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Psychological Factors Determining the Choice of a Future Job

Abstract

At the time of an economic crisis and its psychological consequences the attitudes and activity of young adults, who are just starting their vocational life, are of great significance. Graduates from colleges and universities are a very important group among them. Their abilities have an impact upon the intellectual potential of the country's economy, and consequently upon its novelty.

The presented research concentrated upon the knowledge of graduates about ongoing changes and tendencies in the labour market, and their ability to communicate their needs in this respect. The study comprised 602 students of the final years of B.A. and M.A. studies, since they are confronted with making a decision concerning their future jobs. Decisions made at that time have a long-lasting influence on the quality of their life. It is therefore worthwhile to acquire better knowledge on the inner motives of their choices.

Keywords: *vocational career, entrepreneurship, labour market, planning, early adulthood*

Introduction

In 1997 A. Jansen asked college students aged from 18 to 28 to select the indicators of adulthood out of forty proposed terms. Most frequent choices of the students included four indicators: 1) taking responsibility for your own actions, (2) making decisions based upon your own beliefs and values, (3) becoming independent and not relying on parents and other significant persons, (4) partnership

relations with parents. It is worth pointing out that such indicators as finishing education and starting professional work were not mentioned. Yet, most authors consider the start of professional work or planning a vocational career one of the fundamental undertakings of early adulthood (Erikson, 1968).

The choice of a professional career is, as a rule, preceded by a long-term education and evaluation of one's own abilities. An additional criterion is taken into account by young men, namely, working conditions. It raises the following questions: What is the meaning of a professional career for contemporary young Poles? What criteria are they ready to accept? What are they aiming at and what are they taking into account in their professional plans?

Vocational career from the psychological point of view

Social sciences define career as an individual course of events or progress in life. As a rule, it is believed to mean a vocational career, i.e., a job enabling an individual to realize his/her potential and abilities. It is also connected with the personal development of a given individual, while the development means changes occurring in activity, aspirations, and aims of the individual. It runs in turns from progress to regression and then from regression to progress (Werner, 1957). The phase of progress is connected with assimilation of new information and differentiation of experience, while regression results from a conflict between the new and old experience. The phase of plateau appears between the phases of progress and regression, which makes it possible to organize and initially integrate the new experience. Regression causes a crisis, which causes discomfort in all spheres of life. That is a significant breakthrough since it marks the end of one phase and start of the next phase of the developmental cycle. The form and intensity of the crisis depends upon many factors such as age, family relations as well as the previous experience of a person.

Super (1980) distinguishes four stages of professional life: (1) exploration, (2) stabilization, (3) maintaining status quo and (4) decadent. Their characteristics are determined by the degree of engagement in vocational activity.

The stage of exploration is concerned with looking for one's own place in life, trying on various vocational roles, and deciding which of them is appropriate for us. The developmental task of a young person is to integrate their knowledge about themselves and their current experience including the role played so far (son, daughter, student, friend) and an attempt to integrate the past, present, and future. Those who get encouragement and reinforcement through personal exploration

will emerge from this stage with a strong sense of self and a feeling of independence and control. On the other hand, those who do not receive positive identification standards and get no reinforcement from their family and significant others (e.g., teachers) will remain unsure of their beliefs and desires, and will be confused about themselves and the future (Erikson, 1968; Overmeier, Seligmann, 1967). An important factor of the exploration phase is connected with an attempt to look for a good and well-paid job. Hence, young people are ready for some renunciations if they believe that it might lead to gaining material success in the near future.

The next phase distinguished by Super (1980) is the stage of stabilization. It is connected with making a choice, and finding a permanent place and field of vocational activity. Naturally, some modifications of plans or even a need to change the type of work might appear due to recent social, economic and technical development (Gurba, 2000). During the stage of maintaining status quo a person strives to keep their vocational status, while the decadent stage means withdrawal from vocational activity. Yet, all the stages are developmental in their nature, and require changing activity in accordance with appearing circumstances. Hence, even at the decadent stage, man can engage in other than vocational activities or wait passively for the end. It all depends upon his/her motivation, beliefs, attitudes, and his/her previous experience first of all (Kaczmarek, 2012).

Social aspects of career choice

Nobody functions in isolation from her/his surroundings. Hence, besides psychological factors the economic and social conditions of a given family plays a significant role. Despite the declarations of 11–12-year-olds of being ready to give their parents financial help in case of need, only those living in small towns and villages really are ready to do it. Stefańska-Klar, (2000) who conducted such studies, points out that attitudes formed at that stage of development are of great significance in being able to act in an independent way, and making appropriate decisions in the future periods of life. They affect the ability to set goals, make attempts at their realization, and overcome obstacles that might appear. It is, therefore, a period of the acquisition of habits connected with work and dutifulness, as well as identification with future vocational roles (Stefańska-Klar, 2000).

Attitudes of young 20–35-year-old Poles towards making economic decisions were evaluated by Tyszka (1997). He also stressed the importance of previous personal experience in this area. A person who used to work and was able to buy some goods, acquires a sense of independence and a belief in an ability to have an

influence upon the quality of their own life. As a result, such a person is able to take into account the previous experience and make an appropriate decision. In other words, the attitude of resourcefulness or helplessness is created by upbringing in a concrete family setting.

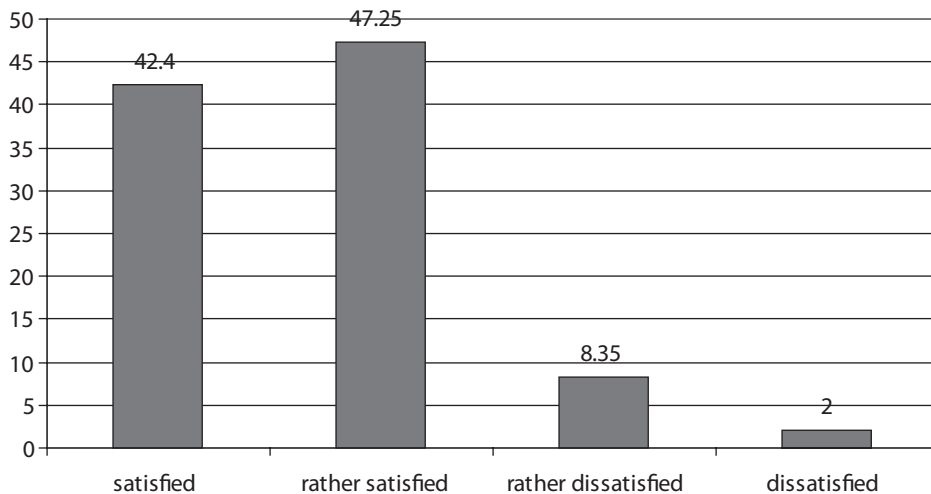
Planning the vocational career requires an ability to evaluate the results of undertaken actions. Young people at the above-described exploration stage are apt to take a risk if it gives a possibility of immediate or at least very close financial benefits. Hence, they frequently change their jobs, and are ready to undertake them despite their onerousness or a long distance to commute. They are also apt to emigrate for some time in order to get a better job. As a rule, the perspective of long-term results is ignored. Possible consequences of physical and psychological overload are not taken into account. The attitude of “I want to have it now” is conducive to undertaking risky activities, such as borrowing without taking into account the real possibility of repayment.

The above-presented studies show that a significant factor in making decisions is “personal interest”. The youth take into account what they consider to be most profitable for them (Plassman, O’Doherty, Rangel, 2007, Kaczmarek, 2012). Research by Judd, Krosnick (1982), Davis (1982), and Lipset (1995) revealed that the idea of personal profit depends to a considerable degree on such a variable as the education level, as well as age or sex, but to a lesser degree. Persons having a higher education exhibit market-oriented behaviors, they are more active and professionally oriented. On the other hand, those with a lower level of education frequently exhibit demanding attitudes (e.g. they believe that the state should provide a citizen with a stable and well-paid job). A low level of education is often connected with external locus of control, and the belief that the state should control the labor market, wages, production and sale. Such persons expect to get high benefits, high minimum income, and low income inequality (Tyszka, 1997). A higher level of education shows greater approval for economic changes. It probably results from the ability to anticipate new chances and profits following system changes. Young highly educated people show a tendency to expect positive rather than negative events. They expect to change their job for a better one, and not to be confronted with being left without a job. It is an effect of wishful thinking closely connected with consumer needs typical of that period of life. Middle-aged persons look for stabilization and attempt to maintain the acquired position.

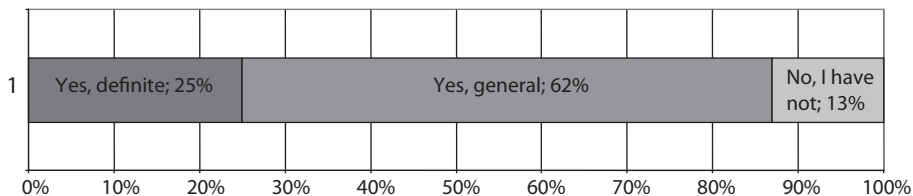
Results

The presented study comprised 602 participants. They were asked to specify their satisfaction with the chosen field of study. The data gathered in this way are presented in Figure 1.

Figure1. Satisfaction with the chosen field of study.



It can be noted that 90% of the participants were satisfied with the chosen field of study (43% to a high degree and 47% quite so), and only 10% were not happy with it. Moreover, 8% of them reported a moderate lack of content. At the same time, 62% of the examined students declared that they would make the same choice again, and only 24% would change their field of study. Others were apt to change the form of study (intramural/extramural courses), but within the same field. It shows that the previous decisions of the examined youths were taken consciously and responsibly. Quite optimistic are also the data showing that the interest in a given domain was the main factor taken into account while choosing a field of study. Accordingly, 57% of the respondents (in the multiple choice questionnaire) pointed to the interests, 40% took into consideration a possibility of getting a good job, while for 33% the distance from the place of residence proved to be of importance. The additional reasons enumerated by the examined students in the final part of the questionnaire were failure to be admitted to the first choice studies as well as clear coincidence.

Figure 2. The degree of defining occupational plans by examined students.

Closely connected with the study choice is the future job. As illustrated in Figure 2, only 25% of the examined subjects reported defined career plans, while 62% had but a general idea about them, and 13% had not formulated any plans as yet. It confirms the assumption that the youth taking part in our research were at the stage of exploration. They were looking for fulfillment of the planned tasks in accordance with the already acquired abilities and skills.

Among other factors having impact upon the chosen field of study, financial attractiveness of a job was taken into account by 58% of the respondents, while 12% of them thought it was of no significance. What proved to be important was the possibility of making a career (53% of choices), and easy access to the workplace (52% of choices). At the same time, the prestige of a profession was considered only by 44% of the participants. It means that well-paid jobs were not perceived as prestigious. Family traditions were taken into consideration only in 8% of the cases. In a similar vein, 7% of the participants undertook a given field of study under family pressure, and 23% of their choices were influenced by family connections.

It is of interest that only 43% of the participants believed that the field of study chosen by them would make finding the desired work easier for them. It means that more than a half of the examined students did not expect to take up a job in accordance with the acquired qualifications. There is also a rather loose connection between the evaluation of the practical value of their study and the feeling of being satisfied with it. Let us remind here that 90% of the participants reported being happy with their choice, yet only 18% believed that theoretical classes may be of some value in their future vocational life. It does not mean that theoretical classes do not take into account vocational usefulness, but lectures often do not take care to expose mutual connections between theory and practical skills. It needs to be stressed that nearly half of the participants (48%) appreciated the practical experience of lectures. They appreciated flexibility and attractiveness of classes: lecturers with practical experience often give examples which make theoretical issues of a lecture more interesting and easier to understand.

Conclusions

The nature of a vocational career is subjective to a considerable degree since each person attempts to realize his/her own goals in accordance with the accepted values and attitudes. It should be stressed that the ability to set a goal is a significant condition for achieving success. Those who are able to plan their own career have a feeling of being a creator of their own destiny, which in turn strengthens the sense of one's own value. Such persons find their strong points and analyze their own capabilities, which stimulates their further development and active search for a position that would suit their needs and capabilities. It need not be reminded that a satisfying job gives you a feeling of well-being and happiness.

The dynamics of social and economic changes makes young people undertake new challenges and change the forms of activity during their vocational career. It is connected with the shortage of workplaces, new ways and character of occupational tasks, and increase in the requirements of professional qualifications. Therefore, it is of import to be flexible and able to change vocational activity in accordance with new labor market needs.

The above-presented data points to many aspects of the complex nature of career planning. The choices made by young people are influenced by their previous experience and acquired attitudes. It makes it possible to take up various forms of activity as well as an ability to overcome problems that might appear. It is of particular importance due to the constant change of economic and social conditions. The present financial and economic crisis shows that apart from economic factors, psychological attitudes of consumers and bank clients are significant. Hence, despite possible problems that might appear at the labor market those who know their own possibilities and are able to act in an entrepreneurial way will have a greater chance to win.

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