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Article

Dynamics of career preferences in management students

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Abstract

Background. One of the key challenges facing university students in terms of their career is the relevance of career preferences to professional and personal competencies. The reported study explored the relation between career preferences and competencies of students at different stages of training. Career preferences are viewed as indicators of successful transition through the normative crisis of professionalisation. Career preferences are students' attitudes to essential challenges related to career development. Career preferences include motivational, emotional and volitional, and orientation components.

Materials and methods. The data were collected by "Career Readiness" and "Leader. Manager. Expert" questionnaires developed by S. V. Dukhnovsky. The sample included 167 students aged 18–22. The evidence was collected from university students on management programmes. The empirical results were processed by Statistica 10.0 Software Package with the use of Shapiro-Wilk test, one-way ANOVA and Pearson's correlation coefficient.

Results and discussion. The results suggest that most students prefer a mixed type of career. Throughout all the stages of training, they opt for vertical career rather than the horizontal one. Students also show a gradual transition from non-specialised to specialised career preferences. Changes in career preferences are associated with the development of leadership, managerial and expert competencies. First and second-year students are more likely to show leadership skills, while students in their final year of training tend to reveal managerial and expert competencies.

Conclusions. The results of the study can be used in the development of career profiles for university students as tools for promoting their further professionalisation.

Keywords: career preferences, personal competencies, professional competencies, management degrees, university students

Научная статья

Динамика карьерных предпочтений студентов вузов управленческих специальностей

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Аннотация

Введение. Одной из ключевых проблем, связанных с карьерным развитием студентов вузов, является проблема соответствия карьерных предпочтений их профессиональным и личностным компетенциям. Исследование, представленное в статье, было направлено на анализ взаимосвязей между карьерными предпочтениями и компетенциями студентов на разных этапах обучения. Мы рассматриваем карьерные предпочтения как показатели успешного перехода через нормативный кризис профессионализации. Карьерные предпочтения представляют собой установки студентов на решение проблем, стоящих перед ними в связи с планами в отношении карьерного роста. Структура карьерных предпочтений включает в себя мотивационный, эмоционально-волевой и ориентационный компоненты.

Материалы и методы. Данные были собраны с помощью анкет «Готовность к карьере» и «Лидер. Менеджер. Эксперт», которые были разработаны С. В. Духновским. В выборку вошли 167 студентов в возрасте 18–22 лет. В опросе приняли участие студенты двух российских университетов, получающие образование в области управления. Эмпирические результаты подвергались статистической обработке с помощью пакета прикладных статистических программ Statistica10.0 с использованием критерия Шапиро — Уилка, однофакторного дисперсионного анализа ANOVA и коэффициента корреляции Пирсона.

Результаты и обсуждение. Результаты показали, что студенты в основном предпочитают смешанный тип карьеры. На всех этапах обучения вертикальная карьера более предпочтительна, чем горизонтальная. Помимо этого, по мере продвижения учащихся от курса к курсу наблюдается постепенный переход от неспециализированных предпочтений к специализированным профессиям. Изменения в карьерных предпочтениях связаны с формированием лидерских, управленческих и экспертных компетенций. Студенты первого и второго курсов склонны к проявлению лидерских компетенций, в то время как студенты последнего курса в значительной степени демонстрируют управленческие и экспертные компетенции.

Выводы. Полученные результаты могут быть использованы для разработки профессиональных профилей студентов университетов в качестве инструментов психолого-педагогического сопровождения их дальнейшей профессионализации.

Ключевые слова: карьерные предпочтения, личностные компетенции, профессиональные компетенции, управленческие специальности, студенты высших учебных заведений

Introduction

A career choice and its development are integral to professionalisation. Career-related issues are particularly relevant for university students. An effective career is about using professional competencies and skills. Another key factor is career preferences. Students' career preferences include career plans, career opportunities (preferred types of careers, ideas about the desired position and the speed of advancement), professional competencies and personal resources. As a result, viable career preferences allow students to develop realistic ideas about their future professional path. We believe that career preferences are one of the most important conditions for students' professionalisation and the development of their readiness for future professional activity.

Career preferences

Psychology has two approaches to study career preferences. The first approach is based on the theory of career decision-making. It views career preferences as a component (stage) of a person's career decision-making process (Gati, Asher 2001; Germeijs, Verschueren 2006; van Esbroeck, Tibos, Zaman 2005). The second approach investigates career preferences as an independent phenomenon (Hirschi, Lage 2007; Prjzazhnikov 2017; Savickas 2005; Super 1990). According to latter approach, career preferences are intrapersonal (subjective) elements which determine career decisions.

The reported study is based on the second approach. It is grounded in the activity theory (Leontiev 1975), dispositional concept of social behavior regulation (Yadov, Semenov, Vodzinskaya et al. 2013), and subjective approach to psychological

analysis of career (Stebbins 1970). Career preferences of university students can be considered as indicators of professional self-definition and the successful transition through the normative crisis of professionalisation (Klimov 2004; Pryazhnikov 2018; Zeer 2006). Thus, career preferences of students are their attitudes to essential challenges related to career advancement and development (Mironova-Tikhomirova 2006). Effective career preferences foster successful career development. Such students have a stable focus on successful prospective careers, career advancement and professional self-definition (Sedunova, Mikhaylova, Gnedova 2014).

Similarly to V. A. Malikova and I. G. Prokopenko (Malikova, Prokopenko 2011), we suggest that the structure of career preferences includes motivational, emotional and volitional, and orientation components. A motivational component is a wish to attain a certain position; an emotional and volitional component is the speed of career advancement; an orientation component is related to a preferred career type. For the Russian setting, it is expedient to use the following grounds to distinguish between career types: career specialisation (specialised career vs. non-specialised career), career orientation (horizontal career vs. vertical career) and career organisation (intra-organisational career vs. inter-organisational career) (Dukhnovsky 2019).

Career preferences of university students

Realistic career preferences are essential to a successful career after graduation. Empirical studies show that effective careers are associated with prior development of career plans. This includes clear goals, thoughtful self-evaluation, a roadmap, and awareness of possible obstacles to the successful implementation of career plans (Corr, Mutinelli 2017; Hunt, Rollag, Hebert-Maccaro 2017). According to Y. Guan, M. Zhuang, Z. Cai et al., the mediators of successfully implemented career plans are professional self-definition and adaptability of career plans (Guan, Zhuang, Cai et al. 2017). The researchers also focus on students' career optimism and its positive and negative impact on students' career preferences (Kalafat 2018; McIlveen, Beccaria, Burton 2013).

A competence approach to the psychological analysis of career allows to structure factors that determine students' career preferences. Competence is the ability to effectively apply knowledge and skills to solve professional and personal issues of professional self-definition. The role of compe-

tencies in the development of students' career preferences is described in (Povarenkov 2013; Rubtsov, Zabrodin 2012; Tolochek 2017; Sinyagin 2016), etc. Competence approach is also instrumental in the feasibility analysis of students' career preferences and their compliance with student's professional and personal characteristics. This is especially relevant when students are trained in the areas that offer a wide range of career opportunities, in particular, in the areas of administration and management.

The structure of competences in the field of management and administration is still a matter of debate. Earlier, we proposed a model of professional competences (Dukhnovsky 2019). It is based on the two whitepapers: "Employment in Public Administration" (Kontseptsiya kadrovogo obespecheniya... 2017), as well as "Guidelines on the Implementation of the General Concept of the Development and Use of Public Administration Professionals Pool in Russia" (Metodicheskie materialy po realizatsii... 2018). This model includes such competencies as strategic leadership, perseverance, effective social interaction, managerial competence, self-management, readiness for teamwork, scope of thinking, readiness for personal development, and expert competence. We consider the development of the above competencies a prerequisite for effective career preferences of students trained in management and administration.

It should be noted that university students' career preferences are marked by instability, interdependence, and a tendency to maintain stability in life (Mironova-Tikhomirova 2006). These features may become obstacles to a successful career. In this regard, it is crucial to study factors that determine the effectiveness of students' career preferences at different stages of training. It is also important to analyse the dynamics of career preferences and identify growth points in students' prospective careers.

Current study

The empirical study analysed the relation between career preferences of university students and their personal and professional competencies at different stages of training. The objectives of the study include: 1) comparative analysis of career preferences common for university students at different stages of training; 2) comparative analysis of students' personal and professional competencies depending on the stage of training (zone of actual development); 3) analysis of the relationship between students' career preferences and personal and professional competencies to identify growth points for different

types of careers. The evidence was collected from university students on management programmes.

Materials and methods

Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of 167 university students aged 18–22. It included first, second and fourth (final) year students on the educational programme Human Resource Management operated by The Yugra State University and Kurgan Branch of The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (Russia). The subsample of first-year students included 59 respondents (23 males and 36 females), there were 55 respondents (23 males and 33 females) among second-year students and 53 respondents (18 males and 35 females) among fourth-year students.

The first-year students were surveyed before their first university exams. Second and fourth-year students were surveyed at the end of the relevant academic year. Thus, the study covered the first, middle and final stages of university training.

Tools and measures

Students' career preferences were assessed with the "Career readiness" questionnaire (Dukhnovsky 2019). The questionnaire identifies a preferred type of career, professional tasks, official status, speed of career advancement and the level of position. Thus, the questionnaire allowed to obtain the following data: type of career specialisation (specialised career vs. non-specialised career); type of career orientation (horizontal career vs. vertical career); type of career organisation (intra-organisational career vs. inter-organisational career); level of position (subordinate vs. superior); speed of career advancement (slow vs. fast). The "Leader. Manager. Expert" questionnaire was used to assess

personal and professional competencies of respondents (Dukhnovsky 2019): strategic leadership; perseverance; effective social interaction; managerial competence; self-management; readiness for teamwork; scope of thinking; readiness for self-development; expert competence. Both questionnaires were developed by the author of the present paper and verified at the stage of their development. The results of verification are described in an earlier publication (Dukhnovsky 2019).

Data analysis was performed with Statistica for Windows, version 10.0. The normality of the distribution was confirmed with the Shapiro-Wilk test. The Shapiro-Wilk test was acceptable, so comparative analysis was performed with one-way ANOVA. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to analyse the relation between students' career preferences and their personal and professional competencies at different stages of training.

Results and discussion

The comparative analysis revealed differences in students' career preferences at different stages of training (see Tables 1).

Table 1 shows that first, second and fourth-year students have a predominant preference for several career types at the same time. Regardless of the stage of training students opt for a vertical career. However, career preferences of students at different stages of training differ. First-year students prioritise vertical and inter-organisational career. Second-year students give preference to non-specialised, vertical and inter-organisational career. The sample of fourth-year students tend to prioritise vertical career, while some of the respondents also mentioned horizontal and specialised careers.

According to Table 2, first-year students focus on getting senior positions and fast career

Table 1. Preferred types of careers ($M \pm \sigma$)

Types of careers	First-year students	Second-year students	Fourth-year students	F
Specialised career	3.9 ± 1.1	5.2 ± 1.9	5.9 ± 1.0	2.24**
Non-specialised career	4.0 ± 1.0	5.7 ± 1.1	5.0 ± 1.1	2.37**
Horizontal career	4.3 ± 0.9	5.0 ± 0.9	5.7 ± 0.9	2.32**
Vertical career	5.8 ± 1.1	6.0 ± 0.9	5.9 ± 0.8	–
Intra-organisational career	4.2 ± 1.3	4.6 ± 1.7	3.8 ± 1.3	–
Inter-organisational career	5.6 ± 1.0	5.7 ± 1.1	4.8 ± 1.7	1.98*

Note: *— $p < 0.05$; **— $p < 0.01$.

advancement. Both these indicators decrease significantly by the end of the second year and show a slight increase by the end of training (graduation).

Table 3 describes students' personal and professional competencies in relation to the stage of training.

The results allow us to conclude that students have a low or middle level of personal and professional competences regardless of the stage of training. At the same time, each stage shows certain trends in students' professional development. First-year students are marked by perseverance, while effective

social interaction and strategic leadership is more common in second-year students. By the end of the final year of training, students show highly developed managerial competence, readiness for teamwork, readiness for self-development and wide scope of thinking.

The correlation analysis identified significant correlation between students' preferred career types and their personal and professional competencies (see Table 4).

Thus, a preference for vertical career is related to such personal and professional competences

Table 2. Preferred position and speed of career advancement (M ± σ)

Career profile	First-year students	Second-year students	Fourth-year students	F
Level of position	49.4 ± 6.1	43.4 ± 8.0	46.0 ± 8.0	2.01*
Speed of career advancement	56.2 ± 5.9	49.4 ± 5.7	53.5 ± 5.4	2.06*

Note: *—p < 0.05.

Table 3. Personal and professional competencies (M ± σ)

Competencies	First-year students	Second-year students	Fourth-year students	F
Strategic leadership	23.0 ± 5.3	28.9 ± 5.0	19.5 ± 5.3	2.27**
Perseverance	26.3 ± 4.5	26.9 ± 4.7	24.1 ± 5.1	—
Effective social interaction	24.4 ± 3.7	29.0 ± 5.2	25.9 ± 3.8	—
Managerial competence	22.2 ± 4.6	23.9 ± 6.0	29.6 ± 5.1	1.99*
Self-management	23.0 ± 4.8	25.7 ± 6.4	25.4 ± 4.7	—
Readiness for teamwork	24.2 ± 6.0	26.3 ± 5.2	28.0 ± 4.9	—
Scope of thinking	23.5 ± 5.8	24.2 ± 5.3	29.5 ± 4.8	2.02*
Readiness for personal development	22.0 ± 5.1	24.0 ± 7.5	28.2 ± 5.2	2.11*
Expert competence	21.1 ± 4.6	20.6 ± 4.1	24.1 ± 3.5	—

Note: *—p < 0.05; **—p < 0.01.

Table 4. Correlation between students' preferred career types and their personal and professional competencies

Indicators	Spec	Non-spec	H	V	Intra-O	Inter-O
Strategic leadership	0.21	0.25	0.29	0.47**	0.24	0.20
Perseverance	0.47**	0.43*	0.25	0.22	0.21	0.15
Effective social interaction	0.25	0.47*	0.44**	0.49**	0.20	0.41**
Managerial competence	0.46**	0.22	0.26	0.53**	0.25	0.33
Self-management	0.29	0.27	0.22	0.23	0.24	0.27
Readiness for teamwork	0.31	0.23	0.47**	0.24	0.26	0.43**
Scope of thinking	0.23	0.29	0.11	0.20	0.23	0.25
Readiness for personal development	0.44**	0.21	0.55**	0.51**	0.27	0.24
Expert competence	0.49**	0.10	0.35	0.31	0.30	0.26

Note: **—p < 0.01. Abbreviations: Spec—Specialised career; Non-spec—Non-specialised career; H—Horizontal career; V—Vertical career; Intra-O—Intra-organisational career; Inter-O—Inter-organisational career.

as perseverance, effective social interaction, managerial competence and readiness for self-development ($0.47 < r < 0.53$, $p \leq 0.05$). Horizontal career is linked to readiness for teamwork, effective social interaction and readiness for self-development ($0.44 < r < 0.55$, $p \leq 0.05$). Inter-organisational career correlates significantly with readiness for teamwork and effective social interaction ($0.41 < r < 0.43$, $p \leq 0.05$). Non-specialised career correlates with effective social interaction and perseverance ($0.43 < r < 0.47$, $p \leq 0.05$). Finally, specialised career is associated with expert competence, perseverance, managerial competence and readiness for self-development ($0.44 < r < 0.49$, $p \leq 0.05$).

The results of the reported study show that first, second, and fourth-year students have preferences for several different types of careers simultaneously. We suggest identifying this phenomenon as a mixed type of career preferences. Regardless of the stage of training, the mixed type of students' career preferences includes a vertical career, i. e., progressing up the career ladder with a strong focus on career advancement. In addition, first, second, and fourth-year students are marked by year-dependent preferences. First-year students opt for a mixed type of career that includes vertical and inter-organisational careers. It means that students would like to develop their career in different organisations. The mixed career preferences of second-year students combine vertical, inter-organisational and non-specialised types of careers. This sample of students looks for a career that offers diverse positions at different organisations. Finally, fourth-year students are interested in vertical, horizontal, and specialised careers. They find it important to combine career growth with professional development in another functional area of the core professional activity. They look for diverse and complex professional tasks or may be interested in trying different positions within the same structural level of an organization provided they get a pay rise (horizontal career). Fourth-year students are also interested in going through different stages of their professional activity within the same professional sphere (specialised career).

In addition to the differences in the preferred career types, the study found differences in the expected speed of career advancement and the desired level of position for students in different years of training. Unlike first and second-year students, first-year students evaluate themselves as having more readiness for a senior position. It is also true about students' assessment of the speed of career advancement. First-year students have the most optimistic assessment of their career prospects, unlike second-year and fourth-year students, who

show the lowest assessment and moderate assessment, respectively. These differences may be due to a greater awareness of students about who they are, their personal and professional profile and career preferences. We assume that as the students progress to the fourth year of training, they show a much deeper understanding of themselves, their capabilities, professional skills and possible career opportunities. Thus, fourth-year students have a more objective picture of their position in the labour market. We believe that this is due to better developed personal and professional competencies. Accordingly, the preference for a particular type of career may be associated with the particular personal and professional competencies.

The study also revealed differences in students' personal and professional competencies depending on their stage of training. First and second-year students prioritise the development of leadership competence. This involves building a team of like-minded people, encouraging others to achieve ambitious goals, and forming a vision of the future. Fourth-year students focus on managerial and expert competences, i. e., organisation and coordination of individual and teamwork, activity planning, readiness to analyse problems, to build qualified expert groups for problem solving, to make expert decisions.

We have supposed that the correlation between preferred career types and students' personal and professional competencies reflect growth points, i. e., competencies that have to be developed to implement the preferred career type. The correlation analysis showed that perseverance, managerial competence, readiness for self-development and effective social interaction are the most significant competencies for the mixed type of career preferences (combined preference for vertical and inter-organisational career types). This career type is of high interest to first-year students, which implies that their growth points correlate with the development of competencies listed above. Strategic leadership, perseverance, effective social interaction, readiness for teamwork, readiness for self-development and managerial competence are the precondition for a mixed type of career preferences that combine vertical, inter-organisational and non-specialised career types. This combination is a high priority with second-year students, so the development of these competencies will encourage their personal and professional growth. The third mixed type of career preferences integrates vertical, horizontal and specialised career types. This combination requires the development of managerial competence, perseverance, readiness for teamwork, expert competence, scope of thinking, readiness for self-development and effective social

interaction. Found in fourth-year students, this career preferences require a pool of competences related to personal and professional managerial and expert resources.

Conclusions

University students have different preferred career types and different levels of personal and professional competencies at different stages of training. Each of the preferred career types has its special zone of actual development (students' actual personal and professional competencies) and growth points (competencies that students have to develop for a successful future career). First-year students look for vertical and inter-organisational career. They would also like to take a senior position and want fast career advancement. First-year students' zone of actual development is related to perseverance. Their growth points include the development of managerial competence, readiness for self-development and competence of effective social interaction. Among second-year students, the most preferred career types are vertical, inter-organisational and non-specialised careers. They are less willing than first-year students to get a senior position as quickly as possible. The dominant personal and professional competencies of second-year students are the competences of effective social interaction and strategic leadership. Their growth points are related to the development of perseverance, effective social interaction, readiness for teamwork, readiness for self-development and managerial competence. Fourth-year students in our sample focus on vertical, horizontal and specialised career types. They expect

a moderate career advancement and the desire for a level of official position. This requires well-developed managerial competence, readiness for teamwork, readiness for self-development and wide scope of thinking. To further implement this career type, students are expected to develop readiness for teamwork and effective social interaction. The results of the study can be used in the development of career profiles for university students as tools for promoting their further professionalisation.

Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, the dynamics of university students' career preferences was assessed using cross-sectional analysis, while the reported study could benefit more from the longitudinal approach. Second, the participation in the study was limited to the students on the educational programme Human Resource Management, which does not allow to extrapolate the research findings on students on other educational programmes. Third, the study did not take into account gender of its participants, while gender may have an impact on career preferences, their development and functioning.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest, either existing or potential.

Ethics Approval

The author reports that the study followed the ethical guidelines for human and animal studies.

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