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TENDENCIES IN THE CAREER PLANNING OF STUDENTS

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Abstract

Any career is built in time, through consistency and effort, based on a solid training, in a correct relationship with who we are and what we can do with the opportunities we identify at some point. Our career path starts with the course of studies, when we clearly distinguish between our knowledge interests to be well prepared in a certain area of specialty, with a mandatory choice of a route/specialization out of the educational offer of a faculty. Therefore, we should make the right decisions and constantly plan our career development. This career planning process may be acquired and applied throughout our life by covering a few main stages or it may be achieved spontaneously, under the influence of chance. This paper aims at highlighting the habit of three hundred 1st, 2nd, 3rd year students of POLITEHNICA University of Bucharest, regarding their own career planning, and we expect that planning model of the self-oriented type based on awareness, rigorous analysis and proper information should undergo variations from one year of study to the other. The research method used was the questionnaire-based survey and the data processing of the two questionnaires used during the research confirmed the working hypothesis.

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Keywords: CAREER planning; self-oriented model; chance-luck model; career planning strategies.

1. Introduction

Professional counseling is presented as one of the solutions for improving educational performances and access to the labor market. Career counseling and schooling guidance are discussed as the approaches which can help youngsters better manage their professional lives, from choosing the right school or university to follow, up to finding the proper workplace (Enăchescu, Roșca, 2014). Career gives the measure of profession progress of any individual throughout his/her whole life. Within the same profession, the career of an individual may record specialization, professional improvements or

promotions (Tășica, 2002). The actual choice of a career starts when we get aware and define the intention to attend certain studies and practice a profession. This process of awareness and definition of the intention in the direction of an appropriate education which will result in practicing a profession, depends on internal factors (skills, attitudes, values, etc.), but also external factors (family, social models, job market, etc.), (Chircu, 2015). Skills development for career planning to manage coherently and constructively the internal and external factors is imperative, especially when the discrepancy between the two factors often generates dissatisfaction, manifested as a dissonance between what we like to do and what we come to practice. The student years mean first and foremost a crystallization of the educational route, the university studies leading the student, due to the perseverance of attending them, to the point of providing them an applicative dimension, by exercising them in a job. In this stage, career planning means for the student the ability to determine correctly and concretely educational and professional objectives which, by correlation with appropriate actions, might lead the student to the career target. Generating an efficient system of professional counseling involves analyzing various factors that affect the degree of involvement of students in the management of their careers (Aroca, Romero, Paredes, 2016).

The chance and luck type of career planning is based on the following vision: to get the wanted job, one must rely on chance and luck, thus exclusively insinuating the power of factors upon the career, chance and luck often being equated with one's relationships and, perhaps, the opportunity to catch the right context in order to obtain the targeted job. In opposition, the self-oriented model of career planning fosters the individual's ability to rely on his/ her own resources, consciously combining in an informed way the internal factors (own skills, for example) with the external ones (job market opportunities, our relationships) when determining and crossing the road towards the wanted job (Byars, Rue, 1987). The guidelines of the Resolutions of the European Union Council (2003-2004) emphasize the need of placing the student in the center of the counseling services, so that the accent should shift from school or professional decision assistance to the development of his/her ability to manage his/her own career. Consequently, a self-oriented model of career planning is proposed, based on targeting the assistance supplied by the career counseling and orientation services in the direction of developing students' abilities to plan their own career. Interventions by the counseling process either individual or group must follow the correct evaluation of the students, creating what is called a primary diagnosis, encouraging students to reflexivity, self-guidance concerning abilities, self-motivation for action, developing a solid identity in professional, academic and personal field (Obaya, Vargas, 2014). The proper implementation of certain counseling and orientation services based on a self-oriented approach of career planning becomes achievable first by the identification of the level of development of such self-oriented approach of development in career planning amidst the students and, further on, by adjustment of the specialized actions either in a remedial direction, or in a consolidation one.

2. Methodology of Research

This paper aims at identifying the way in which students would plan their career: relying on good luck and chance or consciously, sensibly, connecting to competencies.

We operate with the following hypothesis: we expect that the self-oriented approach used by the students in career planning should incur certain variations from one year of studies to another.

2.1. Research Context

The research was based on the data obtained during the term of two projects, POSDRU/161/2.1/G/136211 „Successful career in engineering sciences” and POSDRU/161/2.1/G/136010 „Career counseling, practise for success” performed at the Faculty of Technological Systems Engineering and Management of POLITEHNICA University of Bucharest, both having as an objective enabling students’ transition to the job market, by participating in group or individual professional practise stages and career counseling and orientation services.

2.2. Methods of Research

The questionnaire-based survey was used as a method of research, which “is almost always an opinion poll” (Iluț, 1997). By means of the questionnaire, as an investigative tool, questions are asked and problems are raised which determine various answers from the inquired persons. The questionnaire-based survey has also a standardized character, because the questions are clearly pre-formulated, just like their number and order (Chelcea, 2004).

2.2.1. Structure of the involved tool

As a research tool, the questionnaire plays a double role: it provides for stimuli for respondents and support to record their reactions. In this research we render valuable the results of two questionnaires data processing, applied sequentially throughout the two projects. The first questionnaire was applied at the end of the group counseling sessions and includes 18 items which aimed at identifying the students’ opinions on their own professional insertion on the job market and of the factors which enable or hinder this career stage. We will present the results of 5 items which allow attaining the stated objectives, among which 3 items are pre encoded: items no. 7 (time invested in specialized training), no. 12 (on persuading the students about the profession in their line of expertise), no. 17 (work experience during university years), one item is mixed, enabling an answer ranking, with a variant of open multiple choice of the type „other, which?”: item no. 2 (sources of educational and career information used during student years), and another open item no.18 (specifying the activities which assure a minimum professional experience acquisition since the university years). The second questionnaire was applied at the end of the individual counseling sessions, it aimed at the identification of career expectancies of students, consisting in 5 items, of which we will render valuable the results obtained from data processing of only one mixed item, item no. 4 (opinions on the progress of studies).

2.2.2. Sampling

The sample consists in a lot of 300 students, enrolled in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year of studies, beneficiaries of the two projects. We used a random stratified sampling, where the stratification criterion consisted in the year of studies (among which 100 respondents enrolled in the 1st year, 100 in the 2nd year and 100 in the 3rd year). The data were processed by means of SPSS 20.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software, using methods of descriptive statistical processing.

3. Results

We use for the verification of our hypothesis, stating that we expect the self-oriented type approach used by the students in career planning to incur certain variations from one year of studies to another, the four-step strategy of career planning, congruent by logic and coherence with the self-oriented approach, as follows: 1. Identifying the problem, 2. Collecting information, 3. Career decision-making, 4. Action plan development.

3.1. Identifying the Problem

Identifying a problem means, first, defining the problem. The problems that may arise during student years are varied, of course, and a careful planning is required to overcome such problems (retakes, difficulties of adaptation to the teaching style of certain academic staff in major subjects or to student life in general, poor guidance in relation with the way in which one can acquire professional experience since student years etc.), but those that may be considered essential from the point of view of the coherence of the effort and time invested in education are related with the doubt to work in the line of expertise. Thus, at the question “Do you think you will work in your line of expertise” 66% of the 1st year investigated students had an affirmative answer, this conviction of practising in the line of expertise drops in the 2nd year to 43% and 50% undecided, then a raise is recorded in the 3rd year of studies to 56%.

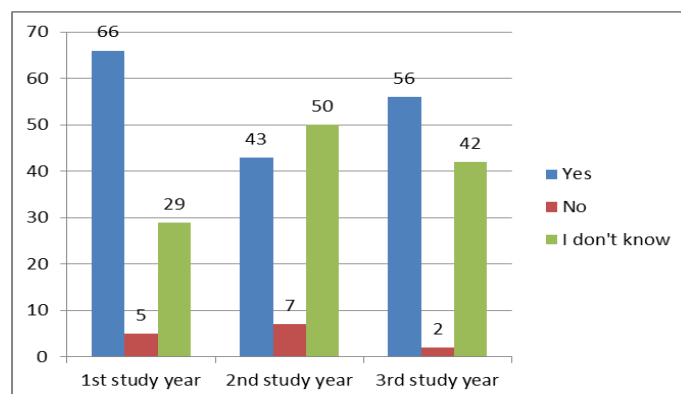


Fig.1. Conviction to practice in the line of expertise

3.2. Collection of Information

The briefing on the opportunities of academic training or available jobs and the conditions required to get them is an important and necessary alternative that the students must consider in the process of their own career planning. When they were asked what sources of educational and career information they use, the students in all three years of studies indicate the faculty website and the employment websites as their main sources of information, another credible source is the faculty registrar's office.

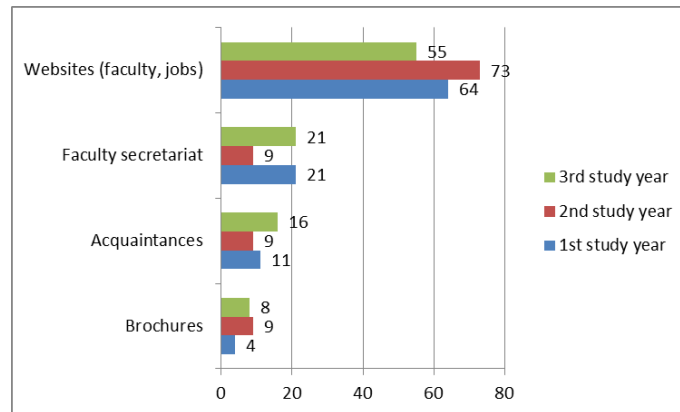


Fig.2. Sources of educational and career information used by students

3.3. Career Decision-making

Career decision-making is part of the category of important decisions, in particular through the consequences in time. During the student years, career decision-making becomes necessary when, for example, we just choose an educational path (for example, STEM faculty – specialization: Robotics, master degree in Industrial Engineering) or professional skills training (by internships, additional training courses etc.). Gaining professional experience during the university years, by getting a job while studying and/or participating in internships, etc. becomes useful for professional skills training. So, the decision of gaining such an experience provides for the students, besides the opportunity of putting into practice and practicing certain professional skills, a clearer perspective on the job market, familiarizing them with the identity of an employee with responsibilities and developing the trust in their own forces by exercising the sense of usefulness. According to the data obtained at the open item “Specify the activities which help you acquire a minimum work experience since the university studies“, half of the 1st year students already participate in volunteering actions, 60% of the 2nd year students state that they participate in internships and volunteering, and in the 3rd year, though the interest is in decline for these kind of activities, it is frequent for internships. Concerning the employee experience of students during studies, the recorded values show that the employee experience appears in 26% of the 1st year investigated students; it rises in the 2nd year student to 60% and records a decline in the 3rd year to 43%.

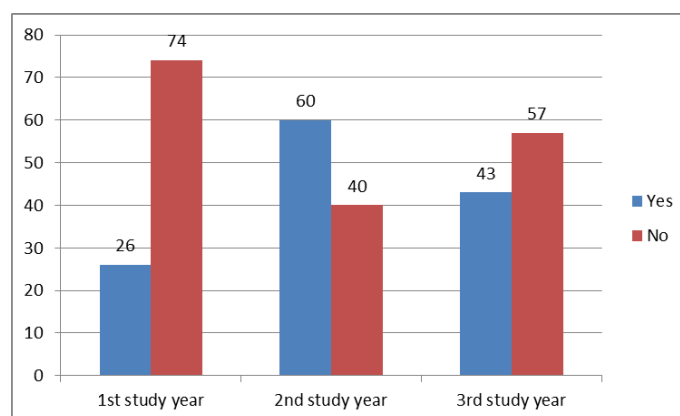


Fig 3. The employee experience of students during studies

3.4. Action plans Development

Developing action plans concerning the career must be natural during the student years, one of them and of major importance as it sums up all the other actions in the direction of the career, consisting in the time dedicated to study. The time dedicated to specialized training decreases also in the 2nd year of studies (54%) as compared to the 1st year (65%), and then it records an increase in the 3rd year (68%).

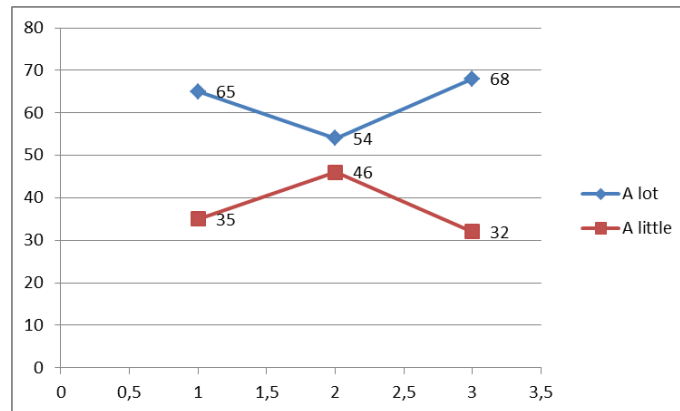


Fig 4. The time dedicated to study

Another necessary action plan aims at the studies elected after the completion of the undergraduate studies. Analysing the students' statements regarding the progress of their studies, the data show that the decision to enroll for a master program in the same area of studies becomes natural in the evolution of the education plan, both for 1st year student and for 2nd and 3rd year students. The doctor's degree in the area of studies is, also, in the plan of the students of all three years of studies, though with a lower weight. Thus, 29% of the 3rd year students record a state of expectation regarding the sequence of the educational path stages, stating that they expect to obtain their bachelor's degree first and then they will think of the other stages of their career.

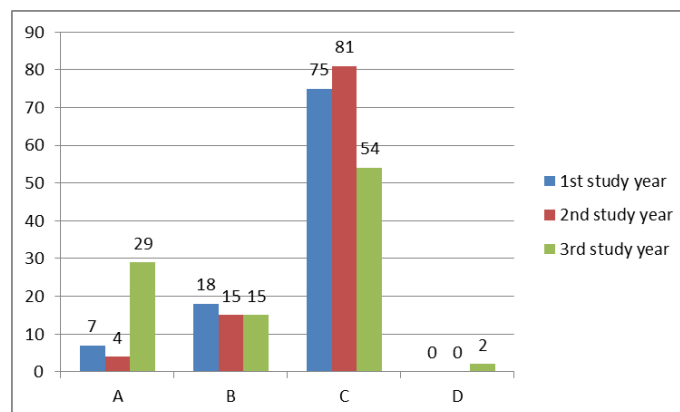


Fig 5. Opinions on the progress of studies

A= I wait to get my bachelor's degree at the moment; B= I intend to enroll for a doctoral program in the field;
 C= I intend to enroll for a master program in the field; D= I am not sure yet

4. Interpretation

The analysis of the results obtained from data processing confirms the working hypothesis "We expect that the self-oriented approach used by the students in planning their careers should incur variations from one year of studies to the other". Thus, at the question "do you think you will practise in your line of expertise" we notice that 66% of the 1st year investigated students gave an affirmative answer, while the conviction of practising in the profession decreases in the 2nd year to 43% and 50% undecided, with an increase in the 3rd year to 56%. When asked what educational and career sources of information they use, the students of all the three years of studies indicate the faculty website and the employment websites as the main sources of information they resort to, another credible source is the faculty registrar's office. The interest for participating in volunteering actions, internships, is a useful and compensator one for the employers concerning the lack of work experience of the new graduates and often invoked as a disadvantage. According to the data at hand, half of the 1st year students already participate in volunteering actions, 60% of the 2nd year students state they participate in internships and volunteering, and in the 3rd year the interest, though in decline for this kind of activities, is frequent for internships. Concerning the employee experience of the students during their studies, the recorded values show that the employee experience is in 26% of the 1st year investigated students, it increases in the 2nd year to 60% and records a decline in the 3rd year to 43%. The time dedicated to specialized training decreases too in the 2nd year of studies (54%) as compared to the 2nd year (65%), and records an increase in the 3rd year (68%). Correlating the data obtained from the analysis of the items of the two questionnaires we can notice that, out of the 26% 1st year employed students, over 20% do not work in their area of specialty or related field from the point of view of competencies, the jobs mentioned by the students are part-time and mainly in activities such as: seller, call center operator, jobs in the beauty industry in the case of the girls etc. Their number increases in the 2nd year to 60%, while most of the students keep both the part-time job, and the fields of activity as above, outside their specialized skills. We are able to explain now the hesitant answers of the 1st and 2nd year students in relation with practicing in the line of expertise. Practicing the engineer profession during university studies is difficult, at least in the first two years of studies, because it requires certain competencies which are getting shape by gradual acquisition (especially for the students coming from theoretical high schools), in the 3rd year of studies only can we speak about a clarification and adaptation of technical skills which enable their application into practice. We may note the interest for employment is in decline in the 3rd year, half of those who are employed say that they have part-time jobs in their line of expertise (mainly in mechanics and car industries), while the time dedicated to studies increases. On the other hand, 29% of the 3rd year students record a state of expectation regarding the sequence of the educational path stages, stating that they expect to obtain their bachelor's degree first and then they will think of other stages of their own career.

5. Conclusions

When planning their careers, the investigated students of the three years of studies alternate the approaches having no specific direction to the self-oriented approach. The intervention by professional counseling and orientation enable the career planning process in the direction of adopting to a larger

extent the self-oriented approach, because it allows a debate and clarification of what the engineer profession actually means, the time required for building the necessary skills avoiding, for example, the disorientation of the 2nd year students who manifest hesitations regarding the conviction of practising in their line of expertise. At the same time, a simple debate of the way in which the student conceives his/her own future profession and the necessary steps, with the career counseling and orientation specialist in universities, enables the student a better awareness of the fact that a plan of preparing and completing the educational path and his/her professional debut is necessary. The assisted development of his/her career plan provides for the student the benefits of a better awareness and a more comfortable self-control in the direction of the completion of his/her educational path, i.e. to practice his/her engineer profession.

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