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CAREER GUIDANCE SERVICES - BENEFITS FOR WORKERS AND COMPANIES

Theoretical article

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Abstract

This paper proposes a theoretical review of career counseling services with a focus on identifying the benefits of these services in the complex process of adapting to the changing requirements of the labor market. For individuals, career counseling services are part of the process of lifelong learning process and for companies they are part of human resources efficiency. We do that because even if such specific actions were practically already applied in Romanian companies, there is an actual recognized need for certification and standardization which allows us to integrate into the European trend. Using scientific methods and tools for identifying the skills and competencies of workers, the services of career counseling help employees to find the efficient career pathway, in a systematic plan so as to finally contribute to the 'intersection' of goals and development requirements of the organization with personal preferences and skills of workforce.

The European context is favorable

There is a consensus in Europe that high quality guidance and counseling services play a key role in supporting lifelong learning, career management and achievement of personal goals. At European institutions level there is an effort to stimulate lifelong guidance and recognition skills, competences and qualifications of workers in the perspective of smart and inclusive growth. Currently, there is a tendency for guidance and counseling services to become a more professionalized and standardized activity, meaning well trained specialists who have certification for this occupation, using tools, methods, rules, procedures and codes of practice specialized and standardized.

For a better European cooperation and providing expertise, there is a network of career guidance (**European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network - ELGPN**) which aims to assist the Member States in developing co-operation on lifelong guidance in both the education and the employment sectors.

Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies, 2008, confirms that the “the definition of guidance as referring to a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/ or used” (Council of the European Union, 2008).

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training - Cedefop supports the European efforts on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies. There is a huge variation across Europe in terms of professional training available, competences and qualifications acquired through such training, roles and functions carried out by guidance practitioners and settings in which guidance services are offered (Cedefop, 2009).

Special **Eurobarometer** 417 “European Area of Skills and Qualifications” (2014) provides important data on issues that are relevant to current policies on education and skills in Europe. An important theme is the use and perception of career guidance services. Across the EU, around a quarter of respondents (24%) has used a career guidance service at some point. If respondents have never used a career guidance service, this is often because of the lack of access to services (45% of all respondents), rather than for other reasons (29%). Most EU citizens (71%) agree that they are useful for making the right choice for further studies, while just 13% disagree. A slightly smaller proportion agrees that career guidance services are

useful for finding a job (62%), although 22% disagree (Eurobarometer, 2014).

Career guidance services in Romanian companies get in force

In our national context, there are some theoretical studies on career management but less are showing applicative aspects and practical tools applied in organizations. The Romanian Institute of Educational Sciences issued a report on "Career counseling for adults" (2003) addressing conceptual, theoretical and practical aspects, policies measures and conditions for career counseling. Also, in line with the national situation and the European context, it has developed the "Code of Practice for occupation of career consultant" (2004) published with European Union support. These are the first steps for professionalizing career guidance and establishing a coherent guidance system.

In addition to similar activities such as school orientation and counseling for finding a job (which is regarded rather as a service exclusively dedicated to the unemployed or people in search for a job), career guidance is a model of continuous support offered to a person in the complex process of development of a career and the personal adaptation to the work related changes.

Services of career guidance have three structural components such as: counseling and career guidance (referring to: labor demand and forecasting, strategy for searching a job, retraining etc.), supervision in counseling (assessment and certification of competences acquired at work, mediation, coaching for performance) and finally, guidance for the training needs with acquisition of the adequate competences). All these come into a collaborative process of feedback.

The area of benefits of career counseling services within an organization is complex and involves multiple functions, through direct or indirect relationship, as follows:

- a) For employees' point of view we notice the following benefits: Assessment and certification of competences, Adaptability and career path management throughout their entire life in a changing context, and Well-matching workers competences with job requirements.
- b) From organization perspective, efficient services of career guidance could be important for: Development of relevant competences for performance and competitiveness of the company, and Identify training needs and skills development in line with the strategic plan of the company.
- c) At the macroeconomic level, better guidance services could improve the Transferability of the skills on labor market, and Better information to facilitate the transition from school to work

Assessment and certification of competences are acquired as a result of learning in informal or non-formal environment (competences as a mix of: knowledge, skills practice and attitudes to pursue workloads accurate). More, the employees would be directed to obtain a certificate indicating the presence of competence for a specific qualification. This is useful in continuing careers path on the same route and career progression or changing the orientation to another field of activity according to labor market requirements. On the other hand, the worker may be recommended or directed to human resource development activities and the inclusion in training programs. At the personal level, going through a process of counseling has a motivational role as it aims to help the worker to know better the characteristics of their personality and value the strengths and opportunities, professional interests, skills and competence, i.e. those elements that will sustain those chances to obtain work satisfaction and salary income growth.

Adaptability and career path management throughout entire life in a changing context is important because the real success depends on the ability of workers and companies to adapt to new trends, demonstrating flexibility and occupational mobility. Awareness of workers' personal resources, actual or potential, is an essential first step in career development. When people have a vision of what they want to do with their lives, they tend to be more focused, better able to take opportunities, and more determined in their career path. An authorized career counselor will apply professionally recognized tests to assess competences and describe their certification procedure. Moreover, the techniques applied could be replicated each time during their careers in various activities such as certification of skills in making professional decisions, setting goals or career building plans etc. In the current rapidly changing conditions, relevant information about the labor market volatility and the ability to preview needed competences and potential niches of development are essential.

Well-matching workers competences with job requirements. Sometimes, workers are overqualified for their current jobs so they are capable of handling more complex tasks and their skills are underused while others are under-qualified for their current jobs so they lack the skills normally needed for their job. The professional career counselor knows the overall situation of using competences and the real need of competences. In this way, the employer is guided to places where his competences are appropriate. Meanwhile, adequacy of competences is directly related to achieving increased wages and employment satisfaction. In both cases, the wage is

negatively affected by inadequate employment regarding qualification. The effect of skills mismatches on the income level of workers is remarkable and differs depending on the measurement method (Perry, 2014).

Development of competences relevant for performance and competitiveness of the company.

In this actual changing environment, competitive advantage is not static but is determined by the capacity to offer and adjust offer according to market demand and prediction emerging opportunities. The competitive position in the market depends on the sensitivity, adaptability and responsiveness by efficient use of existing resources. Thus, especially human resources i.e. skills, competences, attitudes to innovation, research, strategic reorganization can provide the know-how base required to obtain competitive advantage. Valuing knowledge and human potential to generate value-added, Arie de Geus, who introduced the concept of "Learning Organizations", says: „The ability to learn faster than your competitors may be only sustainable competitive advantage” (de Geus, 1997). Modern management methodologies are based mainly on innovation and valorization of knowledge, creativity and lifelong learning.

Identify training needs and skills development in line with the strategic plan of the company.

In modern organizations there is a constant concern to identify and develop competences and skills that are fundamental for the achievement of organizational objectives and future-oriented business development. There is a relation between career counseling activities and training activities because it involves developing the individual learning plans for employees. The evaluation of relevant competences and design of desirable targets of performance allow people to focus on skills, knowledge and characteristics that have the greatest impact on the productivity if the process of training and development opportunities are aligned with organizational needs. Career counselor have to do some challenging choices: for example, motivation and retention of skilled workforce, with specific work experience, willing for an ascendant career or hiring graduates with general competences who are open-minded to new technologies and innovation, at the beginning of career with adjacent problems keeping motivation and adequate financial satisfaction.

Investing in the right skills requires a strategic approach and developing the right skills would respond to the needs of the labor market.

Transferability of the skills on labor market.

From the labor market perspective, the effects of professional orientation and competences development in order to meet the demand for skills in different professions or economic sectors are integral part of professional mobility. If workers are correctly oriented and guided in career depending on the demand for skills and/or qualifications, that means a better professional transition without long periods of inactivity, unemployment period and social assistance.

Human capital is more portable across occupations than previously considered (Gathmann, Schonberg, 2011). Authors show that individuals move to occupations having skill requirements similar to those of their previous occupation. In addition, the distance of actual moves, as well as the propensity to switch occupations, declines sharply with labor market experience. These changes in skills demand have to be identified, and translated into up-to-date career path and relevant programs.

A strategic approach to skills policies also needs to consider local differences, particularly in emerging economies where these differences can be large [9].

Better information to facilitate the transition from school to work

The first work experience often shapes the future attitudes to work and willing to develop a career. Services of career counseling have to collaborate with the services of orientation in schools, especially for students in the final year of study in order to facilitate their first-job engagement according to their competencies.

Under-skilling, under-use of skills and unemployment can arise because of a lack of information and transparency in skills systems. Thus, quality career guidance is a critical part of any skills strategy (OECD, 2012). To make effective transitions from school to employment, young people need to have access to information and suitably qualified people to assist them in making the right decisions about jobs, courses and career paths.

Conclusions

Skills have become the global currency of the 21st century. The best solution to actual challenges is investing effectively in competences throughout the life cycle; from education, and throughout a working life. The services of career guidance make

an essential contribution to the development of high-quality career path, essential in meeting the needs of employees and furthering companies' targets to competitiveness. Responding to the needs of workers and companies is the driving force behind the design and operation of a good system that provides career guidance, and this service should be available and relevant to all interested persons.

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