

REFERENCE POINTS ON THE ROAD TO BUILDING THE INTEGRATED AKA CAREER COUNSELLING MODEL

Cojocariu V-M., Maria Puiu M.*

Abstract: The importance and significance of the career plan is no longer a novelty for the activity of counsellors and career centres. Nevertheless, we are still looking for new concrete and efficient ways of performing such activities with the students. Our intention is that of designing and organizing such activities that may be integrated into a course throughout the entire undergraduate programme. The purpose of our study is twofold: 1. building a proactive attitude towards one's own professional development; 2. providing the techniques for elaborating a feasible career plan. The theoretical presentation of the integrated AKA model of conducting the career counselling activity by means of the career plan is combined with illustrating certain sequences from this process conducted at the Department of Professional Counselling from "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău.

Key words: career management, career counselling, career plan

Introduction

Career management, career counselling and career plan – conceptual delimitations and interdependencies

The unprecedented increase, in Romania, of the interest in the processes characteristic of professional counselling opens doors for both theoretical and practical initiatives.

Career management expresses the ample action of assuming and managing one's own professional becoming in a responsible [3] and systematic way. Career management is acquired and, like any quality competence, it is validated when one makes the leap from dependent action (in relation to the support provided by the counsellor) to independent manifestation, in which all the client's decisions and actions are the result of his/her own responsible choices.

"Career counselling refers to the services and activities meant to assist the individual of any age and at any moment in his life, in making choices concerning education, training and occupations, and to develop his own career" [12, p.10]. Career counselling is a significant part of the career management process, turning into notions and, simultaneously, interrelated processes.

The career plan represents a personal projection of one's own professional becoming, which should necessarily include some basic elements such as: objectives, strategies, deadlines. Career management is thus the wider frame within

* **Venera-Mihaela Cojocariu**, Associate Professor PH.d "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău, Department of Teacher Training, Bacău, Romania, **Maria Puiu**, career counsellor "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău, Department of Professional Counselling, Bacău, Romania, ✉ corresponding author: mirelamnec@yahoo.com

which career counselling turns into reality and produces the expected results. Storey (1976) will highlight the fact that career management represents the “process of designing, implementing and monitoring the career plans undertaken by the individual in a unique way or together with the career systems of organizations” [9, p. 94].

How did we design the integration of career counselling activities? The AKA integrated model of career counselling

Many specialized studies emphasize the idea that the number of research on the long-term efficiency of career interventions is limited [8]. For this reason, this context should motivate and support the effort of performing well-organized, systematic and long-term career interventions so that generating the expected results should have a superior degree of manifestation probability.

Consistent with this fact, our department’s specialists have designed, starting with the 2012-2013 academic year, a career counselling programme for first-year students, meant to be conducted throughout the entire length of the study programmes as an integrated type of activity, which may combine the most diverse and attractive forms of activity, both with a view to raising the students’ awareness and involving them in this type of activity, and, especially, to achieving the envisaged objectives.

Our holistic and eclectic approach combines and exploits the theoretical perspectives of social-cognitivism (Perdrix&al., 2012), social-constructivism and Holland’s personality theory, including its reviewed version (1997) [7]. In agreement with these theories, the goals that we have set and designed may fall within the following coordinates:

1. Making the first-year students familiar with the particularities of the academic environment and life, its exigencies and opportunities as different from high-school education, in the first month of activity. Promoting the Department of Professional Counselling and the services it provides, its timetable and team work, projects, initiatives and collaborations;
2. The systematic achievement, throughout the entire length of undergraduate programmes, of the sessions of individual counselling, with the purpose of knowing and evaluating students, building self-knowledge skills, in order to clarify/adjust the clients’ needs and provide support in formulating/reformulating customized career objectives;
3. The regular and systematic achievement, throughout the entire length of the undergraduate programme, of at least 4 annual group counselling workshop projects, organized with students from different specializations (Economic Sciences, Letters, Engineering, Mathematics), with a view to exchanging ideas, practices, experiences, solutions for certain shared problems characteristic of a career;
4. Constantly ensuring and achieving the services for individual career counselling, the intervention for evaluating existing career options related to guidance and

support, decision making as well as application of certain solutions. In agreement with authors such as [2] successfully exploited techniques such as work registers, drafting and interpretation exercises, individualized feedback, constant flow of information about the job market, constant personalized support.

Consistent with the point of view expressed in the first part of this study, by integrating the entire career counselling activity (CC) on the level of the career plan (PC) we are taking into account the long interaction, systematically resumed throughout the entire undergraduate programme, between 2 relevant vectors: action (A) and knowledge (K).

Started as a group action (A1), career counselling will provide the necessary support for knowledge (K1), with a direct impact upon future actions (A2), but also with a reverse connection at the level of self-knowledge (AK1) and of undertaking initiative in individual career counselling (CC1). The first expected result is related to resuming the action (A2) on a higher level, individually as well as in groups, where the knowledge (C2) and self-knowledge degree (AK2) is in progress, self-image is clarified, motivation is enhanced and oriented. The succession of these sequences is amplified in relation to the client's needs, to the point in which the "nth" action (An) relies on good knowledge and self-knowledge and no longer requires, except partially (and subsequently to an irrelevant extent) counselling. Career counselling, significantly included into the equation of professional becoming and promotion, may, at a certain point, be left in the background (as we represented in Figure 1), as the students become autonomous and graduate from their study programmes.

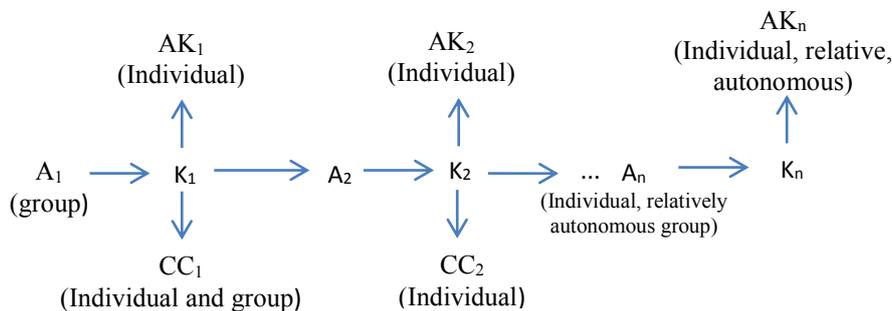


Figure 1. Sequential representation of the integrated AKA model of career counselling
Source: Authors own elaboration

Some aspects related to the efficient achievement of the integrated AKA career counselling model

The purpose of this study is to present the integrated AKA model of achieving career counselling through the career plan, illustrated with effective sequences from this process conducted at the Department of Professional Counselling from "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău.

The main objective of our activity is that of ensuring the best counselling services with a view to preparing students for a versatile and unpredictable job market, in which transversal competences play an essential part. In order to be competitive on the job market, the graduates should hold not only general, but also transferable competences, so that they may be able to knowingly undertake the responsibility of managing their own careers [10].

Through the activity designed and conducted like a variegated repertoire of manifestations, in the form of projects, counselling sessions and events, our department has managed to bring interesting models and practices of achieving career counselling to the students' attention. We here emphasize the most important ones: the workshops Career Counselling I and II, Career Plan I and II, a volunteering programme, sessions of psychological evaluation and testing with validated instruments, vocational counselling and information, professional counselling and orientation (educational, personal, career plan), motivation sessions, meetings with employers. We believe that these meet the students' needs, as well as those of high-school students or other persons interested in building a successful career. We shall further proceed to a brief analysis of the most important ones, in terms of organization and achievement and, especially, the expected impact:

1. *Career Counselling Workshop I* – target group: first-year students; interval: the first week/the first two weeks of the academic year; duration: 30 minutes; purpose: becoming consistent with the specificity of academic life; objectives and activities: to identify the main services inside the university; to distinguish the particularities of academic life; to identify the structuring of the academic environment into departments and faculties; to use the campus map in order to identify the main services (educational, administrative, documentation, counselling, social); to identify the particularities of the didactic process in the academic environment, how it is organized, how exams are held and marked; to make use of levers in their communication with their colleagues, tutors, mentors, professors, department heads and deans from the academic environment.
2. *Sessions of psychological evaluation and testing with validated tools* – are conducted individually or in groups, in an interval dedicated to the applied test, during 1-3 sessions, with the purpose of: evaluating personality traits and correlating them with the students' professional interests; objectives and activities: to know the emotional, cognitive, behavioural, relational and skill-related aspects of personality; to understand the dynamics and structure of their own personality; to discover professional interests; to become consistent with the role and influence of psychic factors in choosing their educational and professional path; to intervene on time and resort to specialists in shaping a balanced and harmonious personality.
3. *Career plan I* – target group: first-year students; interval: weeks 8-10 from the academic year; duration: 30 minutes; purpose: elaborating the first career

- plan; objectives and activities: to know the stages and opportunities for elaborating the career plan; to become aware of the importance of the career plan; to understand the characteristics of each profession corresponding to the study domain; to formulate their own career objectives; to establish the short- and medium-term plan of action to achieve the objectives [6]; to understand the educational experience (practice stages, volunteering activities) from the perspective of the employers' perspective; to achieve their own personal portfolio (to elaborate their curriculum vitae, their letter of application, the plan of extracurricular activities); to structure their career plan.
4. *Vocational counselling and information* – is conducted individually or in small groups, in sessions of up to 50 minutes, the purpose: self-knowledge, evaluation of professional development opportunities; objectives and activities: to analyse the identified skills; to correlate the skills identified with the study programme attended; to indicate domains and jobs, companies and activities for which they could/would like to apply in the future, in agreement with the skills identified and the training obtained by the end of the study programme; to name successful local and regional employers in their field of interest; to conduct a micro-research in the field of human resources involving a company in their field of interest.
 5. *Professional counselling and orientation* (the educational, personal and career plan) – is conducted individually or in small groups, in sessions of up to 50 minutes, with the purpose of: training with a view to developing a positive attitude needed to entering the job market and keeping one's job, for example [7]: tolerance to ambiguity, a proactive attitude [4], openness to novelty, adaptability [11]; objectives and activities: to present versions of the career plan they have designed; to indicate feasible/performed actions for putting the career plan into practice; to analyze the career plan of one of their colleagues/friend in terms of its feasibility; to take part in debates on future actions related to entering the job market; to provide a case study on the issue of job market insertion.
 6. *Motivation sessions* – are conducted individually or in groups, according to the students' demands and needs, whenever they are required, duration: 50 minutes, purpose: increasing the level of the students' motivation for study, profession, and career; objectives and activities: to discover the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation regarding the study programme they have chosen; to elaborate, within a professional framework, their personal skills and competences; to become consistent with the impact of motivation upon personal growth and development; to gain a high level of self-esteem, to know specific methods and techniques by means of which they may efficiently satisfy their needs of self-fulfilment, affiliation, power and worth.
 7. *Volunteering programme* – the target group: the students/graduates of the university; interval: according to the activities and projects (volunteer certificate for over 120 hours, volunteer official sheet for below 120 hours).

Among the annual projects of the department which provide a suitable environment or volunteering activities we mention: Together in the joy of giving, From small hands to great hearts, Open Doors Day, Give with your soul (some of them at their sixth edition); purpose: consolidation and development of digital, social and civic competences, initiative and entrepreneurial spirit, raising cultural awareness and artistic expression; objectives and activities: to develop their skills in expressing and interpreting thoughts, feelings and facts both orally and in writing; to interact appropriately in social and cultural contexts; to appreciate cultural diversity, interest and curiosity concerning foreign languages and intercultural communication; to develop/exploit their mathematical thinking in solving problems from daily situations; to acquire the skill of organizing their own learning, including through efficient time and information management; to learn constructive communication ways; to adopt an attitude based on collaboration, assertiveness and integrity; to participate constructively in the life of the local community; to show solidarity and interest in solving the problems of the local community.

8. *Meetings with employers* – are conducted in groups, according to the students' demands and needs, whenever they are required, in agreement with the study programme, the local job market and the successful employers in the field; duration: 50 minutes, purpose: increasing the knowledge level of the concrete demands from the job market; objectives and activities: to meet employers in the field of activity characteristic of the study programme they have chosen; to explore, within a professional framework, the relation between professional exigencies and personal competences; to become aware of the expectation level of employers; to relate their personal training level to the employers' real requirements.
9. *Career Counselling Workshop II* – target group: students from the final years; interval: weeks 6-7; duration: 30 minutes; purpose: training with a view to elaborating, completing and defending the graduation paper; objectives and activities: to know the methodological aspects of the graduation examination (to comply with the procedure for entering the graduation examination; to identify the elements of the graduation examination); to consult the themes for the graduation papers according to the study programme they have attended; to know the necessary steps for elaborating the graduation paper; to build a constructivist relationship with the graduation paper coordinator; to evaluate the system of competences acquired during their study years; to give due attention to organizational aspects and to know techniques for emotion and stress management.
10. *Career Plan Workshop II* – target group: students from the final years; interval: the second semester; duration: 50 minutes; purpose: training for the selection interview; objectives and activities: to acquire skills in exploring professional options (analysis of occupations and the job market) and in

formulating career objectives; to identify easily the domains under development; to use productively the ability to adapt, emotional intelligence, creativity and the innovating spirit in solving problems; to become consistent with the stages and techniques characteristic of a job interview; to approach with maturity the compiling of their personal portfolio (curriculum vitae, letter of intention, certificates, diplomas).

It is worth noting that the novelty of the integrated AKA career plan (as we represented in Figure 2) does not consist in the types of the activities conducted (otherwise characteristic of the usual processes of career counselling) as in the fact that these are projected in anticipation and articulated during the entire undergraduate cycle, aiming at a finality of utmost importance: the transversal competence of achieving career management by means of the career plan.

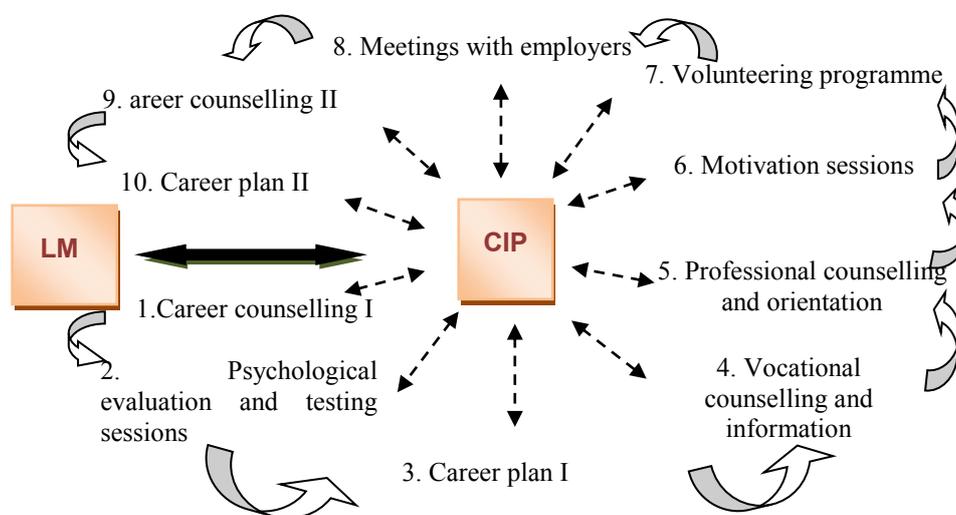


Figure 2 – Action representation of the AKA career counselling model by the integrated career plan

Source: Authors own elaboration

Future action and theoretical lines

Since the integrated AKA career counselling model is in its first year of experimentation, there should be conducted analyses and self-analyses related to the obtained results and their quality, as well as quantitative studies, which should enable the measuring of the indicators of the model's success, both at the end of each year and at the completion of the training programme. Qualitatively speaking, the categories of activities should be refined, their number possibly reduced and the dimension of professional counselling enriched. Quantitatively speaking, there should be identified some indicators and the activities should be focused in this direction. The limits which intervene in career counselling within our activity

(presented in the first part of our paper) should be kept under control, monitored and turned from blind spots into strengths, vectors for future activities.

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**PUNKTY ODNIESIENIE NA DRODZE DO BUDOWANIA ZINTEGROWANEGO
MODELU DORADZTWA ZAWOWEGO AKA**

Streszczenie: Waga i znaczenie planu kariery zawodowej nie jest już nowością w działalności doradców zawodowych i centrów kariery. Niemniej jednak, nadal poszukujemy nowych, konkretnych i efektywnych metod wykonywania takich działań ze studentami. Naszą intencją jest zaprojektowanie i zorganizowanie takich działań które były zintegrowane w program obejmujący wszystkie lata studiów. Cel niniejszego artykułu jest dwójaki: 1. Budowanie aktywnej postawy wobec własnego rozwoju zawodowego, 2. Dostarczenia technik do opracowania wykonalnego planu kariery. Teoretyczne przedstawienie zintegrowanego modelu AKA do prowadzenia działalności doradztwa zawodowego w planowaniu kariery, ilustruje pewne etapy tego procesu, przeprowadzone na Wydziale Doradztwa Zawodowego na Umniwersytecie „Vasile Alecsandri” w Bacau.

Słowa kluczowe: zarządzanie karierą, doradztwo zawodowe, planowanie kariery

參考點的道路建設綜合又名生涯心理輔導模式

摘要：職業生涯規劃的重要性和意義已經不再是新奇的活動輔導員和職業中心。儘管如此，我們仍然在尋找新的具體和有效的方式與學生進行此類活動。我們的目的是，設計和組織這樣的活動，可能會整合成一門課程在整個本科課程。我們的研究目的是雙重的：1。建立一個積極的態度對待自己的專業發展；2。制定一個可行的職業生涯規劃提供技術。

AKA的綜合模型進行職業輔導活動，通過職業生涯規劃相結合的理論介紹與說明某些序列進行專業輔導部從這個過程中，從“瓦西裡·亞歷山德里大學巴克烏。