

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE LABOR MARKET

ALINA NIȚESCU *

ABSTRACT: *In today's society, characterized by an accentuated dynamics and multiple changes, both at micro and macroeconomic level, in order to increase the employability and the chances of insertion on the labor market of young people, a special role is played by professional counseling. Thus, this paper aims to outline a number of issues regarding the need and benefits of professional counseling, but also the tools used and the information provided to facilitate the transition of young people from the education system to the labor market and to increase employment workforce.*

KEY WORDS: *professional counselling, labor market, young people, skills*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *J20, J24*

1. INTRODUCTION

The activity of professional counseling represents a social action that has in view the assurance for the young generation of the possibilities of choosing the profession in optimal conditions of knowledge of the personal characteristics but also of the existing socio-economic environment.

Professional counseling is a form of socialization and/or social learning by offering young people new experiences and information through which they can better shape their career path, be aware of the right profession/career and successfully integrate into the labour market. All of these are meant to bring them professional and personal satisfaction and can help them overcome certain critical contexts in life.

Career counseling has a special role in human society, and economically developed countries with a high standard of living have given it due importance.

* Assoc. Prof., PhD., University of Petroșani, Romania, al.nitescu@gmail.com

Professional counseling aims to provide the necessary support for decision-making related to the profession and the realization of individualized career plans and, at the same time, aims at the process of maximum compatibility between resources, requirements, aspirations, values and interests of an individual and the real offer in education, training and socio-professional integration.

In the context of social realities and new dynamics of the national and international labor market, the content and usefulness of the concept of professional counseling are more current than ever.

2. PURPOSE AND STAGES OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING

Supporting young people for sustainable integration into the labor market is a priority of macroeconomic policies aimed at employment and promoting economic growth and living standards, and is also an important goal of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

The transition of young people from the education system to the labor market is often hampered by a number of specific factors (insufficient practical experience or total lack of experience; young people's lack of knowledge of the main ways to identify a job; lack of a career plan and realistic professional goals correlated with personality traits, inefficient use of personal marketing tools, etc.). This situation generates a series of negative effects materialized in relatively low employment rates, a high unemployment rate and high rates of young people who are not employed and do not follow any education or training program (NEET); at the same time, we must keep in mind that the phenomenon of youth unemployment is much more sensitive to economic fluctuations than adult unemployment.

In this context, the process of professional counseling involves a permanent reporting on the dynamics of socio-economic development at local, regional, national and European level, the evolution of demand on the labor market in the medium and long term, the dynamics of professions in different branches of economy or routes. special professionals.

At the same time, the economic, social and educational realities reveal the need to identify potential entrepreneurs with characteristic skills such as responsibility, spontaneity, adaptability, flexibility, initiative and managerial spirit. These skills are essential for the profile of an entrepreneur, they subsequently generate specific skills in terms of identifying and implementing appropriate strategies for economic efficiency. However, the identification of these skills cannot be achieved by itself, but requires a series of specific actions and activities, among which the activity of counseling and career guidance plays a particularly important role.

One of the main purposes of professional counseling aims to identify for each individual the right occupation, respectively to ensure a double agreement between the individual possibilities and the exigencies of the professions and between the aspirations of the individual and the needs of the society.

The importance of professional counseling for young people derives from the following aspects:

- the dynamics of socio-economic development at local, regional, national and European level;

- the evolution of the demand on the labor market in the medium and long term;
- the dynamics of professions in different branches of the economy, etc.

From the point of view of young people aiming the insertion on the labor market, the professional orientation resides, first of all, in the profound process of change that characterizes the current socio-economic system with repercussions on the jobs, of the professional fields required by the labor market. In this context, professional counseling involves supporting / assisting the young person in the process of choosing - justified and in accordance with his preferences and aspirations - the study courses offered by the existing education and training system, as well as professional or, why not, entrepreneurial career.

For efficient professional counseling of young people in the transition to the labor market, it is advisable to go through the following steps:

- ✓ stage of identifying professional counseling needs globally, through the information interview which includes demographic data, short family history, career counseling needs, educational / professional history, lifestyle, medical history, skills professional etc.;
- ✓ the stage of designing and establishing strategies and motivational approaches. Each person must set their own motivations, professional and individual development goals that generate a series of opportunities, lead to increased self-confidence, and subsequently to the achievement of goals and the removal of obstacles;
- ✓ the stage of providing the necessary elements for career guidance that address issues such as: providing current information about labor market, support in decision making and establishing the career plan, implementation of the plan etc.;
- ✓ stage of evaluation-correlation of skills, knowledge, lifestyle, values, interests and personal career profile with the requirements of employers;
- ✓ The stage of monitoring the career plans seen as an activity to determine the progress of the activity in relation to the planned results; it is considered the systematic observation of the activities and the identification of the problems faced by the counseled person in order to identify solutions.

Professional counseling aims to synchronize, maximize the compatibility between personal and social aspirations regarding work seen as a source of individual satisfaction and as a means of general economic progress. The process involves: competence, competition, selection, success, failure, learning, continuous professional training, taking responsibility, etc.

3. PROVIDING INFORMATION AND USE THE PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING TOOLS IN ORDER OF THE SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE LABOR MARKET

In the first stage of the professional counseling activity which involves the interaction between the counselor and the beneficiary in order to identify the counseling needs, a number of specific tools can be successfully used, such as the information interview and the SWOT career analysis.

The information interview involves the meeting of two people in a specific context, which may aim to exchange information and assess counseling needs. It can be said that the interview method is the practical basis of any counseling relationship regardless of the scope. Historically speaking, the interview method is part of the counseling process, and the communication relationship that is established between the counselor and the subject is the premise for the success of this approach. The interview has two distinct purposes: to collect information about the applicant, which is the first step in its evaluation and to create a positive counseling relationship.

In general, for the informational interviews used in career counseling, the main elements of interest are:

- outlining a general image of the beneficiary (education, professional experience, personal life);
- identification of professional aspirations;
- identifying barriers to achieving these goals and the resources needed to overcome them;
- outlining the first elements of career decision planning;
- identifying the social roles played by the beneficiary.

The SWOT analysis, used in economics field, where it fully demonstrated its efficiency, quickly gained popularity and was taken over by other fields, including in the activity of professional counseling. Career counseling, guidance and planning services have adapted the SWOT method to the needs of their beneficiaries, using it as an analysis tool.

SWOT career analysis helps to understand the factors that can intervene and influence in different ways the initiation and development of activities aimed at professional life. This analysis tool provides information, on the one hand, about identifying and defining one's own capabilities and elements that are competitive advantages, but also about weaknesses or issues that need improvement. The objective of the analysis is the evaluation / self-evaluation of one's own situation, awareness of qualities, recognition of weaknesses, knowledge of opportunities and prevention of possible dangers in relation to the intended career.

In the SWOT career analysis, the internal factors (strengths, weaknesses) refer to individual abilities, qualities, skills and competences, respectively defects, gaps, lack of practical experience. External factors (opportunities, threats) refer to uncontrollable external events (from the socio-economic environment) that can increase the individual's potential or that can negatively affect his professional activity.

The use of SWOT career analysis as a working tool in counseling sessions is particularly beneficial from both the beneficiary's point of view - as it allows the identification and assessment of strengths / weaknesses, career opportunities / threats, and the professional counselor - as it allows a thorough knowledge of the beneficiary; the application of the instrument being an important step with a role in providing information in order to establish the profile of skills and competencies in relation to the career concerned.

Knowing the personality of the counseled person and their correlation with various professions can be achieved by applying *tests and professional interest*

questionnaires such as the *Holland questionnaire*, which assesses a person's interests, for certain areas of activity or professions.

Holland considers that vocational choices are an expression of personality and that work environments, like personalities, can be structured into well-defined and defined categories; people are looking for environments and vocations that allow them to exercise their skills and abilities, to express their attitudes and values.

By applying this test and interpreting the results, the counseled person will benefit from relevant information about aspirations, interests, activities, personal skills and will understand how they can be connected to certain occupations, segments of the labor market (there are several professions that fit each person, in accordance with the personality structure of each). Basically, the counselor will associate the personality characteristics of the beneficiary with the information about professions and occupations, so as to provide the most realistic indications about the recommended work environment for the beneficiary.

Another range of information services that the counselor has to provide in counseling sessions relates to the *set of information that targets the labor market* as a whole and that proves to be extremely useful for the beneficiary in terms of labor market integration. Such information may refer to the employment rate, the professions and occupations required by the market, the main skills and selection criteria considered by employers, the main sources of information to identify job vacancies, employment dynamics and employment fields of activity, salary and promotion conditions, use of personal marketing tools, presentation of web pages, sites containing useful information about the labor market, etc. The information presented is general in nature, and will be customized according to the needs identified for each beneficiary.

Beneficiaries of counseling sessions must be connected to the realities of the labor market and the socio-economic environment in which they will work; only in this way will they be able to achieve a sustainable integration, achieving professional and personal success.

In connection with the information aimed to familiarizing beneficiaries with the main sources of identification of vacancies jobs, it must be emphasized the active role of the National Employment Agency in providing this information but also in stimulating the employment of young graduates of educational institutions in a coherent transition process from the education system to the labor market. Also, in this context we can mention the private recruitment agencies, personal contact network (networking), as well as professional sites.

In addition to the aspects above, the counselor should encourage the beneficiary to participate in the job market, use personal marketing tools (CV, letter of intend, letter of gratitude), play different roles to simulate a job interview and, last but not least to make the beneficiary aware of the importance of adopting the concept of lifelong learning.

As tools used in counseling, in addition to role play and simulation of a situation (can be focused on issues such as employment, choice of profession) can be used case study that determines the analysis of the situation, establishing decision options of favorable factors or disadvantages for each variant, as well as the appropriate measures to implement the optimal decision.

Regarding the concept of lifelong learning, young counseled need to be aware that changes in the economic, cultural, social fields, as well as the development of information technologies are changing society's requirements for the level of adult's education. As such, lifelong learning is gaining an importance and a stronger nuance, as the speed of technology development, the need to integrate these technologies and new ways of working in our daily lives have increased, the exchange of information is much faster, so the need for learning continuous is obvious and undisputed. Among the benefits gained from the adoption of this concept, and that young people need to be aware are:

- easier insertion on the labor market;
- rapid professional reorientation;
- development of social relations;
- increasing social and personal well-being;
- professional advancement;
- intellectual stimulation, etc.

At the individual level, lifelong learning refers to the development of skills and competencies on a regular basis, increasing the level of knowledge. In an organizational context, lifelong learning involves capitalizing on one's own experiences and knowledge and using them as a level of learning.

Young people must be informed, during counseling sessions, that the process of continuous lifelong learning can be achieved through active participation in complementary courses, specialization courses, postgraduate courses, internships, workshops, thematic events, etc. All this will lead to an increase of the level of expertise, to the acquisition of new skills and abilities, to personal development and an increase in self-esteem, and last but not least, to a sustainable integration on the labor market.

At the same time, the young counselors must be aware that the continuous learning process contributes to the development of skills such as:

- developing strengths and balancing weaknesses;
- setting and achieving the proposed goals by overcoming uncertainties and efficient management of problematic situations;
- objectivity in terms of professional life and realistic expectations;
- responsibility and proactive attitude at work.

Following the application of the tools presented and the provision of information in the professional counseling sessions, the counseled persons:

- ✓ will integrate more easily on the labor market;
- ✓ will adapt more easily to social and economic dynamics;
- ✓ will acquire the ability to identify and solve problems, along with the ability to plan, make decisions, take responsibility;
- ✓ will acquire the ability to collaborate effectively with colleagues and to accommodate to any work environment;
- ✓ will acquire a series of specific knowledge about occupations and professional career, as well as about the labor market in general;

- ✓ will be aware of the relationship between skills and knowledge acquired in school and professional success;
- ✓ will realize the importance of the internship, as well as the importance of extracurricular activities in establishing the professional path and gaining practical experience;
- ✓ will be aware of the benefits of adopting the concept of lifelong learning;
- ✓ will develop interpersonal skills and career-relevant skills (self-knowledge, communication, emotional intelligence, etc.);
- ✓ will be encouraged to take a private initiative, to develop proactivity and creativity, adaptability and flexibility and will be prepared to face the risks involved in any economic activity.

On long-term, the activity of professional counseling contributes to an easier and long-lasting insertion on the labor market of young people, which will lead to:

- a professional and personal satisfaction;
- a reduction of the duration of unemployment and implicitly of its social costs;
- increased positive labor mobility etc.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In the activity of professional counseling, higher education institutions play an essential role both through its structures, cycles and types of programs, as well as through the diversity of educational disciplines, specific actions of professional career counseling (the activity of counselors, psychoeducators, tutors, study program coordinators etc.).

In the current conditions of socio-economic development, a continuous investment in human resources is necessary (in the formal, informal and non-formal framework of education and training).

In particular, young people need to be aware that current and future labor market dynamics involve lifelong learning, occupational mobility, personal initiative, communication, entrepreneurship, taking on social roles in the community.

In this situation, the providing of counseling and guidance services for the development of the individual's career are the most recommended. These involve supporting beneficiaries in building their own image and identity in accordance with their personality structure, skills, affectivity or system of professional interests with a regulatory role and anticipation of the lifestyle they want to assume in society.

Properly done, professional guidance and counseling is the premise for successful socio-professional integration and a successful long-term career.

The need to intensify professional guidance and counseling, especially at the level of graduates, lies in the fact that at the present, skills requirements have changed, more and more jobs are subject to automation, technologies are playing an increasingly important role in all areas of activity, and entrepreneurial, social and civic skills are becoming increasingly relevant to ensure resilience and the ability to adapt to change.

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