study during the faculty, and the lack of experience and the employers' increased demands cause problems for most of them. The respondents consider that special programs for just graduates should exist, for example the implementation of more internships within several companies.

The outcomes of the qualitative research confirmed all the hypotheses established based on the prior information.

Analysing the specialty literature and the results of our research, we can conclude that counselling and vocational orientation are very necessary for the students' careers management. We believe that these career centres should be highly promoted both among students and among professors. These centres are useful, offering opportunities and very reliable services, but they are not used at their full capacity.

The VIA project represents a unique opportunity, which can help students first of all create an individual personality chart compatible with the suited activity sector, and then receive the counselling they need. There are many students which, after

graduating a university, are confused, not knowing what to do. Because of that, both VIA project – most of the time, and counselling centres can help such students.

We propose counselling centres but also the VIA project should be promoted by Transilvania University of Brasov on the university website and on every faculty's website. A good promotion could also be made by professors. Students trust their professors and the message could have a strong impact. Once the information has reached a few students they will spread it to their colleagues and friends, being well known that word of mouth promotion is the most effective method in such cases.

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