

THE ROLE OF CAREER COUNSELING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract

Counseling services and career guidance have evolved significantly in the industrial, post-industrial and information societies from several points of view – in what concerns the organization, methods, structure, policies and practices, considered resources and available occupational structures. Moreover, educational and vocational counseling and guidance support individuals to build their own careers and thereby, helps in conceiving an optimal path in life.

Currently, career counseling must meet the following categories of new situations and challenges: the globalization of the labor market, the extend of market economy in most of world's countries, organizational transformation of the workplace, the growing importance of knowledge, communication skills - not only verbal ones, but also the use of advanced information technologies, progressive learning, demographic growth and rising unemployment, the implementation of the policy of women emancipation, migration and border mobility for labor, and recently, the implementation of new government policies regarding the overcoming of the current crisis. These issues have already made considerable changes considering expectations, micro and macro structures, and the task of counseling and vocational guidance is to properly appreciate the impact, to understand the phenomena in progress and to support individuals as they adapt to new challenges.

This paper aims to show the role of guidance counselors in the development of rural entrepreneurship. The target group mainly consists of youth from rural area. Research methods used: questionnaire, focus group, case study.

Key words: counseling, career guidance, rural entrepreneurship

Counseling and career guidance services have evolved significantly in the industrial society, as well as in the post-industrial and information societies, from multiple points of view – in what concerns the organization, methods, structure, policies and practices, considered human resources and occupational structures available. Moreover, counseling and career guidance supports the individuals to build their own careers and thereby, helps them to have an optimal route in life. Probably one of the most comprehensive definitions of career counseling is that used by the OECD, the European Commission and World Bank: "career counselling refers to the services and activities intended to assist individuals of any age and in every moment of their life, to make choices regarding education, training and occupations and to develop their own career. These services provide information on careers in printed form, electronically or other, assessment and self-assessment tools, counseling interviews, educational programs for career development, to support the individual in order to have a proper self image, to be aware of the opportunities he could benefit from and to develop career management skills, testing programs, programs for job searching and transition services "(Career Guidance: a handbook for policy makers. OECD, EC, 2004).

Career guidance is the process of maximum synchronization between personal and social aspirations concerning work, regarded as a source of individual satisfaction as a means of general economic progress. This particular process requires: competence, competitiveness, selection, competition, success or failure, learning, permanent professional training, assuming responsibilities etc. In the near future, career counseling will have to face the following types of situations and challenges: globalization of the labor market, the increase of labor surplus, and especially of the young one, the expansion of the market economy system in most countries, organizational transformation of the workplace, the growing importance of knowledge, of reading skills, computing, communication, of information literacy and lifelong learning, demographic growth, the implementation of the policy of emancipation of women, migration or cross-border labor mobility, the implementation of new government policies on economic development, education and professional training (Herr, 1996). These issues will produce significant changes on expectations, structures and openings, which will have to be confirmed and resolved by counseling.

So, considering the aforementioned factors and conditions stipulated in the Directions of the

EU Council in 2003 and 2004 on strengthening the policies, systems and practices on lifelong counseling in Europe, we can observe the need of locating the individual in the center of counseling services, as well as redefining the offer to develop the professional skills of the person and that it's absolutely necessary to enlarge the access to career guidance services and continuous quality improvement for the provided services.

Therefore, the major challenges which any system of career counseling will have to meet are as follows: shifting the emphasis on the offer concerning professional services, from assisting the professional decision to developing a person's ability to manage their own careers, and also to find inexpensive ways to broaden access for beneficiaries to counseling services (according to the reports prepared by the World Bank and European Training Foundation). A certain system which must align itself to these particular directions is characterized by: transparency – this feature ensures easy access throughout life; carefulness regarding transitional moments in life; flexibility and innovation in service offerings, in order to meet different situations of target – groups; programs for customers skills development to support them in managing their own careers; the opportunity to seek and explore opportunities to study and work before deciding upon them, access to detailed and integrated information, access to individual counseling with field specialists, when they need it etc.

In close relation to career guidance is entrepreneurship education, which can be defined as the "process of training and information developed to explore abilities, material and personal resources, existing opportunities in the socio-economic field for business initiation and implementation of specific business ideas" (Jigau, 2001, 294). In other words, entrepreneurship training aims to provide basic information for a person to be encouraged in becoming an independent professional.

It is necessary to recognize that entrepreneurial orientation and entrepreneurial education have a relatively narrow range of offerings for the wide diversity of people who, at some point, wish to become entrepreneurs. Since 2001, the European Commission has been reporting a series of constraints concerning guidance in our country: "Poor public information about field services, weak institutional capacity to use eLearning, insufficient staff, counseling services operating within institutions with wider attributions, limited international relations" (LaRoche et al., 2006).

These constraints are also reflected in Vama Buzaului, Brasov county – these constraints were outlined in the study conducted. We have sought to identify the needs of the target group, we analyzed the obtained data, we defined the problems faced nowadays by young rural entrepreneurs and have made recommendations to improve the situation found.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study targeted a group of 17 young entrepreneurs from the village of Vama Buzaului and 33 counselors from CJAP, Brasov county. As research methods we used the questionnaire, focus group and case study.

The questionnaires developed included a number of sections applicable to the both of the target groups. These aimed: professional interests, the need of counseling, examples of problem-situations. I used mostly pre-coded items as they allow better statistical processing. However, the lists of possible answers necessarily include an open rubric, named "others". I also used a number of mixed items that require a hierarchy of responses (in addition to marking at least three options from an exhaustive list, the respondent must also indicate the priority, thus ensuring a greater accuracy of the response and an increased delicacy of data interpretation).

I then observed the correlation of the responses obtained in the group of young entrepreneurs with those of the counselors to questions on: the content of a career counseling session, the type of desired support, sources of information that beneficiaries need to be able to obtain important qualitative elements regarding the offering and the demand, but also in order to capture the interest of stakeholders in this field. Most items have been transformed in qualitative statistical variables and a limited number of them could be placed on an ordinal scale, due to the nature of questions. As a result, the analysis procedures are those specific for qualitative variables, determining distributions of frequencies and structures and also the association of some quantitative scales in ranking cases.

Since a number of questions in the questionnaires used in this research were common, we could have a more detailed picture of the career counseling activity and of the counseling needs of the selected target groups as well.

The questionnaire for young entrepreneurs sought to identify certain career expectations, counseling need, situations where they need specialists support, expectations about the counselor and the environment in which the counseling develops, support alternatives to career choice issues and the sources they call to in order to get information on the area covered in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire includes 11 items and is divided into three sections: personal profile of professional interests, guidance and counseling needs, identifying information.

The questionnaire applied to the counselors working in the County Center of Psychopedagogical Assistance had 15 items, which have observed the analysis of professional profile, of relationship with beneficiaries and of counselor's personality.

In the study, I have also applied a second instrument: the questionnaire for identifying professional values (adapted by Super, 1970 and Katz, 1993). Professional values relate to specific aspects of professional activity that are more or less desirable and represents a subsystem within the axiological system. D.E. Super identified upon the basis of numerous investigations, 15 professional values which Katz had reduced to only 10. In the present research I have adapted the tools used by the two authors mentioned above, which resulted in an inventory aiming to identify 12 professional values.

The focus group has been applied to both target groups within the meetings at which 10-12 people attended.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the data revealed the following: more than half - 76.47% of young people have not benefited so far by career counseling services and only 23.53% said they had access to these services. This fact can be explained by a lack of transparency and publicity of activities and services of the institutions that provide counseling services in the county. Even field NGOs are little visible as they have not managed to create a strategy to penetrate rural areas, and most of their interventions made in schools had been sporadic and on short periods of time.

The item on which kind of sources of information the young entrepreneurs call to in order to learn more about entrepreneurship, underlines the preference for the Internet, a fact explained by the easiness, speed and diversity of information that can be accessed via computers. The family ranks second, and friends third. Field NGOs rank last. Although in Brasov county, this sector is well represented, we see once again that the information does not properly reach the target audience.

When asked to what extent the current offer of career counseling meets the needs, we find that on the first place is the option "not at all satisfied" 64% , "in a small extent" 27.50% of respondents, while 7.5% of them present an average degree of satisfaction.

Regarding the counselors, 79% of the respondents stated they appeal to field literature, about half of them use the Internet and 33% inform themselves at meetings with colleagues, within trainings and post-university courses in the field. Two of the items used in the questionnaire aimed to identify certain ways to improve counselors access to information in the career guidance field. The data analysis helped in finding out that almost half of the counselors wish to participate in accredited training courses in the field, a greater transparency of training sources, the existence of articles, brochures, publications for counselors, a wider spreading of information; they also wish to participate in work-shops conducted by specialists and also to open classes where they would be able to observe models of good practice.

30% of the counselors need an adequate material basis (including specific tests with license) as only some offices have benefited from facilities provided by the order of MEC. 28% of the counselors believe that a web page with specific content for career guidance and properly publicized is needed. There are also mentioned: the intra and inter- institutional collaboration (collaboration with the authorities and their presence in schools – CAE (County Agency for Employment), the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, NCVET (National Centre for Vocational Education and Training) etc.

Values, interests and attitudes are important dimensions of personality, organically interrelated (Chelcea, 1994.101). In Dictionary of Sociology coordinated by Zamfir and Vlăsceanu (1993, 661-663) values are seen as "conditions or modes of action considered to be desirable. They have a key role in guiding human actions, in setting the objectives and the goals to be achieved, strategies, methods and ways of action." Chelcea underlines the fact that values contain cognitive, affective and conative elements, revealing thus the action potential of individuals, groups and human communities. Professional values represent a subsystem within the axiological system: they refer to specific aspects of professional activity that are more or less desirable (Super, 1990). But it must be noted that having an explanatory function, the values themselves must be explained by social and psychological mechanisms.

It is not enough to say about a young fellow that he gives positive value to safety in choosing a profession, but we have to explain his preference for that particular choice of profession by relating the option to the profession which ensures occupational safety, through social factors (work organization), personality factors: skills, self-esteem, control place, etc.

After applying the professional values inventory to the sample of young people, we find that the first places in the hierarchy of professional values are occupied by the desired job by 44%, then the material advantages - 42% and independence - 41%. In opposition, we find the professional values related to creativity, leadership and immediate employment.

CONCLUSIONS

Research has shown that only a small proportion of the young respondents participated in counseling programs. The most urgent needs felt by them related to the lack of information about the business environment, the lack of an adequate access to a permanent counseling in order to access various grants. The problems faced by them in this period are poor communication, the uncertainty, lack of financial support. The skills that young people state that should be improved are those related to communication, information as well as personal development and self-awareness.

The type of support most urgently desired by this target group is in the form of aid for projects development (raising funds), but they also need career counseling and especially clarification techniques concerning professional values and development of IT skills. They also want publications (brochures, posters, guidebooks), group and individual sessions, information, which provides a wide range of opportunities for the counselor in order to meet the needs of beneficiaries.

In what concerns the relationship with the counseling specialist, first of all, the young entrepreneur expects objective information, a warm environment and confidence. There is a limited knowledge of the institutions that can provide guidance and counseling information. The research have also revealed that only half of the counselors have special training in counseling and guidance, and only one third of them have attended

long-term courses, a fact explained by little work experience (of 1 - 2 years) of most of the counselors in the psycho-pedagogical assistance network. Counseling services providers from CCPA feel the current shortage of information on the labor market to be severe, ways to attract grants, but also, the lack of specific tests on career guidance (with license).

The impact of counseling and career guidance carried out in the village of Vama Buzaului county, is a limited one, career decisions that young people take are little influenced by counselor's evaluations, while entrepreneurship education services are little visible and poorly publicized. The ideal solution to optimize this type of services – of counseling and career guidance - is the establishment of local career counseling centers as happens in most European countries, the adequate popularization of services offered by various institutions and a greater involvement of local factors in supporting young entrepreneurs.

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