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Theories of Career Development Applicable to Career Development and Counselling of Higher Education Economics and Management Students and their Employability

Abstract: Employability of the graduates is one of the most important elements of higher education and higher education institutions. In order to enable the students to become more employable, career development and counselling are one of the key activities of higher education institutions besides curricula. In order to provide career development and counselling services it is important to understand career development theories applicable to the students. In this paper, a qualitative analysis of existing literature on career development theories applicable to the career development and counselling of the students, especially economics and management students, and theoretical basis for career counselling of students is going to be performed in the light of increasing their employability. Recommendations for the career development and counselling of management and economics students are given, with the transferrable skills as a crucial element.

Keywords: Career development theories, career counselling, higher education students, employability.

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1. Introduction

Employability of the graduates is becoming one of the most important elements of higher education and higher education institutions (Römgens, et al. 2020) and 21st century job market is more complex than ever before (Dessler, 2013; Amundson, et al. 2014; Kenny, et al. 2018). Cheng, et al. (2022) emphasised that all stakeholders should take part in enabling graduates' employability (the students themselves, higher education institutions, and governments). In achieving employability, it is important to understand career development theories applicable to the students and to comprehend and develop career counselling programs that can increase their employability. Career development theories themselves have a history of changes, adjustments, and improvements through 20th century (Sharf, 2013; Sharf, 2016; Hershenson, 2016). Patton and McMahon (2014) emphasised that career practitioners often do not know which theory to follow and apply in their practice.

In this paper, a qualitative analysis of the most prominent literature on career development theories applicable to the career development and counselling of the students, especially economics and management students, is going to be performed together with the theoretical basis for career counselling, in the light of increasing their employability for contemporary job market.

2. Literature review

a) Career development theories

Career development is often defined as life long process that includes psychological, sociological, educational, economic, and other factors or contexts (Brown, 2002; Brown, 2007). At the end of 20th century, it also became clear that chance and national culture should be also taken into the account (Brown, 2002; Brown, 2007; Rice, 2014; Krumboltz, 2015). One of the newer definitions states that career development can be defined as “managing professional life of one person organized in a family, psychological, social, and economic context” (Ilić-Kosanović, 2020).

Lent (2005) and Lent, et al. (2002) analysed research on the topic of career development and concluded that it is a vast puzzle which includes genetic, family, learning, capabilities, values, personality, goals, life or job satisfaction, choice, performance, development and changes, transition from school to the job market and the exit from the job market – retirement. Dumulescu, et al. (2015) added meaningfulness of a job as an important factor. It is important to emphasise that every piece of this puzzle is different for each individual and has to be taken into the account in developing career development and counselling programs. That makes

career development and counselling of the students a very complex process. Here we can add a field of study (STEM, social sciences, humanities), as an important factor.

Career development theories and researching this topic is not something new for the end of the 20th and the beginning of 21st century. Frank Parsons laid the basis for the expansion of the theories of career development and counselling at the beginning of the 20th century with then rather novel idea that individuals should be actively involved in choosing a job and that taking a chance should not be the only way to progress in one's professional life. Parsons concluded that active involvement in career management brings job satisfaction for individuals and lower costs for companies (Brown, 2002; Patton, McMahon, 2014b). Parsons' theory was known as *Trait and Factor Theory* and was published in 1908. His work is considered as a cornerstone of career development and counselling research. Parsons focused on specific occupations and the typology of people who engage in those occupations (Brown, 2002; Savickas, 2013; Patton, McMahon, 2014b; Savickas, 2019; Patton, McMahon, 2021).

In this literature review, we are going to focus on the most important theories of career development that made mark on career development and counselling, especially career development and counselling of higher education students. In the early 1950's, Donald Super started to develop and published his, now famous, *Life Span Life Space* theory. Super defined three basic terms (Bingham, 2001): life span, life space, and self-concept. Super defined self-concept as "an image of oneself in a role, situation or position, in the performance of a series of activities or in a network of mutual relationships" (Brown, 2002; Brown, 2007; Suhoverhova, 2021).

Super also defined fundamentals of career development: firstly, all individuals are different in their abilities, personality traits, desires, values, interests, and self-concept; secondly, he emphasised that based on their individualities, individuals are qualified for diverse occupations; each occupation requires different combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics, etc. (Brown, 2002; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009; Amundson, Harris-Bowlsbey, Niles, 2009; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2017).

What has attracted the most attention in Super's theory and what remains the foundation of career development studies and career guidance and counselling is his concept of stages of career development. Super highlighted that the process of career development begins in childhood and lasts throughout whole life (life span) and defines five stages of career development (Brown, et al. 2002; Brown, 2007; Amundson, Harris-Bowlsbey, Niles, 2009; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009; Savickas, 2013; Patton, McMahon, 2014b; Savickas, 2019; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2017):

1. Growth – From four to thirteen years of age

- At this, earliest, phase of life, the crucial process is physical and mental growth and development. In this phase, the children establish attitudes and behaviour mechanisms that will become a part of their future self-concept, i.e. self-image. This stage includes elementary and the beginning of secondary education.
2. Exploration - From fourteen to twenty-four years of age
 - At this stage, at the beginning, young individuals are starting to be aware of the occupations available. Through schooling, the young individuals are narrowing their potential profession, and are becoming more aware of their own knowledge, skills, and abilities, same as interests.
 3. Establishment/Crystallization – From twenty-five to forty-five years of age
 - This phase includes first job experiences, possible career changes, adjustments, training, and education. Individuals are establishing themselves in their careers.
 4. Maintenance – From forty-five to sixty-five years of age
 - At this phase, the one's career either continues in the direction it started or the career path is adjusted at the beginning of this period.
 5. Disengagement – From the age of sixty-five
 - This period is about final contribution to the job and preparation for retirement.

Super's theory is characterized with his idea that people in the course of their lives have different social roles (*life space*): the role of a son or a daughter; the role of a elementary of secondary school pupil or higher education student; the role of somebody who arranges and enjoys his/her free time; the role of a citizen, the role of an employee; the role of a life partner; role of a homemaker; the parenting role of parents; the role of a pensioner. These roles are "played out in the theatres" of home, school, work, and the environment, and each individual's career consists of a set of these life roles (Brown, 2002; Amundson, Harris-Bowlsbey, Niles, 2009; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2017).

Super created his famous graphic representations, so-called *The Archway Model of Career Determinants* and the *Life-Career Rainbow*, which denotes the life roles. At the end of 20th century, there was some criticism over theory's applicability on non-white individuals and minorities. Nevertheless, Super's setting of the stages of career development is still generally accepted today both in scientific and professional circles. Super was aware that the future studies would adjust and improve his concepts. Savickas (Savickas, 2013; Savickas, 2019) analysed Super's theory and pointed out that for the development of "self-concept", the role of parents is important and that the children choose role models according to the problem-solving models they received in childhood.

The next noted career development theory is *Holland's theory of professional interests* from 1959 (Brown, 2005). This theory is still very influential and had many revisions and adjustments. Holland also focused on developing psychological instruments that would assist

individuals in career development, but also assist career counsellors and psychologists (Blustein, 2017). His theory was successfully implemented for more than five decades in practice and that makes it very significant (Woods, et al. 2020) career development theory with practical implications.

The end of 20th century was characterized by various new theoretical approaches to career development, like the theories of John Krumboltz; Linda Gottfredson; Lent, Brown, and Hackett; Young, Walach, and Collin, etc. Theory of Young, Wallach and Collin, adds cultural factor and does not tend to generalize information either on the group or individual level (Brown, 2002; Patton, McMahon, 2014b).

b) Career counselling foundations

One of the most known definitions of career counselling is "a formal relationship in which a professional counsellor helps an individual client or group of clients to effectively manage their own career issues (e.g. career choice, career change, work-related stress or job search)" (Amundson, Harris-Bowlsbey, Niles, 2009; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2017). The basis of career counselling is an interaction between a counsellor and a client, with the goal to assist a client in making career choices, in setting career goals, and define career paths. It is essential for the career practitioners to help clients to develop their own paths and to make their own decisions. Career counselling of students has to be founded on the same principles. It should consist of the assessment of a student's personality, interests, knowledge, skills and abilities with the assistance on the analysis of data on the job market opportunities (Ilić-Kosanović, 2020).

According to NCDAA (The United States National Career Development Association), career counsellors perform following activities: Individual assessment; assisting in finding internships; assisting in understanding job market; assisting in developing career plans; assisting in developing job related skills, etc. (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2017). Similarly, UN emphasizes main components of students' counselling: assisting students in becoming aware of their own interests, abilities, values and personality; enabling appropriate resources on the job market requirements; empowering students to make their own career decisions and to assess their interests, abilities, values and personality's match to the available careers; educating students in managing their careers.

Career counsellors should possess the knowledge of career development theories; individual and group counselling skills; ability to develop appropriate programs; ability to work with various groups (minorities, students with disabilities, etc.); the ability of using new technologies; (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2017). Career

counsellors at the beginning of the 21st century are focused on the application and adaptation of career development theories more than ever before and the new career counselling approaches are being developed (Vondracek, et al. 2019). It is becoming even more important since they are faced with an increasingly diverse client base and with the fast development of technology (Swanson, Fouad, 2014).

3. Discussion and recommendations

Ho, et al. (2023) argued that employability of the students is one of the key issues of career development and career development interventions. Tomlinson, et al. (2022) studied higher education students' self-assessment of their confidence in transitioning to the labour market and available psychological scales for self-assessment and supported their value as the employability development tools with significant applied substance. Chavan, et al. (2018) performed a qualitative study in researching management students' preparedness for the job market and found that the students at the beginning of their studies usually do not consider employability as the most important element of their studies and that it changes during the advancement and, especially, through internships and part time employment (Rogers, 2021).

Like Super defined, at the exploratory stage of one's career, young people make choices, but those choices have to be based on realistic picture of one's self in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities and interests and available professions (McMahon, 2013; Zunker, 2015; Maree, et al. 2018). Career counsellors in schools and higher education institutions are thus very important factor in assisting students in paving their own career path (Carvalho, et al. 2023). The first and key goal of a career counsellor is to help the client take responsibility for his/her own career development and for making personal career-related decisions. The fundamental goals of career counselling are: enabling the client, in our case a student for taking responsibility for one's own career (and not providing ready-made solutions); using transferable skills; overcoming negative emotions; assistance in finding work that gives each individual purpose and meaning. One of the researchers stated that career practitioners should follow famous professor Amartya Sen's philosophy that everyone should develop according to one's own capabilities (Robertson, 2015).

In choosing the right theory and adjusting the practice of career counselling, cultural differences and specificities of the region and country should be taken into account. Many standardized assessment systems used in career counselling cannot be used in certain settings (due to cultural, linguistic and other differences).

In assisting students career development, the most important steps are:

- Helping a student to understanding own strengths and weaknesses;

- Providing information on the job market for economics and management students;
- Career guidance and counselling;
- Development of skills and abilities necessary for successful studying;
- Development of skills and abilities necessary for successful understanding and inclusion in the world of work;
- Individual counselling;
- Group workshops;
- Job Shadowing;
- Visits to companies;
- Organization and/or support of student projects;

In the activities, the focus should be given on the development of the so-called transferable skills (Ilić-Kosanović, 2018; Ilić-Kosanović, et al. 2020), the skills needed for effective academic education and for accomplishment in any job position in the future. Those skills usually are team work, analysis, problem solving, reporting, etc.), with the particular skills needed for advancement to managerial positions (leadership, problem solving, change management, innovation, etc.). Economics and management students, in addition to professional knowledge, should also acquire so-called transferable skills, those that can be applied in different work (and life) situations and environments and which are essential for employability in the 21st century (Ilić-Kosanović, et al. 2020). Key to helping students acquire these skills are the programs and courses offered by career development centres in higher education.

Fundamentals of individual career counseling include the following elements that are applicable to economics and management students: assessment of a student's knowledge, skills, and abilities; various aptitude testing; psychological counselling; assessment of personality and interests through various standardized tests and personality inventories; drafting individual development plans and individual career goals; assistance in creating resumes and cover letters; preparation for job interviews; consultations related to the requirements of certain economics and management job positions; counselling on further studies; counselling for preparation for applying for scholarships abroad (criteria for program selection, program compatibility with the domestic labour market, assistance in preparing the application, etc.).

At higher education institutions, the activities of career guidance and counseling of students are handled by career development centers whose practice is based on the application of theoretical principles of career development and career guidance and counseling. In the use of the theoretical basis (theory of career development and career guidance and counseling) and the use of experiences from the practice of career guidance and counseling, several criteria must be

respected for the purpose of counseling economics and management students in terms of their employability:

- Analyze existing theories of career development and career guidance and counseling;
 - Choose those theories that can be most applicable in different national cultures and that will not discriminate according to gender, social status, disability, or any other form of discrimination;
 - Apply existing theories on career development and counselling and create of centers for career development;
 - Apply international best practices;
 - Apply positive experiences of university and faculty career development centers in Serbia;
 - Analyze the attitudes of economics and management students towards career development and counselling, career development centers and use the results.
4. Limitations of the study and recommendations for the further research

This study is based on a qualitative study of existing literature on the issues of career development and career counselling with the emphasis on students, especially of economics and management students. Further steps would include empirical study of career development and career counselling of economics and management students and the consequences on their employability.

Conclusions

Existing literature on career development and counselling shows that for the students to become more employable, students' career development and counselling should be a crucial part of higher education institutions. Existing career development theories assist in building career development and counselling programs for the students, which is applicable to economics and management students. After a qualitative analysis of existing literature on career development theories applicable to the career development and counselling of the students, especially economics and management students, it becomes clear that development of management and economics students should encompass acquirement of transferrable skills as a crucial career development activity.

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