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Training in the Purpose of Career Guidance Quality Improvement¹

This paper studies the relation between certain characteristics of changeable careers and the process of career managing on the one hand, and certain qualities of trainings on the other. With „changeable“ careers, we can notice differences in the process of career management. Career management has become a life-long process which consists of a complexity of activities undertaken by an individual or which are used to help an individual to successfully cope with the challenges of professional development. These activities have become numerous and more complex, while education, especially the education of adults, is the foundation for some of them. However, what is more important than educational role as a foundation is the fact that education is the condition for realization and development of many of these activities. Considering the fact that education in this area realizes through trainings, it is precisely the trainings and their qualities in this field which are the essence of this paper. There are numerous efforts to improve career guidance quality, and many of them relate it to the practitioners in this field and their training. In this sense, the paper will observe the place of training in the context of the qualities of career guidance process, but in most part will be studied its importance regarding the practitioners in this field, as an important quality of this process.

Key words: career, career guidance, career guidance quality, competencies of career guidance staff, training

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Introduction

The matter of career guidance qualities is gaining more and more importance. The reasons lie in the fact that the mere phenomenon of career has changed and left behind a completely clear difference between traditional and “contemporary” careers. In other words, careers used to be related to the work life and career advancement, and they represented something reserved for a certain number of people. As this traditional interpretation of career was abandoned, the new one has occupied its place, the interpretation which observes career as a set of different life and working roles that an individual takes during his/her life. These careers are dynamic and require from an individual to get equipped with resources which will enable them to lead such a career, that is, to guide it. Thus, numerous requests related to career guidance process occur, and this becomes exactly that – a process which lasts the entire life. This way, a help to an individual to make an initial career choice and enabling them to operate within this choice is now only one of these career guidance activities, which is, considering the changed nature of careers, less and less feasible in that form.

Today we can define career guidance as a set of activities oriented to different target groups which differ in many characteristics. Also, in this model of career guidance there is an increasing need to look at the role of education, especially adult education, which occurs as a condition of realization and development of these activities. Training takes a special place among prerequisites for realization and development of these activities. Training in this field can be oriented to end users of some career guidance activities, but also to those who plan, organize and implement these activities – practitioners in the field of career guidance. In that sense, we find that it is very important to bring up the issue of a relation between trainings quality in the field of career guidance on the one hand, and the career guidance quality on the other hand.

Towards some questions of quality of career guidance and the role of training

Before we broach the question of managing career guidance, and it's relation with training, we consider that it is essential to look back on the determination of “changeable” careers and determining career guidance. Those determinations are important above all because of the clarity of the frame from which we delve into this matter. On the other hand, we

can acknowledge that out of the very determinations it can be “read” why there is an increasing need for the examination of the quality of career guidance. The term “changeable” careers, is determined differently, but it seems that there are certain elements which are common to different determinations. Those same elements are what often separate traditionally accepted career and the “modern” one. With the full appreciation of the fact that out of many determinations which are related to a career there is a vast number of those who do that in the a totally fair manner, definitely encompassing all its essential elements, we decided to go along the determination of career as a “series of positions, roles, activities and experiences related to employment which a person may encounter” (Arnold, 2005: 520). Especially significant are the experiences related to employment, so this author considers that “experiences related to employment include that the activities such as training, education, volunteering, but also unemployment can be regarded as elements of someone’s career” (Ibidem: 520). Educational activities which this author emphasizes are very significant. Specifically, training and education are an important part of someone’s career according to this determination. Career guidance represents the second most important term with which we are operating in this paper. One determination of the career guidance says that “Career counseling encompasses services and activities whose aim is to assist people of any age to in any moment of their lives to make decisions regarding their education, advancement, and professional lives and to successfully manage their own careers” (OECD, 2004) Although this definition talks about career counseling, in our opinion, through operationalization of activities which make it, career guidance and career counseling can be considered to be synonymous. Based on this determination about what career guidance qualities can we discuss?

Above all, it consists of various activities and services; what characterizes it is the openness in the sense of age; openness in the view of different life situations of users; directedness towards their decisions related to education, advancement and professional life; finally, it helps people (and doesn’t do it for them) to successfully guide their own career.

To the question “what is career guidance?” we can answer through the display of activities which is consists of. In the Strategy of Career Counseling in the Republic of Serbia career guidance is defined by following activities: Career informing; Education for career; Career guidance; Counseling for employment; Referring to employment; Career guidance and counseling for employees (Strategy of Career Guidance and Counseling in the Republic of Serbia, 2010).

Although among these activities there are those which don’t have the sufficient level of complexity to achieve the quality of the independent ac-

tivity in career guidance, these activities certainly illustrate the fact that the very process of career guidance is being made more and more complex, and new mechanisms are being sought so that the increasing need for career guidance could be better dealt with, and its quality better taken care of. The emphasis of the importance of the quality of the career guidance is visible from the roles that are being given to this process. In that sense, „career guidance and counseling are one of the very basic instruments of human resources development, by which both educational goals (improving the efficiency of the educational system), and economic development goals and goals of social equality and inclusion are achieved“ (Ibidem). So the questions that become significant are: how to provide a quality career guidance, how to ensure it, how to obtain everything that which comprises the quality of this process? Apart from that, the situation is furthermore made complex by the fact that there is a great variety in view of demands that are that are being sought after in this process, and which can be illustrated in such a way “we need to keep in mind that there are many different – and partially contradictory – expectations about what guidance services should be doing in what way, and what makes them effective” (NICE, 2012) .

In order for the question of quality and the ensuring of quality not to remain unattainable, we believe that it's necessary to constantly make attempts to operationalize it. Still, that attempt is as necessary as it is challenging. Although it appears to us that the attempts of determining what exactly is the quality of career guidance can be made in many ways, having in mind the aims of this paper, we decide that the quality of career guidance can be discussed through the determination of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development where quality can be discussed through:

- Quality of occupational and educational information
- Qualifications/competencies of guidance staff
- Delivery of guidance (OECD, 2001b).

If we would analyze this operationalization further, the criterion taken for the concretization of the quality of career guidance would be very debatable. Also, it is very hard to make a clear distinction between the domain of the quality of information, qualifications and staff competences and the delivery of “counseling“. Still, initiating this discussion would shift the focus of our work to a great extent. Still, this view of quality opens the horizon for the discussion about the role of training, especially through the two previously mentioned points: qualifications/competences of guidance staff and delivery of guidance. On the one hand, training the staff is something great attention is paid to when the ensuring of quality of

career guiding is in question. That can be seen through one determination which best illustrates the current opinions of this relation: „the training and competence of career guidance staff make essential contribution to the development of high quality career guidance services, essential in meeting the needs of national populations and furthering EU strategic aims“ (CEDEFOP, 2009: 9). On the other hand, the delivery of many career guidance activities is also happening in the very act of training. What certainly characterizes the area of career guidance is the variety of target groups to which this process is directed to, and which again, delivers numerous requests when training staff in the field of career guidance is in question. That variety is shown in the results of the research in which relevant European documents about the career guidance are analyzed and which gave interesting findings in view of the target groups of career guidance. According to the research results, this process is intended for the “the young people who are in the formal educational system and who are without qualifications (so called dropout); then it is intended for the adults, for the employed much less than the unemployed and for senior citizens (Mihajlović, Popović, 2012: 38). This question demonstrates the importance of recognizing different target groups, and when the issue is the realization of the activities of career guidance for different target groups. This is also important when planning and programming of practitioner training who work with different target groups. Finally, this is one more way of observing the relation between the quality of training and the quality of career guidance.

Training and competencies of guidance staff

In order to understand the position of training in the field of career guidance better, it is necessary to briefly explain what we mean by training in accordance to the needs of this paper. Although the mere term “training” is characterized by great terminological dilemmas, we shall put them aside for now, still not avoiding their placement in terminological frames which appear in education, especially in professional adult education. Regarding this, we will not observe the training as a type of professional education or a strategy – the way of acquiring professional education. The definition we observe as an important instrument in our work is the definition which considers training to be a specifically designed process of tutoring knowledge, skills, viewpoints and competencies, and which is organized with the aim of skills and competencies development, which is why practical work dominates this program, as well as exercising, multiple

repetition of task procedures which need to be acquired, along with other phases, while in the domain of the outcome, the special accent is put on the successfulness of performing the acquired skills and/or competencies” (Pejatović, Pekeč, 2011: 177–178). Thus, staff competencies in the field of career guidance become a directive to our further examination of trainings in this field.

In the environment where more and more importance is given to career guidance both on individual as well as on a global social scale, the special place takes an issue of staff who work in this field. It is obvious that a number and complexity of different roles they take in this field is growing. With this, what is also growing is the need to define these roles and coordinate them. However, the complexity of work that these practitioners do in this field, leaves some space for exploring the initial preparations and specializations of this staff. There seems to be a discrepancy between an very complex work of a practitioner in this field and the matter of their preparation for it. The list of competencies of a practitioner in this field is becoming longer and more complex. Furthermore, the question of staff specialization in this field is of crucial importance, considering the fact that the changes occur constantly in this field. This, above all, refers to practitioners in this field, considering the fact that it would be rather risky to talk in terms of profession and professionals in this field. Those who are called practitioners take different roles. In most cases, these are professional guides (there are different types of professional guides), peer educators and administrative workers (UNESCO, 2002: 13–14). Still, the role of career guides is considered to be the most complex one and the most affected by the changes in this field, so we will further analyse some of the prescribed and desirable competencies of career guides, which can be significant in terms of the trainings outcome.

Canadian national association of career guidance offers some guidelines for activities in which career guides participate. These comprise the following:

- The implementation of formal and informal evaluation processes in collaboration with clients, as well as the result assessment in order to clarify and explain to the clients their relevant characteristics (such as values, interests and competencies).
- Encouraging research activities based on experience (such as job shadowing, practice and informative interviews).
- The of career planning system and the system for informing about professions with a view to help the individuals to understand better the business world.

- Giving opportunities to improve decision making skills
- Help in the individual career planning development
- Teaching strategies of job searching, interview skills and helping in writing CVs/resumes/biographies
- Help in solving potential personal conflicts at work, through the exercise of developing relevant interpersonal skills (ex. assertiveness training)
- Help in understanding integration of work in other roles in life
- Giving support to people who experience stress at work, job loss and/or career change (Amundson et al., 2010: 8).

The expansion of career guides' areas of responsibility has also been noticed. However, analysing these activities can be significant when it comes to programming trainings, that is – then it comes to contents which need to be provided. This is very important taking into account the fact that trainings for employees in this field are often characterized by a gap between what is needed and what trainings offer. Our attempt to summarize these activities will go in the direction of identifying the knowledge and some of the skills and viewpoints which are necessary for the practitioners in this field, or, to be more precise, which are the guidelines for their training. Some of the guidelines can be: knowledge of the business market, of professions, theories of professional choice, changeable careers; job searching strategies; skills of necessity examination, of career planning, especially the individual ones, tutoring skills, soft skills... Some of the new dimensions of career guidance, which have been represented in previous sections of this paper, can be good indicators of some of the new challenges that the employees in this field face. These challenges can be categorized in a few statements:

Careers are no longer a synonym for success. This statement could still mean that the majority of people today have a career. Such careers need guidance and for career guides this could mean that they will more and more often meet the people of different work experience. Consequently, this will require delicate ability to recognize different professional needs of people who seek their help. Thus, this set of knowledge and skills can be significant in terms of their training.

Careers do not last a period – it is a life-long process. If we had spoken in the previous paragraph about the people with different professional needs and experiences, that focus could now be transferred to the plurality of age groups. Thus, „many people use the services of career guides long after adolescent period or early youth. Moreover, career guides, together with their clients, adjust these interventions to suit the problems and spe-

cific conditions of their clients“ (Ibidem: 3). Situations which require elderly people to get involved with their own career guidance are becoming more and more common. These are often the people who are trying to confront and cope with the dynamics of changes, very often without having the adequate knowledge and skills of career guidance.

Career guidance is strived to be an independent process. Considering the fact that everything is done so that people cease to be dependent on the services of career guidance, but to be trained to be in charge and (often) the only leaders of their own career paths, another challenge is now put before the practitioners in this field. It is very difficult, and certainly requires abundant experience, to level and „dose“ the information flow. That is, to dose it in the amount which will enable those who lead their own careers to expand their research capacity. In a nutshell, staff should make effort to activate their users, not to tender their passive role.

Career is not isolated from other roles every individual takes. A similar acknowledgment we can find in Amundson who finds that „helping clients to take care of their career problems from a hollistic point of view requires a very high level of guiding professionalism“ (Ibidem: 6). This would still mean that practitioners in this field should be competent to observe the global life context of the people who seek their help.

These challenges are important because they can become the foundation for programming trainings in this field. We find this the right time to analyse some of the competencies necessary for practitioners in this field. Canadian national association of career guidance defined the essential competencies necessary for career guiding. They comprise eleven content fields which this association defined briefly:

- **The theory of career development:** theoretical base and knowledge which are considered to be essential for professionals in this field.
- **Individual and group guiding skills:** the competencies of individual/group guiding.
- **Individual/group evaluation:** the skills of individual/group evaluation
- **Information/resources:** Information/ resource basis and knowledge
- **The development, management and implementation of the program:** The skills necessary for developing, planning and implementing various programs of career development in a variety of environments and their management.

- **Support, consulting and improving realization:** Knowledge and skills which are considered to be the basic for enabling an individual and organizations to affect the process of career guidance and development efficiently.
- **Different populations:** knowledge and skills which are considered essential for offering the process of career guidance and leading in different populations.
- **Supervision:** knowledge and skills which are considered essential for critical evaluation of a guide's work, maintenance and improvement of professional skills and seeking other people's help (if necessary) in career guidance.
- **Ethical / legal matters:** Information basis and knowledge essential for ethical and legal realization of career guidance.
- **Research / evaluation:** knowledge and skills which are considered essential for the understanding and doing research and evaluation in career guidance and development.
- **Technology:** knowledge and skills considered essential for the use of technologies in helping individuals with career planning (Ibidem: 9).

Even though we have to take into account the cultural limits of the importance of these competencies, we consider them significant. Why are these competencies significant? As it was emphasized, they „offer guidelines for minimal competencies necessary for efficient dealing with certain profession or a job within certain field“ (Ibidem: 10). Furthermore, „provisions of competences for career guidance can serve as a guide to training programs for career guides or as a checklist for people who want to gain or improve their skills of career guidance“ (Ibidem). From the abovementioned fields we can see that practitioners in this field need whole sets (often of not so related) of knowledge and skills. Taking these sets into account, we can conclude that in conditions when these practitioners deal with certain fields and when the paths of their professional preparation and development are still not beaten, various educational activities and trainings get an important role. A psychologist who deals with career guidance will often lack in parts of knowledge or skills in the area of pedagogical and andragogical counseling. Furthermore, they will certainly need additional knowledge and skills in the area of information technologies. This might be solved by hiring more staff among which everybody will be in charge of one part of work. However, it seems that in practice this would hardly function. Firstly, there are economical reasons. Secondly, it seems that the mere users of these career guidance services

would be left short of effective career guidance. We would like to use this opportunity to emphasize how important it is to consider a set of didactic skills needed to those who work in career guidance, and which are related to education in this field.

As we can conclude on the basis of this section, there are great opportunities and necessity for career guidance trainings. Their importance is exquisite when it comes to the quality of this process. First of all, it is important in terms of the fact that the matter of initial preparation of practitioners in this field is still unsolved. Even in areas where this matter is solved, the training in the sense of additional specialization of workers, and in accordance with the demands related to career management, also finds its place. On the other hand, the quality of career guidance services also depends on the practitioners' training. What is important is that the trainings have to be in accordance with the new career concepts and the contemporary understanding of career guidance.

Some problems and recommendations

Although on the one hand the complexity of practitioners' job descriptions is growing in the field of career guidance, and great efforts to train a great number of practitioners and equip them with necessary competencies, there are still problems which represent great obstacles when it comes to the contribution these trainings make to the career guidance quality. Some of the problems related to trainings for employees in the field of career guidance are mutual to many countries and can be summarized in the following way:

- Governments have been very inactive in defining the content and process of initial training for career guidance practitioners, and in relating these to the goals for public education, training and employment policies. As a result trainers and practitioner associations have developed training programmes quite divorced from public policy objectives.
- National reviews of training for career guidance practitioners take place very infrequently or not at all.
- Significant differences occur in the quality and types of career guidance services that users experience both within and between countries due to significant variations in the training of career guidance practitioners.
- Too often, qualifications in related fields (for example, psychology or pedagogy) are regarded as sufficient for career guidance practi-

tioners, even though such qualifications pay little or no attention to career guidance competencies.

- There are not enough well trained career guidance practitioners to meet demand.
- There is little national data to enable proper human resource planning for career guidance practitioners and investment in training to take place.
- In most countries there are no graded and integrated learning pathways that enable guidance workers to progress from non-expert to expert status. Support staff in career guidance services such as information officers and community liaison staff are provided with no training.
- Too much of the current training is sector-specific, and existing qualification structures do not permit job mobility for career guidance practitioners between employment and education sectors, or even between different sectors of education in some cases.
- There are many gaps in the content of training programmes. These include: skills in ICT use; training for support staff; skills for delivering career education through the curriculum; knowledge of labour market changes; the international dimension of guidance; and how to organise and manage services (OECD,2001, 2004).

Some of these problems could be approached by the following set of recommendations. Some of these recommendations for practitioners training enhancement in the field of career guidance, in the OECD countries are:

- Training should not be grounded in theoretical and philosophical perspectives but should be tied to public policy goals;
- Develop skills/competencies profiles for guidance workers, which could lead to a more flexible qualifications structure with opportunity to progress from first-lene guidance provider to expert status;
- Develop alternance (alternating between work and study) training;
- Provide targeted training for linked professionals and non-professionals, teachers, youth, workers, community organization staff, social workers (ILO, 2006).

What can be spotted at first glance is that these recommendations are aimed towards overcoming the majority of these difficulties. In our opinion, and based on the previously listed problems, a few more recommendations or standpoints could be added to this list, in order to improve the training quality and also the quality of the whole career guidance process.

On the one hand, there is a problem that the trainings were not designed in the way to embrace all the roles career guidance can take: personal, individual role, economic and social role. In this sense, we can say that an important factor in the improvement of career guidance quality is the revision of the training program intended for practitioners. The revision of this program is also important, considering the abovementioned fact that there are gaps in the existing ones. Also, there is no constant monitoring of practitioners training in this field. This requires additional mechanisms (and, unfortunately, often finding initial mechanisms) for evaluating efficiency and effectiveness of trainings. A significant difference with respect to practitioners training in this field leaves a great mark on the quality of this process conducting. In this sense, this is one of the steps to discussing standards in this field. What is certainly an important question is also the number of career guides, but also the number of users of this career guidance process. Although this question cannot be solved only through educational measures, what is definitely concerning is the fact that there are not enough people specially trained for the position of a career guide.

Final remarks

This paper has only brought up some of the issues of training in the field of career guidance. Observing trainings in this field has enabled us to locate some of the ways of observing training in this context. On the one hand, training can be observed as an element of someone's career, that is – as its inherent part. On the other hand, training could be observed as a way of realizing the process of career guidance, or to be more precise – some of its activities. Concerning this, many skills and great knowledge necessary for the career guidance process are offered to users through the very act of training. Therefore, we can consider the quality of some of the career guidance activities equal to the training quality. Finally, a training could be defined as a prerequisite for development and advancement of the quality guidance process. Hence the trainings directed to practitioners in this field are of special importance. Considering this last manner, we have noticed various trends and problems.

New career concepts have brought new demands with respect to knowledge and skills which are necessary to possess. These skills and knowledge are different also for the expanded target groups that this career guidance is related to. The target groups are pupils, students, unemployed, employed and retired people. As career guidance is a life-long process, different age groups seek their place. As a result, today we have a

strong demand imposed on everyone who wants to (and the majority has to) guide their own career. Another result has been expressed as a need for practitioners to be trained to work with different target groups. This is just one of the requests, but also an illustration of a more complex practitioners' job description in the field of career guidance. Therefore, it is not surprising that the most important connection with the quality guidance quality are actually the workers in this field and their training. We have observed the trainings intended for practitioners in this field. Although it was very hard to include all important matters of training in this field, without at the same time taking into account the plurality of initial preparation of the staff which deals with career guidance, we think it is possible to draw a few conclusions.

Trainings are important when it comes to two questions of career guidance quality: the relation between staff quality and training is a direct one. We can also talk about indirect one, when we are talking about guidance delivery (because it also depends on the capability of the staff that delivers the guidance). Even though they are important in the matter of quality guidance process, their contribution is „blurred“. First of all, the trainings still do not match the emerged needs of practitioners in this field. Of course, this kind of claim cannot be asserted unconditionally. In this moment, we assert it on the basis of the problem analysis, given in the references. However, deliberation of this claim is welcome and requires establishing serious research mechanisms. On the other hand, there is still some vagueness as far as different roles of practitioners are concerned. This requires a clear-cut job descriptions which would meet the demands when it comes to training programs. Finally, studying efficiency and effectiveness of trainings for practitioners must become a part of career guidance quality process care. The lack of this information prevents every serious connection of trainings and career guidance process.

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