

## CAREER GUIDANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A. C. MARDACHE<sup>1</sup> C. M. MÂNDROIU<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** *The sense of professional accomplishment and fulfilment as well as the development of a successful career are important goals for most adults nowadays, and vocational guidance and training are important steps in achieving these goals. Choosing an university education program, and postgraduate studies, reviewing the succession of positions and selecting organizations to work for are important decisions for students. In this regard, we conducted a sociological survey based on a questionnaire to point out relevant details in students' faculty choices, the objectives they pursued during their higher education program, as well as their future plans after the completion of their undergraduate studies.*

**Keywords:** *career, vocational guidance, higher education, Holland test.*

### 1. Introduction

The sense of accomplishment and professional fulfilment, as well as the development of a successful career, are important goals for the majority of adults today. The correlation between professional training and career success is very tight, therefore it is highly important for each of us to be professionally well prepared in a field that is a true point of interest, if not a passion. In this way, we are willing to continually improve ourselves in the field, increasing the chances of having a successful career and of highlighting our skills, talent, and competencies. Choosing a profession is one of the most important decisions in a person's life as it can determine success or failure in one's professional life. Professional training and development are necessary processes during which participants acquire the theoretical and practical knowledge needed to carry out their present and future work. In all areas of activity, training and improvement of employees has become a requirement of the times we live in. If in the past the information gained during school was sufficient for a person to exercise a certain profession throughout one's entire life, today, knowledge rapidly becomes obsolete, thus requiring a process of constant learning and professional development.

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<sup>1</sup> *Transilvania* University of Braşov, andreea.mardache@unitbv.ro, corresponding author

<sup>2</sup> *Transilvania* University of Braşov, graduate student

## 2. Career and Career Planning

Although today the notion of "career" is widely used, the concept can be discussed under several headings: advancement, profession or succession of positions throughout life (Manolescu, 2001, pp. 322-323).

In a subjective interpretation, from the point of view of the individual, the career is the dynamic framework in which people perceive their life in its entirety and interpret the significance of their diverse personal qualities, actions, and things that have happened to them (Mathis, Nica & Rusu, 1997, p. 135). Johns (1998, p. 560) defines career as "an evolutionary succession of activities and professional positions that a person reaches, as well as attitudes, knowledge, and skills developed over time".

Rothwell (2012, p. 42) makes the following terminological clarifications:

- the term *career* has several different meanings: "It can refer to the occupation for which you have been educated and trained; your job; your line of work or occupation; your specialty; or, in a religious sense, your "calling";
- *career planning* is "the process of formulating the direction of your career";
- *career assessment* is "the process of comparing yourself to the requirements for making career advancement";
- *career management* is "an organization's efforts to help manage careers by laying out career paths that show relationships between jobs or levels on the corporate hierarchy and what training or other experiences and qualifications are needed to move forward—or upward."

Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart and Wright (2016, p. 238) state that the concept of a career has changed in recent years:

- *in the traditional view*, "a career consists of a sequence of positions within an occupation or organization."
- *recently*, "the concept of a career has become more fluid. Today's employees are more likely to have a *protean career*, one that frequently changes based on changes in the person's interests, abilities, and values and in the work environment. Employees in protean careers take responsibility for managing their careers. Employees look for organizations to provide not job security and a career ladder to climb, but instead development opportunities and flexible work arrangements."

According to Armstrong and Taylor (2014, p. 270), the aims of career management are:

- for the organization, the aim of career management is "to meet the objectives of its talent management policies, which are to ensure that there is a talent flow that creates and maintains the required talent pool."
- for employees, "the aims of career management policies are: (1) to give them the guidance, support and encouragement they need to fulfil their potential and achieve a successful career with the organization in tune with their talents and ambitions; and (2) to provide those with promise a sequence of experience and learning activities that will equip them for whatever level of responsibility they have the ability to reach."

A basic career management system involves four steps (Noe et al., 2016, p. 252):

- *data gathering*. Criteria for success: "Focus on competencies needed for career

- success. Include a variety of measures.”
- *feedback*. Criteria for success: “Maintain confidentiality. Focus on specific success factors, strengths, and improvement areas.”
  - *goal setting*. Criteria for success: “Involve management and coaches/mentors. Specify competencies and knowledge to be developed. Specify developmental methods.”
  - *action planning and follow-up*. Criteria for success: “Involve management and coaches/mentors. Measure success and adjust plans as needed. Verify that pace of development is realistic.”

For Mondy and Martocchio (2016, pp. 26-27), *career planning* is “an ongoing process whereby an individual sets career goals and identifies the means to achieve them.” *Career development* is “a formal approach used by the organization to ensure that people with the proper qualifications and experiences are available when needed. Individual careers and organizational needs are not separate and distinct. Organizations should assist employees in career planning so the needs of both can be satisfied.”

Career planning for the employees of an organization is the process of identifying tailored career goals and methods to help individuals achieve their goals. It affects both the individual and the organization by means of the following implications (Pânișoară, 2005, p. 182):

- better development of employees in terms of the need for fulfilment through promotion;
- assessment of the possibilities to start a new career path;
- better use of human resources in the organization;
- improving performance as a result of good training and awareness of all promotion possibilities;
- high employee satisfaction;
- loyalty and longevity in the firm;
- paying equal attention to all employees;
- better identification of individual needs for improvement and development, etc.

Generally speaking, career planning involves the existence of databases about the organization's needs and opportunities and an information system on the potential and performance of employees (Chișu, 2001, p. 309).

Establishing an individual professional program is the foundation of all professional guidance decisions. Starting from the results of the professional program, it is possible to establish a branch of the professional perspective for each employee, which features the succession of the positions to be filled, so that, through appropriate professional training, they can ensure their promotion (Cole, 2000, p. 139). Rothwell (2012, p. 42) notes that “there is a growing interest in career programs (even that has not always been so) and, in recent years, many organizations have begun to sponsor career planning programs for their employees”, sometimes called career management programs, or career planning and development programs. One reason that organizations should provide such programs is to retain the best (high potential) workers to meet future organizational talent needs (Rothwell, 2012, p. 44). Career management helps employees select development activities that prepare them to meet their career goals. It

helps employers select development activities in line with their human resource needs (Noe et al., 2016, p. 239).

### 2.1. Overview of career development theories

*The Theory of Vocational Personalities* developed by Holland (1959, 1975, 1992, cited by Zlate, 2004, p. 357) focuses on establishing a correlation between personality types (he identifies six groupings) and the corresponding professional environment. The balance / imbalance of an individual's personality is influenced by the exercise of a profession that favours or hinders this expression. The six types identified by Holland are: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional.

*The Theory of Career Anchors* developed by Schein (1990, cited by Zlate, 2004, pp. 363-367) identifies eight distinct patterns of talents, goals, needs, and values that arise from one's first professional experience: technical / functional competence, general managerial competence, autonomy / independence, security / stability, service / dedication to a cause, entrepreneurial creativity, lifestyle, and pure challenge.

As they form, these anchors determine strong influences in career orientation. A balanced relationship between anchors (self-image, motives, aspirations, individual values) and the characteristics of the profession or position occupied by that person is a prerequisite for that person to be self-satisfied, dedicated to the tasks and to show confidence both projected towards the self and the organization. In the absence of such a balance, people feel frustrated, demotivated and exhibit poor performance (Zlate, 2004, p. 368).

A mentor plays an important role in strengthening the career of a young disciple (Zlate, 2004, p. 378). The experience, status, and knowledge of the organization's ways of functioning gives the mentor the following functions:

- *support*: the mentor can nominate his disciple for advantageous transfers and promotions;
- *exposure and visibility*: the mentor provides the disciple with the opportunity to work with key people and to know other departments;
- *training and feedback*: the mentor suggests working strategies and identifies the strengths / weaknesses of the student's performance;
- *activities meant to develop professional capacity*: the exciting work the mentor gives the disciple can help him develop his / her essential knowledge for career progression.

## 3. Career Guidance with Students Enrolled in Higher Education Programs

### 3.1. Research methodology

**Research objectives:** (1) What is the career orientation of the students of the Faculty of Sociology and Communication (FSC), of Transilvania University of Brasov, class of 2019? (2) How satisfied are third-year students of the Faculty of Sociology and Communication with their educational choice?

**Research unit:** the students of the Faculty of Sociology and Communication, of Transilvania University of Brasov, class of 2019 (a total of 232 third year students, registered in the academic year 2018-2019).

**Sample of research:** 99 FSC students, Bachelor's Degree programs (Sociology, Communication and Public Relations, Social Work, Human Resources), representing 42.66% of the research unit. The method employed was not probability sampling.

**Method used:** sociological survey based on questionnaires. In the research, two questionnaires were applied: (1) the Holland questionnaire made up of 120 items and (2) a questionnaire containing socio-demographic data of subjects, as well as items measuring reasons behind higher education preferences, the degree of satisfaction regarding university studies, and students' future plans.

### 3.2. Data Analysis and Interpretation

#### Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

*Gender:* out of 99 students, 19 are male and 80 female.

*Age:* the average age of students is 21 (65 students), followed by 22 and 20. There are 7 students aged 25 to 46 in the Social Work specialization.

Most respondents are state-funded students (96) and only 3 pay tuition fees. Although financially most students fall into the first category, they have part-time jobs (21 students) and full-time jobs (19 students); 32 students specified that they are not currently working, but have worked during the faculty, and 27 students have not worked at all.

*Environment:* 70 students come from urban areas and 29 come from rural areas.

*Home County:* most students have domiciles in Brasov County (41). Other counties: Prahova (14), Bacău (10 students), Buzău (10 students), Galati (10 students) and less than 10 students are from Braila, Covasna, Dâmbovița, Harghita, Ialomița, Maramureș, Olt, Vâlcea and Vrancea.

*Housing:* Approximately half the students are renting, 21 have domicile in Brasov, 22 students live in the dormitory, and 12 are commuting.

#### Student's Attitudes towards their Chosen University Program

*Criteria for faculty selection*

The students took into account the following criteria in the choice of the faculty: location of the faculty in Brașov (65 students); the quality of teaching staff (58 students); the prestige of the faculty (52 students); proximity to home (45 students); friends / relatives who attended / attend this faculty (40 students); material equipment of the faculty (36 students) and lower tuition costs (26 students).

*Sources of information in faculty choices:* university / faculty site (44 students); other graduates of the faculty (27 students) and brochures edited by the university / faculty (22 students).

*Hierarchy of people consulted when deciding on faculty choices:* family (67 students); friends (43 students) and teachers (34 students).

*The faculty is for students:* a chance for a better job (88 students); a way to improve knowledge (87 students) and a way to know more people (79 students).

*Students think that university studies are useful because:* they provide students with

the opportunity to develop the necessary skills in order for them to become good specialists in the field (83 students); they satisfy personal development aspirations (74 students); they increase the chances of having a high income (74 students); they represent a condition for succeeding in life (65 students).

During their undergraduate studies, students intended to develop the following skills and abilities: verbal argumentation skills (88 students); written argumentation skills (87 students); organizational capacity (86 students); creativity (83 students); the desire to know related fields; synthetic thinking (82 students); abilities to become good specialists in the field (80 students); ability to work in a team (79 students); punctuality (65 students); learning a foreign language (62 students).

*After the first year of study, the students wanted:* not to resit their exams (83 students); to remain state-funded students (73 students); to make new friends (62 students); to get a scholarship (56 students); to obtain an Erasmus scholarship (16 students).

*Students have the following future plans after graduating* (options that occupy first place in terms of students' future plans): to get a job or to change their workplace (53 students); to enrol at a Master's Degree Program in Romania (41 students); to travel (18 students); to enrol at a Master's Degree Program abroad (11 students); to start a family (7 students); to work abroad (6 students).

As far as the Master's Degree studies are concerned, the students' choices are the following: 23 students have not decided upon their Master's Program, 23 students state that they do not want to pursue Master's Degree studies; 21 students want to pursue a Master's Degree at the Faculty of Sociology and Communication; 10 students want to pursue a Master's Program in the same field, but in another university centre from Romania; 9 students want to pursue a Master's Degree in another field in another university centre from Romania; 7 students opt for a Master's Degree in Transilvania University in Braşov and 6 students for a Master's Degree abroad.

For students, the following aspects of their future workplace are important:

- pay package (86 students);
- working conditions (76 students);
- the possibility of professional development and improvement (76 students);
- relationship with colleagues (75 students);
- promotion opportunities (72 students);
- relationship with their managers (69 students);
- personal development opportunities (67 students);
- appreciation of their work by other people (66 students);
- developing leadership and communication skills (63 students);
- the work place should be in the field of their studies (60 students);
- image of the company (59 students).

According to the students, *the strengths and weaknesses of the Faculty of Sociology and Communication* are as follows:

*FSC's strengths:* teachers, who are modern, understanding, and well-trained specialists in their field; opportunities for personal and professional development; study programs and subjects; the possibility of obtaining Erasmus scholarships; the quality of the lectures and the acquisition of new information.

*FSC weaknesses:* insufficient rooms, large distance between university buildings; chaotic timetable; little information received / dense courses / some subjects are not strategic, others are unnecessary; the lack of punctuality of some teachers; assessment by means of aberrant exams, improper evaluation of grades; little practice.

Student evaluation of the Faculty of Sociology and Communication (from 1 to 10):

- average grade for teachers: 8
- average grade for knowledge received: 6
- the average score for the lecture theatres: 5
- average grade for laboratories: 6
- the average grade for the administration office: 5
- average grade for training received: 6.
- the general mark awarded to the faculty by students: 7.

#### **Student Career Orientation - The Holland Test**

Holland's theory starts from the correlation between the personality type (six identified patterns) and the corresponding professional environment. The author of the theory considers that the balance / imbalance of an individual's personality is influenced by the exercise of a profession that favours or hinders this expression. The six types identified by Holland are: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional.

With regard to the six types identified by the Holland test, most students of the Sociology and Communication Faculty identified themselves with:

- *the social type* (1st place). According to the Holland test, the social type has the following characteristics: it is interested in activities involving interpersonal relation. The subjects of this type like to be the centre of attention and they also feature verbal and social skills, being overall cooperative and generous. They are attracted to activities that involve information, training, and development. Possible professions: teacher, psychologist, nurse, physician, social worker, speech therapist, jobs in mass-media, etc.
- *the conventional type* (2nd place). Features: Stable, rule-abiding. Subjects of this type prefer activities that require orderly manipulation, systematization of data and information. They have administrative, mathematical skills. They pay attention to details and they want to know what is expected of them. Possible professions: accountant, cashier, financial analyst, secretary, librarian, telephone operator, computer operator, administrative assistant.
- *the third place:* the realistic, enterprising and artistic types.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In order to achieve career success, regardless of the chosen professional field, one must prove that one holds the knowledge and skills necessary for the job. It is very important for students to be satisfied with their results, but the full confirmation of professional success comes with the recognition of those who surround them. In order to gain respect and admiration, regardless of the chosen path, one needs to be a good professional, aside from other traits regarding ethics, modesty, and honesty.

Better communication between students and teachers or counsellors would lead to the improvement of the student's abilities and skills and also of certain decisions concerning their future.

*[C]areers involve repetitive tasks, and more rely on an expanding base of knowledge. Jobs are less likely to last a lifetime, so employees have to prepare for newly created positions. Beyond knowing job requirements, employees need to understand the business in which they are working and be able to cultivate valuable relationships with co-workers, managers, suppliers, and customers. They also need to follow trends in their field and industry, so they can apply technology and knowledge that will match emerging priorities and needs. Learning such skills requires useful job experiences as well as effective training programs. These relationships and experiences often take an employee along a career path that is far different from the traditional steps upward through an organization or profession. Although such careers will not disappear, more employees will follow a spiral career path in which they cross the boundaries between specialties and organizations (Noe et al., 2016, p. 238).*

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