

Dr. Pál Völgyesy
Professor Emeritus
Szent István University

The changing world and the changing role of career guidance - career guidance skills and competences

Guidance is a very ancient and complex human activity which has developed through the ages and under different conditions, within the framework of various social habits. The development of the sciences - especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - created new opportunities, which gave the hope that people would adapt to nature and society even more sophisticated and successfully. Although in the nineteenth century, primarily in the natural sciences, we have witnessed a rapid development and this has made possible a more nuanced understanding of some of these social phenomena. A successful self-fulfilment of individuals made it possible to word such criteria, which attempt to define how human qualities are functioning.

These progressive developments during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including the industrial revolution, gave an increasing importance to human specialised knowledge. However, such specialised knowledge and expertise was only effective and successful when it was related to the diversity of human characteristics. In the nineteenth century there were no references to specific skills or competences, but to general moral values and, sometimes, physical features were considered in certain situations.

In order to ensure workplace efficiencies, economic and social development required people as workers to have a broad knowledge. Therefore, the establishment and the development of the school system played a significant role in the development of European culture.

It soon became clear to those involved in education that different manifestations of individuals can be characterised by different qualities.

It was also clear for those involved in pedagogy as a science and in teaching as a practice that the human personality and the many unique characteristics that are found within that personality can be developed and can be changed a lot.

Within the Hungarian context it may be worth mentioning an outstanding educator and psychologist, Laszlo Nagy. He was active in the first third of the twentieth century and it was he who raised the interest in education as a complex human trait. He examined differentiation and intensity of interests alongside a number of other characteristics. He stated that the success of human life depends, to a large extent, on the contents of one's interests. In other words, on the sort of motives that drives people to do their jobs and give a solution how they conform in the context of the individual's life or in the wider society. It becomes clearer in this process, that differentiating qualities require increasingly diverse and more nuanced knowledge.

This knowledge has objective facts, for example, the particularities of the labour market, as well as subjective knowledge, in the individual's personal characteristics. Orientation is increasingly difficult in this information flow, since it is clear that no one is expected to have full knowledge of the current macro-social, or even micro, systems.

This realisation had an important result. Laszlo Nagy argued that it brought the importance of career choice into social awareness. He was the first in Hungary to establish a career guidance centre where he tried to measure and interpret the most important personality signs that are relevant to career decisions with, at that time, the latest psychological tools.

Consequently, in the first half of the twentieth century, essentially a new element was formulated within the social division of labour, called career guidance. Contingent success of this activity was already widely secured. The basics were the social sciences, which were achieved as a result of progress in the technical and natural sciences, but also, as the result of greatly increased social needs.

These rapidly developing sciences were psychology; sociology; macro- and microeconomics; and pedagogy. When the real content of the concept of career choices is examined, it can be seen that choice plays a dominant role.

In this context, it should be considered that choice is based on the available possibilities. Obviously one option is a progressively precise knowledge of those objectivities (careers, occupations, trades, professions), which are supposed to be described by the so called career mirrors or career descriptions better and better and more useful.

It was also evident that with this diversity of information only those who get proper help and support from the professionals can make informed choices. These professionals are responsible for organising the relevant information for the specific purpose it is intended. The success of the advice, of course, could be developed not only in relation to the objective conditions.

With the increasing development of psychology and the other sciences refer to the specific characteristics of individuals, which intensity and differentiation is a key determinant for how individuals and requirements meet. Up to now career and profession appear as a requirement for the individual. One of the most important challenges for the more nuanced thinking social sciences is humanisation of these requirements in a way that relationship between the individual and the environment can be more and more harmonious.

To some extent, an example for this is in the interdisciplinary science of ergonomics. Essentially ergonomics intends to implement unique solutions so as to provide harmony between man and the device. It is obvious that this relationship can only be considered successful if there is a mutual harmonisation and there is an arbiter, a moderator, an expert, or, as in the present example, an advisor.

In the second half of the twentieth century it became increasingly clear that to achieve a complex task it needs to be accompanied by complex specialized knowledge. This means that on the path to a successful life, professionals, with a new type of knowledge, need to have the capacity to synthesize, using their knowledge. These professionals are called work adviser, or career consultant. This special type of expert needs to compromise between theories and practical solutions. They had to possess the kind of cognitive skills to be able to link a person's social skills, habits and mental knowledge to his/her practical knowledge. This activity primarily has to be effective in practical problem solving and it should be recognise where the boundaries of those competencies are and what are already within the competence of other professionals.

The advisory skills competency of the career guidance expert can also be defined through a few key concepts. The ability of thinking during development and change process and taking individual needs into account are important key concepts.

Longer life expectancy is regarded as one of the positive outcomes of modern societies. This results in a longer personal life, which draws attention to the need to keep the possibility for actions and activities to the members of this aging cohort that can be valuable for the whole of society. This shows a growing need for the greater promotion of life-long learning programmes.

In Hungary, the renewal of advisory services in 1990 is considered a turning point. Around that time Hungarian society was faced with new challenges that resulted from changes in labour market conditions and a number of solutions were developed to address these problems and training structures were considered to be one of the most effective of these solutions. The training approach was developed within the disciplinary framework of andragogy by the Szent István University and later by the country's multi-disciplinary institutions. A well-established system of training has enabled the current practice of national career guidance to adapt to similar European systems with an adequate number of suitably qualified professionals.

It can be stated, on this basis, that today one of the main key objectives of career guidance is that, as far as it is possible, personal problems are not an obstacle to the successful integration of career guidance into the work-sharing system. The career advisor's professional competences have to ensure professional problem solving in this context. It is possible that a client would need more than that to solve his/her own life problems. However, it should not be ignored that this type of problem solving can lead into a therapeutic situation, so, if the professional career advisor should continue along this road, he/she is crossing the boundaries of these professional competences and, therefore, it is necessary to emphasise that in optimal advisory activities, as well as in other professions, openness, progressive thinking, social sensitivity and expertise are important to create a basis for making responsible advisory decisions.

However, we cannot forget that at the same time the career advisor is on a kind of career cycle too, and his/her success depends on whether he / she is able to navigate within the information, using a well-established professional criteria system and whether able to transmit this knowledge to the population who needs it.

As a final thought, maybe it should be pointed out that career guidance professionals have to meet more and more challenges. The extend of these challenges varies depending on the level of integration of the global labour market and on cultural influences that determine, for example, the degree of individual success, or the contents and importance of career-related goals.

Budapest, November, 2011