

DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT CAREER MANAGEMENT COMPETENCES IN HIGHER SCHOOL

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to reveal the general aspects of developing students' personal career management competencies based on students' experiences. The problem of the study is: How do full-time students of the Social Work Programme develop career management competencies during their studies? The article analyses the concept of students' career management competencies and their education in higher education. The research data revealed students' attitudes towards personal careers and its management in the professional field of social work, and identified career development opportunities and methods used in the study process. The experiences of the study participants have been revealed in four career management competencies, such as self-knowledge, research, planning and implementation of career opportunities. Social work students have identified the challenges they faced in the study process in order to develop their career management competencies.

Keywords: social work, students, career development, higher education

1. INTRODUCTION

Interpretations of the concept of career suggest that there are two main directions of the concept of career. According to Lamanauskas and Augienė (2015), one relates to a specific professional activity. The other relates to life planning and the achievement of its objectives in a broad sense. Careers can also be understood as moving from one person's working identity to another. These identities and their changes are mostly related to working, professional and organisational roles, but may include social roles in learning and leisure. In this sense, a career is a certain dynamic of the identity of the individual, the quality of which is judged by the individual himself. Today, the foundation of the career is understood as the accumulated valuable professional experience and skills and the results of their creative application, useful to both the individual and society. From a modern point of view, a career can be successful and without rising up, the measure of its success is the realisation of life goals and satisfaction with activity. It is important for a person to decide, choose, develop and realise himself, he seeks a balance between work, family and leisure, satisfaction with his activities. A person gives meaning to the phenomenon of a career based on his own experience, values, needs, worldview. Thus, the understanding of a career is something distinctive, unique to each individual. The analysis of an individual's career understanding allows you to see the aspirations and priorities of a personal career. There are two main career paths that relate to: 1) a specific professional activity, i.e. moving within a professional or organisational space; 2) movement from one person to another, i.e. identity and their changes are usually related to work, professional and organisational roles. Careers can be understood as a certain dynamic of individual identity. The construction of self-knowledge is of particular importance for understanding the phenomenon of a career: the person's beliefs about the career and the principles of its pursuit; perceived career barriers; goals and intentions that influence the choice of career direction; expectations of a person's career, insights into what results can be expected from one or other career management actions; the maturity of a person's career; the ability of a person's career to adapt to change, the ability to develop realistic career alternatives in line with personality priorities; the importance of a career in self-realisation level of assessment; values of work. The understanding of a career is also determined by the ongoing social processes, their perception of their importance and the potential impact on a successful career. Environmental research helps to take a deeper look at the labour market, areas or organisations where you want to work or work (Lamanauskas, Augienė, 2015).

The development of career management competencies is not meant to accumulate actual information about career management, but to develop career management skills. Each student can find, evaluate and

use personal career management information for himself. The lecturer must help students understand what problem they have encountered, what kind of information they need, encourage them to make important decisions, and shape the right attitudes. The management truths found by the students themselves become more meaningful than those conveyed by the lecturer. Therefore, let us be patient and let the students understand the meaning of the educational subjects themselves, let us not rush to get them out of their comfort zone and to use truths based on their authoritative opinion (Valickas, Chomentauskas, Dereškevičiūtė, 2014).

It can be said that the importance of career management is inseparable from the tactical actions people choose to pursue their career goals. This includes networking, engagement, support for career prospects and positive self-presentation (Chong, Leong, 2015).

Students studying in social science programs usually perceive careers as professional achievement, as personal development (realisation of internal potential, individual development in the field of successful activities, lifelong learning and work path, satisfaction of creative aspirations, professional self-expression, achievement of goals and satisfaction of ambitions). A lesser proportion of students perceive their career as self-realisation (finding a job that is pleasant to work, vocation work, improvement in the direction of the chosen activity). Part of the student's career understands as social relationships, which are embodied in the development of social relations, human cultural and moral maturity, strong links with the community, the nation. A small percentage of students understand careers as leadership (growth of government and responsibility, free choice of activities, leadership of a group of people). The smallest proportion of students in the concept of career emphasises social status (Lamanauskas, Augienė, 2015).

The research found that interest in rapidly changing requirements for an employee in order to meet the challenges posed by the world of work should become the foundation of personal career planning (Tamoševičienė, Grigolienė, 2021).

According to Kučinskienė (2003), the development of career management competencies stimulates the formation of knowledge, payments, skills system and various qualities needed to make decisions about the choice of one's work, enabling them to participate effectively in working life.

McClain (2014) states that identities for the profession are also formed while studying in higher education: students learning, participating in various events, interacting with each other, broadening their horizons. It is noticeable that identity can be strengthened when a person assesses his strengths and weaknesses, admits which professions are pleasing to him and which ones are not. Data from Negru-Subtirica, Pop and Crocetti (2018), Crisaffuli and Žydžiūnaitė (2011) showed that students' career education related to identity formation contributes to the development of students' professional identity.

While studying developed competences, the theoretical knowledge acquired by a person is linked to practical skills and combined with the needs of the market, the ability to communicate and solve problems is developed, the ability to receive, transmit and interpret information is developed, the graduate is enabled to see, as well as successfully implement and evaluate planned and unplanned changes, to plan and design his career, i.e. to create the prerequisites for career development (Čiburienė, Guščinskienė, 2017).

Career Competences – defined as competencies that help individuals identify existing skills, develop career learning goals, and take action toward career implementation (Bonner, Wong, Pedwell, Rowland, 2019).

Each career competency area includes the following necessary components: knowledge (cognitive competence field); skills (the field of psychomotor abilities); provisions (Emotional Skills Area) (Valickas et al., 2015).

The performance of any activity requires knowledge, skills, abilities, certain personality qualities, attitudes, values, interests, which have a significant impact on what a person is capable of doing, as a professional in a particular field. Students gain a set of professional competencies by studying at university and through professional practice and become a specialist in a particular field. However, for a modern specialist in any field, they are not enough. Professional competences are complemented by general competences, which are applied in many fields or professions, transferred from one activity to

another. The development of key competences today is very important, as changes in the current world have become so rapid that professional competences quickly become obsolete. Therefore, it is very important to create a solid foundation of key competences, which enables to effectively adapt to the constantly changing world, changes in the labour market and in case of necessity to independently acquire the necessary professional competencies and successfully manage your career (Lamanauskas, Augienė, 2015).

Experts of Lithuanian higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Science analysed foreign models of career classification, taking into account their applicability to Lithuania, distinguished fifteen competencies, which they divided into four career competencies: areas of competence of self-knowledge; areas of competence in knowledge of career opportunities; career planning competencies; career implementation competencies (Valickas et al., 2015).

A study by Falco and Summers (2017) found that individuals who are more familiar with themselves and self-confident feel stronger when making career decisions.

According to Wagner (2020), only the following seven characteristics of a person will determine their position in the labour market for the next 50 years: 1) critical thinking and problem solving; 2) Cooperation and Influential Leadership; 3) mobility and adaptation; 4) entrepreneurship and initiative; 5) effective oral and written communication; 6) search and analysis of information; 7) curiosity and creativity.

It was found that adaptive, proactive, resilient in challenging and stressful situations, collaborating and seeking to improve and learn employees tend to engage more often in innovative behaviour in the organisation (Dzimidienė, Bagdžiūnienė, 2022).

People who believe in themselves and are able to control their emotions, actions and life themselves are self-confident people. Confident people don't avoid mistakes or failures, but they can take responsibility for their actions and understand the need for lifelong learning and development (Perry, 2022).

In the career path, you need to know about your hobbies and always look for and engage only in activities of interest. Self-confidence is important at work because it helps to better resolve conflicts, improves communication skills and can help to become a good manager or leader, as such people can create a more positive workplace within the company (Symonds, 2022).

According to Dromantaitė (2012), a person must listen to the possibilities and desires spoken by his inner voice to evaluate them well and to reconcile them so that the chosen nature and activities of the profession correspond to the existing competences and skills. With the help of self-reflection, a person can easily realise whether the chosen career path was properly based on self-knowledge.

Balcar et al (2018), Gruzdev et al. (2018), Calanca (2019), Stankevičiūtė, Savanevičienė (2018) recommend that companies and higher education institutions cooperate not only in order to increase students' understanding of the importance of soft competences, but also to help them take individual responsibility to acquire and develop these essential skills in order to continuously adapt to changing labour market conditions and improve their employability.

The competence of cognition of career opportunities actualises that a person needs to be perfectly proficient in understanding and analysing the changes that prevail in the world, which may have an impact on the present and future of the career. The purpose of competence is to provide individuals with an analysis of career opportunities. It is important to note that individuals will be able to specifically find out and have an interest in the information they need, on the basis of sound and reliable sources. Competence purposefully provides assistance to individuals through newly discovered activities to prepare for their further career – to acquire the necessary competences, to develop new career strategic goals, possibly even to get up or even change qualifications. Interested, engaged in new activities and developing person naturally explores learning opportunities for his career (Valickas, Chomentauskas, Dereškevičiūtė, 2014; Valickas et al. 2015).

Researchers (Savickas, 2005; Herr, Cramer, Niles, 2004), who examine the phenomenon of careers, emphasises that research is necessary not only for an objective career, but also for a subjective career,

which is understood as the interpretation, meaning, understanding and further construction of the individual's own career phenomenon and experience. Therefore, an individual's understanding of a career phenomenon can reveal his future career trends (Lamanauskas, & Augienė, 2015).

Career planning is understood as 'the consistent presentation of a person's cognitive and professional decisions in time for the purposes of professional development and the provision of the necessary resources and circumstances' (Laužackas, 2005b, p. 17).

Career Planning Competence Area – focuses on the development of a career vision; career decision making; adoption of a career plan. We can say that the purpose of this competence is to enable individuals to construct their dream careers. The fundamental foundation of career planning is the realisation that career opportunities give real existence by an individual's comprehension and generalisation of the acquired knowledge of himself and career opportunities. With the help of creativity, a person can create a vision of the career of his dreams, maintaining a balance between the links with other areas of life (Valickas, Chomentauskas, Dereškevičiūtė, 2014).

According to Pasha and Reza Abedi (2020), students face the greatest concern about career and life aspect, what professional future awaits them, what kind of work will be good for them and what factors they should pay attention to on this path. According to Left, Pociūtė, Urbanavičiūtė, Liniauskaitė (2013), career planning is an opportunity to look for alternatives in career or life areas. Abubakar (2013) points out that career planning requires a strategy that provides individuals with a professional orientation to what is required in the chosen career field, taking into account abilities and inclinations. Educational institutions are primary sources where learners can provide deeper knowledge and skills at work. Career planning is considered an important step in the career management process.

The ability to make effective career decisions independently is associated with more positive career behavior and higher personal achievements (Bounds, 2013).

Career decision-making is one of the most responsible human actions in the career management process. Our decisions determine the future of life and career, so it is important for individuals to have certain competences when they are ready (Valickas et al., 2015).

Career implementation competence focuses on personal financial management; management of the learning process; management of the job-search process; establishment at work; managing career change and reconciling careers with other areas of life. Creating a clear career vision, being able to set goals properly, priorities are not enough for successful career planning, as the entire career management process cycle is inextricably completed with career implementation. According to the "Proper Career Programme" approved by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania (2014), the objectives to be pursued in the area of career implementation competence are to develop skills, the assistance of which the individual would be able to successfully change and integrate into different career levels and purposefully established in the labour market (Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania approving the Career Education Programme, 2014).

It is important to stress that a significant factor in the realisation of a person's career is guided by acquired skills, abilities and attitudes. Career implementation determines the success of a person's career, establishment at work, possibility to set up his own business, change professional qualifications, etc. (Valickas, Chomentauskas, Dereškevičiūtė, 2014; Valickas et al. 2015).

When making career choices, values are of great importance. In real life, values are always first associated with human choice. Personality direction is determined by an individual system of values. Value orientation is a system of moral, social, political and aesthetic attitudes of the individual. It is like programming all human activities, determining the direction of behavior. Everyone has a system of values that is unique. Values give the individual the direction of life. They determine the motivation and behavior of human activity. When choosing a career, value orientations can be related to the content of the profession and the nature of the work. The greatest influence in choosing a career is the values of work, which define what is important to a person, what he or she accepts, taking into account one or the other's career choices. Motivation and satisfaction of work is much higher if it is possible to realise existing values (Lamanauskas, Augienė, 2015).

The study found that in the opinion of students, interpersonal competences, i.e. the need for social interaction, are the most important for successful careers. This is clearly related to the chosen profession. There is a high appreciation of general competences allowing to adapt to the ongoing social transformations and changes in the world of activity and new requirements for the individual in professional activity. Students perceive less (as factors for successful careers) competencies in relation to professional activity and entrepreneurship. The study found that women, unlike men, attach greater importance to competences that guarantee an active, dynamic career that can be described as a modern individual career. Students believe that general and special (professional) competencies acquired during university studies will have the greatest impact on their successful careers. Students believe that studies will guarantee a more stable position in the labour market and success in professional careers and preparation for further studies (Lamanauskas, Augienė, 2015).

A survey carried out by the Lithuanian Employment Service (Lithuanian Employment Trends and Future Forecasts, 2019) showed that young people entering the labour market lacked the following competences: ability to communicate and cooperate, learn from one's own and other activities, discuss, present, justify and defend one's opinion, communicate freely in 1-2 foreign languages, work in a multicultural environment, carry out projects and small research. Meanwhile, young people, when planning their careers, focus on professional preparation and practical experience, arguing that it is these competences that bring the greatest added value to the employer and return to the individual.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Materials

Problem of investigation. Graduates, integrating into the labour market, seek a career whose success, as a result of a complex process, depends on external and internal factors. External factors are related to the rapid change of the current world. There are changes in the economy, politics, social life, culture, etc., and the need for diverse knowledge, skills and skills in a dynamic labour market is changing. All this influences the careers of 21st century labour market participants and the very concept of career. Higher education institutions educate, prepare and award a qualification to graduates who have successfully completed studies in a certain field of studies, but this specialist does not prepare for a career, i.e. does not prepare him for a career path, to which he may be directed by higher education career centres (Guščinskienė, & Čiburienė, 2018). An analysis of student enrolment and completion of studies at a higher education institution where researchers work shows that about 40 % of students who have enrolled in the last five years of study do not leave their chosen social work studies at a higher education institution. In this article, the problem is formulated on a problematic issue: How do full-time students of the Social Work Programme develop career management competencies during their studies? It is expected that the research will reveal the current situation of students' career management competencies in higher education and will help to provide guidance for the development of student career management competencies.

The object of the research is the aspects of personal career management competencies of social work students from the point of view of students.

The aim of the article is to reveal aspects of students' personal career management competencies in higher education, based on students' experiences.

2.2. Methods

Methods of investigation: scientific literature analysis, qualitative research, research data collected using semi-structured interview method, content analysis method used for analysis of research data.

Research methodology and subjects. In order to reveal how students develop career management competencies at a higher school, a type of qualitative research has been chosen. The qualitative research was carried out using a semi-structured interview method, which allows us to get closer to understanding people's experiences, naming meanings, defining situations and interpreting reality (Creswell, 2013). During a semi-structured interview, the researcher only foresees general questions and is ready to ask

additional questions during the interview (Creswell, 2013). This approach allowed researchers to be flexible, adjust questions during the research, ask additional clarification questions, and explore aspects of students' personal careers. The general questions ensured that there was no deviation from the topic in question. In order to achieve the goal, the following questions were asked to the students during the interview: What is personal career management for you? How did you develop your self-knowledge competences during your studies? How did you develop your career development skills during your studies? How did you develop career planning competencies during your studies? How did you develop your career implementation competencies during your studies?

Study sample, survey data collection and analysis. The study used a targeted benchmark sample. As Rupšienė (2007) points out, the method of criterion selection is effective because it helps to collect high-quality research data. The participants of the study were selected full-time students studying in the Social Work Programme. The study was carried out in June 2023. The study involved 6 students studying in the final course. All interviews were in contact.

The analysis of the study data was carried out using a content (content) analysis method. Qualitative analysis of the content was carried out in the following sequence: multiple reading of transcribed interview texts, distinction of significant elements in the analysed text, grouping of distinctive meaningful elements into subcategories and categories, integration of subcategories and categories into the context of the analysed phenomenon and description of analysis (Žydzūnaitė and Sabaliauskas, 2017). Creswell & Creswell (2018), Mayring & Brunner (2009) notes that the content analysis method allows specific conclusions to be drawn from the text being analysed.

The researchers followed the ethical principles of the research: the study participants were introduced to the purpose of the study, the method of data collection, the study participants participated voluntarily, and their anonymity and confidentiality were ensured (Creswell, 2013). The names of the study participants were coded (TD1, TD2,...). Encrypted data from all study participants are only available to researchers. Žydzūnaitė and Sabaliauskas (2017) claim that such measures break the link between the data of the study and the participant of the study, in order to maintain anonymity and not to harm the participants of the study. Thus, care was taken to ensure the safety of the participants in the study by protecting them from moral damage or trying to avoid it as much as possible. When analysing the results of the study, the characteristics of the participants of the study are presented in general, ensuring that personal information is not provided that would allow the identification of a particular participant in the study. The study is presented by interpreting and substantiating the theory with information, statements and quotations obtained during the interview. The quotations of the participants in the study are authentic, the language is not corrected.

3. RESULTS

The participants understand personal career management as the planned career process, the choice of the right career direction and the achievement of their own career goals and the choice of a specific workplace and continuous learning, professional development. According to the study participants, it is important to rely on personal values and qualities throughout the process, to develop or strengthen professional competences and to monitor rapidly changing labour market processes: "I perceive my career management as the planning and clear path towards the goal of certain steps based on my values, personal qualities and knowledge." TD1 "This is career planning, moving towards set goals, taking into account your career plans to develop the necessary competencies." TD2; "Select the right career path." TD3; I understand my career management as a continuous process in which I am planning, developing and trying to achieve my career goals. I believe this includes not only the choice of a specific job, but also continuous training, the pursuit of professional development and the ability to adapt and renovate in a rapidly changing labour market." TD4 (table 1).

Category	Subcategories
Personal Career Management	Choice of career direction
	Career planning
	Achieving career goals
	Choice of workplace
	Continuous professional development

Table 1. Personal Career Management Elements

3.1. Area of competence of self-knowledge

The aim of the study was to determine how students develop self-knowledge competences during their studies (table 2).

Area of competence	Excellence
Competence of self-knowledge	Acquaintance with personality traits relevant to careers
	Knowledge of the impact of personal development on careers

Table 2. Self-knowledge competences of research participants

The participants of the study revealed that the tasks performed during the studies, communication with other people and various challenges helped them to know themselves as a person. They have purified their strengths and areas for improvement, their inclinations, their personal qualities and their attitudes: “Studies and various challenges have enabled us to purify and understand our weaknesses and strengths.” TD1; “I found out that I wanted to perform the tasks assigned to me flawlessly.” TD2; I found out I had more empathy for people than I thought. “I found out that I can achieve goals no matter how difficult it may be for me.” TD3 “That I still tend to be stereotyped.” – TD4.

The participants identified personality traits important for careers (table 3). In the professional field of self-confidence, the participants of the study shall be provided with the knowledge and successfully completed tasks: “When I have enough knowledge and feel strong in that area, then I trust myself.” “Successful Works and Tasks &...>.” He also named his personal qualities, such as perseverance, openness, courage, empathy, kindness, sincerity, duty, positivity, honesty, tolerance, curiosity: Positivity. Love for others.” TD; “My personal qualities, such as sincerity, openness.” “And...> honesty, kindness.” TD. The study participants mentioned that the career is also influenced by encouragement and positive assessment of others: “Whatever trusts other people’s appreciation, reasoned opinion, encouragement and good word.” “And...> positive ratings from colleagues and the environment, incentives from the environment.” TD2.

Category	Subcategories
Competences of the participants in the survey	Professional knowledge
	Successful completion of tasks
	Valuation provisions

Table 3. Personality Characteristics Important to Career

The participants of the study indicated what general skills they had strengthened during the last three years of study (table 4), which will help them in their work: “I strengthened communication skills, ability to work in a team.” TD1; &...> also critical thinking and organizational, planning skills.” TD2; “The inner discipline to do the work to the end, not to be afraid to ask, to communicate as much as possible.” TD3 “I learned to communicate differently with people, to express my opinion even more strongly.” TD4, I reinforced this perhaps by the following: the ability to cooperate with representatives of various institutions, discuss relevant professional issues, improve the image of social work.” TD5; “Individual studies have changed my thinking and attitude.” – TD6.

Category	Subcategories
Enhanced skills	Cooperation
	Communication
	Working in the team
	Critical Thinking
	Organisation of
	Planning
	The expression of your opinion

Table 4. Students enhanced key competences in the last three years of study

3.2. Areas of Career Opportunity Research Competences

The aim of the study was to determine how students develop career opportunities research competencies (table 5) during their studies.

Area of competence			Excellence
Career Opportunities Research Competence			Collection, evaluation and use of career information
			Study of global trends in economic, social and technological development
			Exploring learning opportunities
			Exploring employment opportunities

Table 5. Career Implementation Competences of Research Participants

The study revealed that students spent an average of four hours per month on developing career opportunities research competencies and analysing their personal careers: “I could say that it is quite minimal.” TD 1; “I would really like to pay more attention to this than I have devoted all these years.” TD1; Very little. I have devoted my studies to the related tasks, and in any case, from my own incentive, it’s not.” TD4.

Most often, participants of the survey look at what is happening in the labour market in Lithuania and the world, search for information on the Internet, look at job ads, share information and discuss in Facebook professional groups: “I am looking for information online and in the media.” TD1; “I am a member of social working groups on Facebook, both in Lithuanian and worldwide.” TD4; “Maybe I spend more time looking at ads.” TD5. According to the participants in the TD1 and TD3 study, they

talk to relatives on professional topics and communicate with workers already working in the professional field: “I was interested in a close and working environment &...>.” TD1; “&...> I speak to other social workers.” TD3. TD2 and TD6 participants participate in international projects, Erasmus+ exchange programmes, therefore take advantage of opportunities to discuss with professionals working in other countries: “As part of international projects, I have spoken with other social workers from other countries on how they provide social services in the country.” “Erasmus+ was interested in how social work is happening in other countries.” TD6. The participant of the TD3 study mentioned that new information on Lithuanian and global issues in the field of social work is also found in scientific articles, which are analysed during lectures, performing tasks: “Reading scientific articles on social work in Lithuania and abroad.” (table 6).

Category	Subcategories
Ways of exploring career opportunities	Communication with loved ones
	Communication with professionals
	Participation in Erasmus+ exchange programmes
	Participation in international projects
	Overview of job ads
	Facebook in professional groups
	Reading scientific articles
	Search online

Table 6. Ways of exploring the career opportunities of research participants

All participants of the study stated that the research of career opportunities during the studies related to the profession they were studying: “During my studies, I was able to test myself in various activities.” TD1; “I learned a lot of useful information that allowed these things to be linked to career prospects.” TD4; “During the studies, I learned about many places where a social worker can work.” TD2; &...> I learned more about the possibilities available.” TD4; “During my studies, I studied what I can take for myself and for my career.” TD3 &...> I will be able to apply new knowledge in my career.” TD6. During the studies, by practicing in various institutions providing social services, the participants of the research carried out research that helped to better understand the current phenomena in the professional field, to gain a wide variety of experience and to comprehend the whole of career opportunities, while at the same time better knowing themselves and their competences: “I have always tried to do practicing in different places of practice to gain a multifaceted experience.” “I conducted a qualitative study, interviews with Roma children about how they feel in community-based child care homes, about the provision of socio-cultural services.” “In the course of qualitative research, I have learned how important it is to know what the users care about and what their needs are.” Through practice, I have assessed my existing skills, identified strengths and weaknesses: what is my ability to communicate with clients, solve problems, create effective interventions, carry out evaluations, etc. During practice, I have had the opportunity to reflect on my values, to see if they are in line with the values of social work.” During the practice, I got acquainted not only with this specialty, but also had the opportunity to look deeper and hear my internal needs, purify my values and understand which specialisation I feel best in. It helped me understand what I wanted to do in the future and what I liked. Therefore, it is now easier to set your career plan, set goals and achieve them.” TD5; “In all my practices, I tried to get into the team as much as possible and be part of that institution.” – TD6.

The participants of the study summarised that their time is insufficient to develop the skills to systematically explore economic, social, technological trends, employment and learning opportunities.

3.3. Career Planning Competence Area

The aim of the study was to determine how students develop career planning competencies during their studies (table 7).

Area of competence	Excellence
Career Planning Competences	Building a Career Vision
	Career decision making
	Establishment of a Career Plan

Table 7. Career Planning Competences of Research Participants

The study found that in the first semester, the post-study visions of the participants were linked to the chosen profession – work in the social field, i.e. to work in a specific type of institution with a specific group of service recipients: “I had a vision after graduating from my studies to work with convicts, so I chose this specialisation.” TD1; “That I will work at the day centre and in ten years I will have my children’s day care centre.” TD2; ‘Acquire a social worker’s specialty, to be employed in an institution providing social services.’ TD3; In my first year of practice, I wrote: “My career vision is that after graduating, I would like to work in a children’s day centre with socially at risk children and their families.” “I had a vision after graduating from my studies to work with young people, children.” TD5.

When asked how the career vision related to their hobbies and inclinations, the vast majority of participants replied that the inclinations were very close to their career vision. What they liked to do before studying in their free time wanted to work even after graduation: I gained a particularly valuable experience by practicing near-workers who curated and accompanied all the time of volunteering. I have always tried to travel to various institutions to get acquainted with the specificities of the chosen specialisation.’ TD1; “It worked hard because I volunteered at a children’s day care centre.” TD2; “To acquire the profession of social worker, to be employed in a social institution, to acquire a qualification as a pedagogue or to study social pedagogy.” TD3; “It was very close, it was always fun to practice where I wanted to work.” – TD5. Only the TD4 participant replied that the hobbies were not related to the studies: Maybe, but it doesn't matter, the hobbies were quite different than the studios.

The study revealed that the research participants’ career vision changed differently during the study period: some – minimally, others – cardinal: “Very minimally, in my first year I have already planned and knew where I would like to work after graduation.” TD1; “Severely changed, I chose another field of social work.” TD2; In the third year, I realised that I would like to work with teenagers, children with disabilities. Therefore, I have the idea of continuing to study social pedagogy.” TD3; Only now I am absolutely convinced that I want to work in an open youth center. This is an important change in my career planning. Over the years, I have noticed how my passion and desire to work with young people has grown.” TD4; “My career vision has changed over the years.” TD5 I like working directly with young people to help them in their personal growth. It inspires me and brings me joy.” – TD6.

The study revealed that students consider their ability to make decisions well and take them as a natural life process, as they have faced many challenges during the year of study, so all participants of the study have strengthened their decision-making competences: I am positive, although there are still challenges in making certain decisions, but I am the one who can take responsibility. I consider everything very well and only then do I make a decision, so often the decisions are appropriate because they are thought out.” “I value well, I make decisions calmly, thoughtfully.” TD2; I rarely have difficulties in making decisions. I usually make decisions easily because I have had many cases of decision-making in the last three years and practices.” TD3; I do not like change very much, but if it happens that it is necessary, I find myself the quickest way to learn and adapt faster without feeling discomfort. If decisions concern only me, the decision-making depends on how one or the other will affect the future.” “Due to the years

of study and work experience, I feel amazed by this ability.” TD5 “I’m careful, so I always think about a few options.” – TD6.

The study found that all participants had to make decisions related to job search and employment in the last three years: “We had to make the decision to change work and test yourself in a sphere where I could never imagine myself.” – TD1 “Have had to start work, abandon several job offers.” TD2; I easily adapt to change. I started looking for the right job with whom exactly I want to work with.” TD3 “I was raised in a position that cost a lot of time and even more careful planning.” TD4; “Have had to change jobs.” TD5; “After my last practice, I stayed in the office.” TD6. All participants in the study, some after the replacement of several jobs, work at the end of their studies in a job related to the acquired education.

The participants in the study revealed which career decisions were most difficult for them (table 8).

Category	Subcategories
Complexity of career decisions	Separation from the normal environment
	Responding to self-requirements and workplace requirements
	Self-reflection
	Support for self-motivation
	Separation with former users

Table 8. The most challenging career decisions for research participants

According to the TD4 study participant, “The most complex, perhaps, is that you have to change your place of residence and separate yourself from the usual environment around you.” The TD1 participant shares their experience: When deciding to change career direction, first of all, there are unmeasurable demands, which are usually directed to themselves and to the future new job. In order to manage these requirements and expectations, it would be useful to develop a clear plan, certain rules on how consistently it should be pursued, how much time and money to devote to it, etc. The TD5 researcher states that “The biggest challenge in changing career paths is self-reflection and support for motivation and patience.” TD2 states that “Leave a job (I work with children, so it was very difficult to make this decision).

The study revealed that although the participants of the study had already worked during their studies and had already been employed after their studies, they still do not have a concrete and clear career plan: “I have a preliminary career plan, but I am in the planning process because I want to start linking my career to the profession of choice.” “Well, I don’t have a concrete plan, but I understand where I want to go, I choose trainings, seminars, and I strengthen the competences I need.” I don’t have an exact career plan today because I want to change something in my life. Maybe study social pedagogy.” TD3; “There is no strong plan, everything will depend on what the job offers will be and where I decide to stay.” TD4 “I don’t have a plan because I’m already working.” TD5; “I made a career plan during my studies because I had to do career planning tasks, but I haven’t adjusted it this year.” – TD6.

When asked by the survey participants, if they do not have a career plan, how they know which targeted actions they should consistently carry out, they replied that they have thought about what they intend to do, but they are not written down and will act according to the situation in order to achieve their goals: Often, without a clear plan, achieving certain things is much more difficult. In order to avoid this, it is very important to create a plan, and I can do it with the help of others, who are also of interest on the Internet, by searching for information in various textbooks. It is easier for me to learn because the information and tasks presented during the lectures have made it possible to learn it.” TD1; “I know what I want to achieve and how I will do it.” TD2 After receiving my diploma, I should seriously think about what I want from my life. I have a few choices I want, I need to set goals and achieve them.” TD3

“For those that do not harm me, it is important not to be too cardinal, but to do everything else in small steps and in a row.” “I’ll plan to look for another job and I’m currently working.” TD5; “I always have a plan in my mind, but it’s not always purified.” – TD6

3.4. Area of Career Implementation Competences

The aim of the study was to determine how students develop career implementation competencies (table 9) during their studies.

Area of competence	Excellence
Competence in career implementation	Personal Financial Management
	Managing the learning process
	Managing the job search process
	Establishment at work
	Managing Career Changes
	Combining careers with other areas of life

Table 9. Career Implementation Competences of Research Participants

The study’s participants were reluctant to talk about personal finance management, claiming that skills increase by self-reliance. Only a few of the participants in the study had the experience of learning to manage personal finances in a targeted way. As the study showed, the participants of the study develop their financial literacy skills episodically during their studies, while studying financial management during two study subjects. Only participants in TD1 and TD2 mentioned self-interest on the Internet and with an investment advisor: “I have strengthened my financial literacy skills through lectures on the fundamentals of economics and entrepreneurship, management and leadership lectures, and I have been interested in it independently on the Internet.” I have not significantly strengthened my financial literacy capacity: in economic lectures, I had to plan my budget. In the first year, when I had to work only half-time and pay for rent, I learned to understand where my money is going and how to manage it.” “I have not strengthened financial literacy competences.” TD3; “I had two personal investment advice and a financial framework subject during my studies.” TD4; “I wasn’t interested professionally, only a few lectures were.” TD5; “I have not paid attention to financial management learning so far, I have enough knowledge.” – TD6

Management of the learning process during the studies went smoother for the participants of the study, all said that the assigned work was done on time. The participants of the study were helped to manage the learning process through personal participation in lectures, active interest in the events related to studies, drawing up a list of study works with deadlines and carrying out planned works in time: “It was all in all, depending on the current charge that was going on during the study, but I think it did quite well.” TD1 “Sometimes it was difficult, but it’s important to keep up with what is happening, to be interested, to participate, if I have the time, I have always done the task earlier.” “I had a list of study jobs with dates and exactly followed the plan.” TD3; “I have done quite well because I have strong enough planning skills, so I have organised priorities and time in an orderly way.” “I didn’t postpone the work for the last minute.” TD5; I tried to attend lectures and perform tasks on time. I think I did it very well.” TD6.

The vast majority of participants in the study took part in the second year of study. Since social workers can only work after graduation, not all participants in the study have worked in the social field: “It was quite difficult because many institutions are looking for staff with experience or at least a diploma, so I chose to collect experience in a different field and try myself in the field of social work after graduating.”

It went well. I wrote a nice motivation letter about what I would do with a young person if I worked in a youth agency and at the beginning of my second year I had a study-related job.' I found the job easily. During the second semester of the first year, I tried to make the best recommendations as a future social worker at the place of practice, I was very interested in social work and interacted with the internship mentor. After the summer, I was offered to work as an individual care worker in the same establishment.' TD3; "I worked, only the work was not related to the studies." TD5; "I completed the training of social worker assistants and immediately became employed in the second year." TD6. The TD4 participant was interested in job offers, but says that he was not actively looking for a job: "I wasn't looking, I just constantly overhauled job ads." TD4.

When asked to name the dream job of the participants of the study, they stressed that it is meaningful and useful not only to the participant, but also to the public, a job in which they can realise themselves and constantly improve and would be well paid: "This is a job in which I can constantly grow and improve, high income and work would be meaningful and benefit not only me, but also society." "I would like to marry therapeutic camps/activities for young people and children." TD2; "Where can I realise myself as a specialist in social work or social pedagogy." TD3; "When you go with a great desire, you can't imagine your life without this job, you get a good salary, you do a really good job that helps people." "Work with people, adequately paid." TD5; "Help others who can't take care of themselves, in whom I can realise myself." – TD6

An attractive workplace for participants in the study would be to provide services and assistance to people, to ensure that the organisation's staff is competent, fair and collaborative, that the working environment is safe and positive, and that there are dignified wages and career opportunities: "Specialists with long experience and strong competences, clear goals, respectful attitudes, career opportunities, encouragement." TD1; It is important to me that the organisation I work for is fair to employees and service recipients, so that services are focused on helping people. It is important that the working environment is positive, safe, and it is important that the work done receives a decent remuneration. It is also important that the workplace has access to higher positions." TD2; "Respect for workers, respect, promotion of individual thinking, artisticity." TD3; "Remuneration, workplace, code, working conditions, complexity of work." TD4 (table 10).

Category	Subcategories
Skills	Time planning
	Individual work
	Working in the team
	Cooperation
	Problem-solving
Values	Clarity
	Cooperation
	Opportunity to improve
	Good working conditions
	Team
	Helping others
	Revenue
	Stability
	Achievement of the objectives

Personal characteristics	Responsibility
	Industriousness
	Discipline
	Courage
	Individuality
	Innovation
	Patience
	Communication
	Specificity
	Creativity
	Flexibility
	Loyalty
	Respect
	Responsibilities
	Trust
	Adoption
	Integrity
	Curiosity

Table 10. Skills, values and personal qualities that helped manage career processes during studies

The participants of the research rate their activity in the development of career management competencies in the first year on average, because at the beginning of their studies, they claim to have little understanding of the essence and importance of career management, because some have not decided what they would like to do in life, are not familiar with competences, and only few knew their career vision and had a career plan, although they had heard about it in high school: I appreciate my activity in the development of my career management competencies during my studies satisfactorily: I tried to be interested in career management, it was interesting to find out and get useful information on this topic during my studies." TD1; "During the studies, I kept updating the table about my career vision, fine-tuning the plan."; TD2; "I was active enough and willing to achieve my goals." TD3; At the beginning, I didn't really understand what it was and what it was, and what I wanted to do in life at all, and I just floated downstream. And now I am confronted everywhere with competences and their significance and understanding of how this can help me in the future. It has greatly accelerated the understanding of this practice. I took part in all the practices, so I gained a lot of experience. Practice has helped you gain practical skills, understand how the real work environment works and build your career dream. I checked whether the selected area was in line with my expectations and interests." TD4; "In the first year, I have not yet fully understood the importance of this thing in life." TD5; At first I was very categorical, but now I look very different. However, I think that three years of study is not enough for such a job and more training is needed." TD6.

When asked about the skills that helped them to pursue their careers and manage their career processes during their studies, most of them said it was important to be able to plan time and actions, work alone and in a team, be able to cooperate and resolve conflicts: "I would think that time planning skills, ability to perform multiple tasks at the same time, collaborative skills, ability to work in a team and independently, &...> problem-solving skills." TD1 Stated that curiosity, communicativeness,

concreteness and responsibility helped them manage their careers: “&...> specificity, communicativeness.” TD3; “And...> curiosity.” TD2 (table 10).

Some study participants see potential obstacles related to careers: “There may be obstacles to career progression, such as the fear of low income, the requirement to comply with the employer’s orders, even if this would be contrary to my objectives, as well as the lack of experience in a particular field.” It’s hard not to sit in one place: I work with service recipients through a professional relationship and when I feel that it’s time to change jobs, I experience internal conflicts, feelings of guilt.’ “Too complex goals, there will be no jobs in the desired establishments, personal decisions are taken too quickly.” TD3; “Fear and self-confidence.” TD4.

However, all participants in the study associate their further careers with the field of social work, that is, acquired education. Study participants in TD1, TD3, TD5 and TD6 replied that they intend to continue their studies in the social field with a specific group of service recipients at a university, while participants in TD2, TD4 stated they intend to pursue their profession and continue their studies at university after a year’s break.

Summarising the interview, the participants of the study are partially satisfied with the development of their career management competencies in higher education. Although conditions were created to develop personal career management competencies during studies and acquired an understanding of the profession and competences, there was a lack of accompanying a professional student throughout the process of developing career management competencies: I am partially satisfied. The conditions for their development have indeed been provided.’ TD1; “I don’t feel very much that I have been educated, perhaps in the first year, but when you have to fill in career tables alone, this is not in my opinion education.” TD2; “I’m happy because I learned the spectrum of social work and I learned myself.” TD3 Well, precisely about the career, we didn’t have some lectures, but when it comes to perception in general and what competence in general is and what their importance is, it really changed the whole thinking. And I am truly satisfied with the things I learned and the opportunity to deepen my knowledge.” – TD4.

What they would do differently during their studies on the issue of the development of their career competences, the participants answered that they would additionally participate in qualification development events, seek help from career consultants and be more interested in career prospects: “I would probably strengthen career competences by participating in various trainings and seminars.” TD1; I’d be looking for more help because I wasn’t looking for it at all in college. I would like to know if there is a career consultant in the college, well, for example, I have questions about master’s studies, I could contact a career advisor about this.” TD2; “I am satisfied with my competences, but only maybe I would go deeper into opportunities about the work itself and career prospects, maybe I have a more clearer vision.” – TD4 Participants in the TD3, TD5 and TD6 study are satisfied with their career development and do nothing differently.

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