STUDENTS CAREER COUNSELLING – AN IMPORTANT STEP IN SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION. CASE STUDY: ROMANIA

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Abstract

The transition from school to professional life is often a challenge for youngsters. Being themselves in the transition from teen age to adulthood, most of the students have to make decisions regarding their future career in which their skills and knowledge could be valued. For youngsters at teen age this change they have to face is a crucial one. They have to choose among a job and university studies, to make decision in order to build a professional experience and to benefit of existing opportunities. The influenced theories in the field of career development and counselling tried to explain how to balance the jobs' requirements with the peoples' personalities, interests, values and contexts. The main idea of the present paper is that career counselling services for students represent a need and this is not the idea of the author only but the conclusion of research in the field of career counselling. In addition, the paper represents an analysis of the counselling services provided to university students in Romania emphasizing the specific of legal framework existing in Romania and the best practices in universities. Career counselling is compulsory in Romanian universities according with legal regulation renewed in 2011. Although almost all major universities in Romania have provided counselling services for students even before 2011, many of higher education institution started to build counselling centers for students after 2011. This is why the final part of the paper contains some recommendations regarding the counselling process based on practices in more experienced universities from other countries considered applicable in Romania by the author.

Keywords: transition, theories in the field of career development, counselling services

1 INTRODUCTION

The step from school to an active working life is often a challenge for young people. Most students, who experience the transition between adolescence and maturity, have to choose a career meant to enhance their skills and training. This is a defining change for young people at this point in their life. They have to decide whether they get a job, or focus on the academic background, how to build their professional experience, how to make good use of their opportunities etc.

The students of Romanian universities are, mostly, people of 18 to 25 years old, which means they go through a period of transformation regarding their personality and social skills, defined by instability, self-seeking, adjustment efforts, lack of a correct view of the professional environment, lack of motivation and perspectives for studying and working, insufficient self-knowledge etc. (Diaconu, Stăiculescu, 2012). At the beginning of their university studies, young students are still adolescents, but during the course of university studies, there is a gradual transition to maturity (Verza, Șchiopu, 1995; Diaconu, Stăiculescu, 2012). Adolescence and maturity traits coexist at some point. Increasing responsibilities, economic and social

pressure make this stage of life tense and full of challenges, which is why there is a great need for counseling adjusted to every student's needs.

1.1 Career Counselling – Theoretical Approach

Career counseling is a complex process which should begin during school. It is very important for every person that comes to counseling, to know their personality traits, to develop their skills and abilities in order to integrate socially and professionally. Also, for the counselor it's very important to know students` personalities in order to make the intervention worthy and this was a topic of great interest for the psychology and human resources specialists.

Theories regarding career development and career counseling have evolved trying to explain how to find a job taking into consideration personality type, interests, values and cultural contexts. The first theories in this field talk about the way interests and skills match the job requirements and the recent ones explain the importance of job satisfaction and of the importance of work in life development.

In 1943, Maslow explained the importance of needs and motivation. By satisfying fundamental needs, such as physiological and security needs, we become motivated to satisfy other superior needs, such as the need to belong to a social group, the need to be socially recognized and the need for self-fulfillment and personal development. It is important for a career counselor to know the degree to which this needs are fulfilled in order to make appropriate recommendations.

Parson's career decision-making model, elaborated in 1909 focuses on identifying individual characteristics, individual traits and environmental factors so that job requirements match people`s needs. This model emphasizes matching the individual traits (knowing one`s own personality, skills, abilities, interests, boundaries etc.) to the requirements of the job (knowing work conditions, tasks, opportunities etc.).

Myers (1920) – Briggs (1940) Type Indicator (MBTI) theory is based on Carl Jung`s ideas about the types of personality. This theory emphasizes the importance of understanding and interpreting human personality and human behavior. It explains that there are four dichotomies that describe personality traits: extraversion-introversion, sensing-intuition, and thinking-feeling, judging-perceiving. Every person has traits that stand between the extremes of each dichotomy and knowing those traits is very important in counseling. The theory was extended and it includes a set of jobs that a person from each category could do in order to help choosing a career (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1998).

J. L. Holland`s theory (1959, 1997) of career development emphasizes on the importance of matching individual traits to job characteristics and on the importance of people`s interests in choosing a career. Holland states that career success and satisfaction are based on people`s personality and interests. Holland identifies six types of personality (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, conventional) regarding work environment, but he mentions that most people have a combination of these types.

Dawis & Lofquist (1984) developed work adjustment theory and their hypotheses were:

- People have two needs: survival needs (food, shelter) and psychological needs (social belonging, acceptance). If their needs are fulfilled, people are satisfied and they have appropriate behaviors;

- Organizations have needs too.

When individual and organizational needs match, satisfaction is mutual. Dawis și Lofquist (1984) say that people tend to choose careers that they think will fulfill their needs and organizations choose employees on the same ground. The proper combination between individual traits (abilities, skills, interests) and job requirements predict satisfaction for both the individual and the employer.

D. Super (1969) created a career development theory – the theory of life and life space. Super states that individuals focus on how they see themselves, how they want to be seen and how they think they are seen, which helps them identify their objectives and career plans. People go through different developmental stages throughout their lives.

J. Krumbolz (2008) applied Bandura`s social learning theory (1986) in career development and stated that counselors main role was not to help an individual find a job, but to help him have a satisfactory life.

N. Schlossberg (1981) created the theory of transition in career evolution. Transition is an event (getting a job or job promotion) or the lack of an event (lack of a job or job promotion) which result in switching roles, routines or relationships in an individual`s life.

Hackett & Betz (1981) and Lent, Brown, & Hackett (1994), in social-cognitive career theory, focus on the personal beliefs that people have in the events related to career development. Developing the previous theory, Gysbers, Hepner și Johnston (2014) state that when individuals have low self-efficacy beliefs or expectations, it will be difficult for them to fulfill their objectives.

Researchers from Florida State University (Sampson, Lenz, Reardon, & Peterson, 1999) created the cognitive information processing theory which focuses on the way people think a d the way this thinking models affect career decision making. They include three factors: self-understanding, occupational knowledge and how people process this information.

Integrative Life Planning Theory was created by Hansen (1997) and states that identifying meaning is essential in the career development process. Also, family, community and cultural context have a very important role in life changes.

Career Building Theory (Savickas, 2005), built upon Super`s assumptions, emphasizes understanding meaning through a narrative approach and encourages counselors to take into consideration each individual`s story, including their context, interactions and the way these evolve.

Brown, S.D. & Lent, R. (1996) emphasizes the importance of values in career decision making. Finding a job that matches a person`s values can lead to a greater job satisfaction.

None of the existing theories explains the complexity of career counseling completely. It is important for practitioners to know different theories in order to have a complete image over career explaining factors and career counseling.

Identifying personality traits is extremely important in career counseling. Personality is defined as a stable element in a person`s behavior, which combines general and particular traits, differentiates people, depends on heredity, but it develops across people`s lives and interpersonal and social relationships have a very important role.

2 CAREER COUNSELING SERVICES IN ROMANIAN UNIVERSITIES

In Romania, counseling and career orientation services have been recently introduced through the Minister`s Order no. 3235/February 2005, which states that „universities have to provide counseling and career orientation services to support students in the professional decision making process".

The National Education Law no. 1/2011 states that an important principle to properly organize students` activities during university is „the right to assistance and complementary free services in the superior state educational system, expressed through counseling and informing by the teachers, career orientation counseling, and psychological counseling".

The Minister`s Order no. 650/November 2014 – Methodology regarding the organization and functioning of career orientation and counseling centers in Romanian universities states that universities are compelled to create and support these centers.

Career orientation and counseling centers from Romanian universities have the purpose to create new employment opportunities for young people in the educational system through counseling activities that include:

a) Counseling and orienting students in order to make them able to efficiently plan their own educational path;

b) Reducing university dropout caused by professional or career orientation reasons and by personal and adjustment reasons;

c) Facilitating the relationship between students and the working environment, so they know the needs and real challenges they will face;

d) Raising student's employment in the field of the graduated studies.

The career orientation and counseling centers activities include:

1. Informing and counseling seniors from high schools and colleges by providing the following services:

a) Educational and vocational counseling

b) Psychological evaluation and counseling

c) Career counseling

d) Creating materials for information and counseling purposes.

2. Raising the degree of insertion in the work environment of students and graduates, offering services like:

a) Preparing the employment portfolio, simulating the job interview;

b) Organizing company presentations;

c) Organizing sessions meant to develop transversal competences;

d) Researching the university dropout, students employment, the impact of counseling services and making suggestions to improve this aspects;

e) Elaborating and applying specific instruments to monitor the employment rate;

f) Taking part in activities organized by alumni.

3. Informing and counseling high school students about the professional and educational opportunities available in the university, about the system of transferable credits available, according to the National record of qualification in the superior education system, through specific means like presentation sessions, educational fairs, thematic visits etc.;

4. Informing and counseling students about the educational and occupational routes in the universities, for superior cycles.

At the European level – the necessity of adjusting university services to students needs is stipulated in documents of public politics (The Declaration from Bologna, European`s Committee Strategy for Superior Education).

Counseling services:

• Must help fulfill students` needs;

• Must assure a proper professional route for the students;

• Must develop professional and transversal competencies to make good use of students` potential for preventing university dropout and sustain employment.

The necessity of counseling and career orientation services ill underestimated by the students from Bucharest universities for various reasons:

- Counseling is not part of the university culture;

- The belief that people who go to counseling have issues;

- Counseling is not promoted enough in the universities that provide this kind of services.

A research made by the National Alliance of Student Organizations from Romania shows that 57% of representing students believe that these services are available, but many do not know of their existence. This percentage is lower than the one in 2014, when 70% of representing students believed that.

In 2016 (the reference year of the research), two years after creating the methodology of organizing and functioning of the counseling centers, they have a series of financial and human resources issues. Currently, there is an average of one employee of the center (psychologist, sociologist, career counselor) for 3448, 88 students, although, theoretically, there should be one employee for every 2000 students, which deeply affects the activity of the centers.   Use as many sections and subsections as you need (e.g. Introduction, Methodology, Results, Conclusions, etc.) and end the paper with the list of references.

3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Counseling services must help fulfill students` needs. It must make them aware of the particularities of their personality, help them develop their self-consciousness, help them take responsibility, solve their adjustment issues, regarding their social and professional life etc.

Studies show that school performance raised for students who were career counseled (Renuka Devi M.R., P.R. Devaki, Madhanika Madhavan, P. Saikumar, 2013) and that counseling services adjusted to students` every day activities increases their efficiency (e.g. online counseling - Adebowale, 2014).

On the other hand, counseling services should help develop the institution, contribute to adjusting educational programs to beneficiaries and promote them so students can use them. Gaughf N. W., Smith L. P., Williams A. D. (2013) show that students from an academic center in the United States believe counseling services are necessary, but few know how to access them (35%).

There is a great need for counseling and orientation services in Romanian universities. It is also very important to provide this services in a coherent, organized system, considering the needs of direct (students, graduates, universities) and indirect (employers, communities) beneficiaries.

Therefore, a series of measures are necessary:

- Providing financial support to universities from public funds so they can provide counseling services for students (at this moment, these services are sustained exclusively by the universities' resources, which is a disadvantage for both the university and the students);

- Standardizing counseling and orientation services provided by counseling centers. This would bring more coherence and quality to them;

- Developing counseling centers by hiring more staff, promoting the offered services, closing partnerships with other important members of the socio-economic environment etc.

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