

Introducing a contemporary practical guide for career choices

In the present paper, the interdisciplinary character of modern career counselling is pointed out by arguing that, this is based upon the crossroads of the psychology and the economics of labour, the sociology of occupations, and elements of human resource management, psychometrics, pedagogic, statistics and computer science. The basic criterion for the proper choices of studies, occupations and careers are also adequately analysed. The most important and constant variable is self knowledge and the considerable matching of each personality with occupations, followed and in combination with other variables, such as occupational perspectives, working conditions and payments, family and financial data, educational factors and random events. Also introduced is a contemporary practical guide for career choices that elaborates and combines these criteria and supports that, people with high performances and strong will can choose from a wider range of professions that match with their personality type, even from those professions that do not include other positive factors of the aforementioned criteria. On the contrary, people with low performances and weak will, is better to choose studies and professions that first of all match with their personality and secondly, include other positive of these criteria. The higher student performances and level of will is, the wider is the possibility that the “risk” of selecting professions represented by negative mixture of the so-mentioned critical factors. The above arguments are the result of many years of research and practice in career counselling and the implementation of career guidance tests.

Key words: contemporary approach, proper career choices

1. The contemporary approach

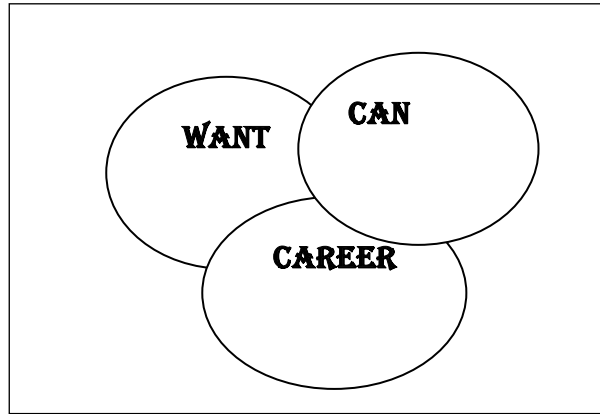
A contemporary approach to career counseling derives from an interdisciplinary point of view, the mixture of different scientific fields and mainly of labour psychology, economy and sociology. Elements from the fields of human resource management, psychometrics, statistics, pedagogies and computer science are also included. This approach is related to Holland’s theory (1959, 1985, 1987, 1997) and is closed to socioeconomic approaches (Hotckiss and Borow, 1990, 1996). Under such a point of view, we introduce a practical guide for the proper selection of studies, occupations and careers. The basic criteria for such a selection process are a combination of the following elements :

1. Self-knowledge, including personal interests, preferences, inclinations, talents, abilities, aptitudes, will, values and the matching of each personality with studies, occupations and careers
2. Occupational perspectives in the labour market, working conditions and payments
3. Family and financial data

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4. Educational factors
5. Random events and the never ending conquest of knowledge

The contemporary guide combines the above criterion and factors and ends up with the best possible answer. Such a selection process should focus on the above five criteria and factors in a well known basic frame of want, can, career as such:



The aforementioned criteria and factors constitute the basic principles of an interdisciplinary approach for the proper choices of studies, professions and careers and are further analyzed here. It is also alleged that, particularly the applied aspects of career guidance which addresses to the wider public, if possible, must stay far from some scientists of the field who approach this institution with contradictory or indistinct opinions and assumptions. The basic need is to provide out specific, clear and comprehensive position and directions regarding the selection of studies, profession and careers. The scientific differentiations or even recriminations regarding issues of this institution can and should only interest the academics of the field. Similar practices when applied in the same area, can barely contribute to one's need for clarity and positive results. They create confusion and disorientate instead of orientating people, counsellors, and the wider public in order to make the right choices in selecting studies and profession. Career guidance can dramatically mark someone's life route and influence the development of economy and society in a country. Particularly the need for clear and specific hypothesis for such an important institution which influences the steps of the wider society, mainly young persons – the hope and future of the world, can and should be taken into consideration very seriously.

2. Self-Knowledge

Following the career guidance and counselling procedure, valid information, instructions and assistance regarding decision making on studies, occupations and careers should be provided. For this reason, persons refer to career counsellors, follow career guidance and counselling procedures, take reliable modern automatic tests of career guidance-career choices and are informed by valid sources. First concern when selecting studies and occupations is to have self-knowledge, to know who they are and what they want or can do. (*Thales of Miletos, one of the seven ancient Greek philosophers, when asked what is most important in life for a man or a woman, he answered, "the self-knowledge"*). They must learn about their interests, inclinations, preferences and talents. They must be sure about what they really are and not what

they think they are. With the help of career counsellors and appropriate tests, they may find out what kind of the Holland's six personality types they are. After realizing what their personality type, interests, inclinations, talents, what suits them and what does not, they should explore their personal general and specific capacities in order to be better orientated towards the right direction and level of studies and career path. They should not only know what interests them, but also what they can achieve and where can they aim for at this first stage of preparation for the long journey to the future. Their performance in some lessons and generally at school is a first sign for the kind and particularly for the level of studies and professional hierarchy which they should be aiming for. Nevertheless, school performances do not constitute the absolute and unique criterion for a persons' future professional success. It is well known that, many great scientists were not very good students during their school years. If there exist a strong will, persistence and life goals for professional and social evolution, their performances might be enhanced radically. Regarding the issues discussed here, the power of will might be of more importance than any other personality element. Because abilities, aptitudes, ambition and specifically will, consist important criterions in selecting studies and professions. Together with the professional inclinations, interests and talents, they constitute the core of the necessary self-knowledge, which each person must have during the pursuit of his/her professional future. Other personality features such as emotional intelligence and balance, diligence, perception, creativity, critical thought, logic, stamina, extroversion and introversion, ambitions, life values etc., are of less importance although they should not be ignored in particular cases. A complementary way to explore people's general abilities and special aptitudes, as well as other features of their personality, is through different types of ability and personality tests, which are considered necessary during the staff evaluation and selection stage for a job opening by business firms and/or various organizations, private or public.

3. Occupational perspectives, working conditions and payments

After gaining strong self-knowledge and getting to know well what they "want and can do", their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their particular personality type, people should explore the world of work, with the help of career counsellors. In particular, they should gather reliable information about occupational perspectives on the local, national and international labour market. They should be informed about the professions of the future and of the past, professions which have positive perspectives and which appear to be degraded and begin to die out. They should check in which workplaces there is much or less competition and which specifications and difficulties might stand as an obstacle in the route they will choose to follow. Nowadays that the world face employment uncertainty and rapid post-evolution in technology, economy, employment and professions' content - occupational perspectives in the labour market, constitute a particularly important criterion for the selection process. Generally, it is logical for average persons to choose from a variety of professions that suit them, those with better future perspectives and to avoid those that are considered to be degraded and tend to die out in the labour market. Therefore, they choose to follow the way of the professions of the future and avoid those of the past. According to recent research and many relative evidences, the majority of young people nowadays choose their studies, professions and career based on their future perspectives and particularly on the security of guaranteed employment. The anxiety of finding a place in the present pale scenery of labour market is stronger than anything that can be said against this

point of view. Nevertheless, regardless how strong this criterion is, it should not be the only one. It is necessary to quantify it with the other criteria and particularly with how much a personality suits to professions. In this great life decision we discuss here, if some professions do not suit one's personality type, his/her preferences and inclinations, these should not be selected regardless how good perspectives they have in the labour market or how good the other factors such as family and financial situation are. Working conditions and salaries, the kind of work, its content, the status of each profession, the working security as well as the hierarchical and career evolution perspectives, are other elements that also need to be explored in the selection process. These particular parameters may be evaluated differently by various persons in accordance with their working values, personality and interests. They constitute part of gaining enough self-knowledge and knowledge of the world of work that is required when they come to the great decision concerning their professional future.

4. Family and financial data

Depending on the situation, family environment, family tradition, culture and economic background, are also important criteria and factors in selecting studies, profession, and careers. Father's or mother's job or a family business is often a worthy and interesting perspective for young people in selecting their professional future. Even though it sounds preterit or it is denounced as favouritism, it is a fact that nowadays in an extremely competitive world, it is wrong for children's personal interest to ignore the advantage given by family tradition, without letting this to lead to complacency. Certain parents try to impose their desires and inhibitions to their children in reference with their studies and professions. Some young people are forced to study a science that is considered to be the vaulting horse for a social and financial development, such as doctor, engineer, and lawyer or work in a family business. Nowadays though, such a pressure might bring about completely opposite results from those expected. This means that the young people oppose against the older generations and particularly against those parents who are overprotective and sometimes oppressive. While in certain cases, parents might be right when they insist on the selection of a particular career for their children, they lose the fight due to their persistent and paternalistic way of acting. Furthermore, even if it sounds unpleasant, we owe to be realistic on how much money can every family afford for the studies of their children. Relevant to this subject is also the place of residence or the country where young people think of working in the future. They first should investigate if the place is close to specific universities and if the local market offers career opportunities. The place where a university and/or college is based, plays a very important role in the selection of studies and this goes particularly to those families who have low income. Of course, young boys or girls can choose to study far from their hometown area as long as this choice is favoured by their personality type, family culture and financial capabilities. Generally, if such choices are feasible financially, they should not be excluded. The perspective of returning to the home town can and should be encouraged. For this reason, in order to make a career choice, it is necessary to quantify the development of local market in relation to the national and international reality.

5. Educational factors

The structure of the educational system, its substructure, the educational directions, the study level, the examination systems, the selection procedure for other and/or higher studies, the influence of teachers in combination to the student performances, play an important role to the selection of studies, profession and careers. When a student has very good performances at school it is logical to choose and enter a faculty with high admission grades such as famous medical or law schools. This should of course be in accordance with the fact that, this person wants to follow the particular profession and is well prepared for all the difficulties that s/he will face in such demanding career route. It is usually considered waste of human resources when a student has high student performances but ends up choosing studies of low admission grades.

6. Random events and the never ending conquest of knowledge

Random events, unexpected fortunate or unfortunate coincidences and chances, which people come across in their life, can play important role in career and personal life. It is important if a person is able to see when luck knocks his/her door so as to intervene correctly in his/her destiny and to be able to ride on top of the waves. This of course should happen without harming other people. It also means that, one should not abandon the effort for constant self development, for conquering knowledge and skills required by the competitive world of current employment reality. It is well known that all *“goods are obtained with effort”* and that professional and life success is the reward for everyone’s efforts. This happens as it is not negated by the fact that, some means of mass media, focusing on a false and virtual reality, give hopes for easy and without effort conquest of success. The never ending conquest for knowledge is a life and joy source, the power of worthiness, success and creativity.

7. The contemporary practical guide

The contemporary practical guide for career choices is a product of a perennial study of career guidance and counselling research and practice, in combination with the development and application of modern automatic career guidance tests. The theory supporting our assumptions, as already mentioned, are based upon Holland’ s and socioeconomic approaches. It combines the aforementioned evaluations and leads to the following basic ascertainment: *“people with high performances and strong will can choose from a wider range of professions that match with their personality type, even from those professions that have negative perspectives in the labour market and/or do not include any other positive factors such as family, financial and educational criteria. On the contrary, people with low performances, without any serious hopes of improvement and with weak will, is better to follow studies and professions that first of all match with their personality and secondly have good perspectives in the labour market or include other positive of the aforementioned criteria”*. The higher student performances and level of will is, the wider is the possibility that the “risk” of selecting professions represented by a negative mixture of the so-mentioned critical factors. This means for example that, when a person with particularly high performances and talent in theatre and strong will, persists in following the profession of an actor, in the end he/she will probably succeed to have a satisfying career, even though the specific profession is a very antagonistic and with few job openings. If persons are sure about their choices, they know what they want and what they can do, they may be able to

succeed. On the contrary, persons with low performances and not particularly strong will, whose parents or themselves insist on becoming for example a doctor (which is also a very difficult and competitive profession), probably they will end up in professional and personal dead ends. It is better if these persons choose professions that fit with their personality type and have good occupational perspectives in the labour market or include other of the above positive factors. Also, they should avoid professions that do not match their personality even if they have good perspectives in the labour market (such as information technology), or include other determinative factors as previously mentioned. In the golden rule (which theory and practice of career guidance and counselling tries to enrich here), should be also added the ascertainment that, nowadays in the globalized and fast moving world, certain persons might be forced to change more than one profession in their career. Furthermore, today there is such a great range of professions that people can choose, without thinking one way or insisting on selecting only one profession. In reality, there is more than one profession matching everyone. If for any reason a person is not able to follow his/her first choice then s/he should not give up and move to the next preferable profession. *There is always the chance to find another profession passion if the first choice is unattainable*". For example, if we assume that there are 1000 professions belonging to 17 large occupational groups, then s/he must draw a line until the sixth or probably the eighth category excluding everything underneath it. What people should avoid (and this is a key point of the golden rule), is not to choose professions and careers which are in complete contrast with their personality and interests. All persons should have an open occupational horizon and choose from a catalogue of professions that match with them. They may choose professions that stand first, second, third, fourth etc, in their list, regarding how much compatible are to their personality and in relation to mixture of the other positive criteria and factors. Apart from the aforementioned elements, it is also noted that, in all professions of medium and particularly of high education and professional hierarchy, it is necessary to know how to use computers, to speak English and to constantly refresh general and special knowledge and experiences in a life long learning process. Of course we should never forget that, an accomplished human being and successful professional is considered to be the person who has spiritual sensitivities and concerns, sticks to values and beliefs, searches education and knowledge, occupies himself with arts and literature or the protection of the environment, develops creative thinking, acts with dignity, morality and perception and performs positively for the general and his own good.

8. The final decision for the proper career choices

The above assumptions and in particular, have been developed after intensive research and practice in career counselling and the implementation of career guidance tests and in the last four years (Katsanevas 2007). The practical guide has been used extensively by the author and a large number of his collaborates in Greece and Cyprus during the last five years in every day career counselling practice. The conquest of self knowledge, the understanding of the world of work, of the occupational perspectives, the working conditions and rewards, family, financial, educational and other specific criteria, under the umbrella of the golden rule, are the basic criteria for taking the most important decision of everyone's life: To choose the studies, the profession and the career path they will follow and will mark them for the rest of their life.

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