

# DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY AND THE RIGHT TO CAREERS OPEN BY SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND A POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE

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**Abstract:** Anyone who wants a successful career should be directly involved in building it. This implies each individual's initiative in choosing, orienting and developing their career. The beginning of the new millennium has drifted the world, many prevalent trends being manifested in contradicting ways: abundance *versus* poverty, better health and healthcare *versus* incurable diseases, gain and access to technology *versus* technological gap, as not anyone is able to use this technology, control over nature, given the knowledge on its elements, forces and species *versus* environmental degradation due to human intervention, with profound, unintentional, but potentially life-threatening effects; better living conditions *versus* persistent differences between people, education *versus* lack of access to education.

Education is a human right and it plays an essential role in choosing one's career and this choice is and should be personal and free.

**Keywords:** democratic society, self-knowledge, self-image, self-consistency, work, profession, career

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## **Introduction**

The beginning of the new millennium has drifted the world, many prevalent trends being manifested in contradicting ways. abundance

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Education<sup>1</sup> is a human right and it plays an essential role in choosing one's career and this choice is and should be personal and free.

## 1. The career paradigm in psychology

In Romania, education<sup>2</sup> is recognized as a universal human right. Education means freedom, emancipation and permanent creation, and not a simple adaptation to environment; science, arts, philosophy, technology, ethics have to stay untarnished by the various centres of power, regardless of their nature—political, religious, ideological.

Today's society is in a permanent change in terms of jobs, professional fields, predominant social and individual values and it propels the evolution of career guidance and orientation. The choice of one's career should be free and personal, as a consequence of responsible deliberation, knowing all the implications that come with the choice, in concordance with concrete objective social and economic realities, with internal motivation and dominant and stable interests. From this perspective, career guidance and support should involve supporting and assisting the student in choosing the right educational path among the options provided by the existing educational and vocational training system.

The school has to pursue one of its main goals, namely to be a student-centred formative process, to be able to value different types of students, to form and develop skills, to meet to the needs of the community and to give to society responsible individuals, be it in their private, professional or public life.

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1 Rotaru, Ioan-Gheorghe, "Educația - prin prisma ideilor pragmatice", în *Simpozionul internațional: Probleme actuale ale învățământului în context european. Constatări și perspective*, organizat de Inspectoratul Școlar al Județului Maramureș, 2010, CD, pp. 438-442.

2 Ardelean, D., M., *Adolescența, dincolo de mituri*, Editura Universității de Nord, Baia Mare, 2009, p. 102

The school has to form well-informed graduates, people with high adaptive abilities and open to social and psychological demands of our society now and in the future. In order to achieve this, we should have counsellors and form teachers well informed on the techniques and tools to be used for a better understanding of the students in order to provide career guidance and support.

For more effective interventions in career guidance and support, we considered appropriate to go on a pilgrimage through the psychology of the personality and career before pursuing the details of career choices among adolescents and young adults. We will start by clarifying essential aspects related to the concepts of self-knowledge, self-image, and self-coherence, and then we shall go thorough work and organisational psychology in order to link the concept mentioned above with those of work, profession and career.

Work occupies an important part in the life of each of us. Most of us work in order to prove that we are able to achieve a goal, set by us or by others, in order to ensure a happy life for us and for our children. If we are lucky to practice in the field we desired, things go smoothly. The world we live in has greatly changed and evolved. Professions are no longer static, but they develop and the individual can take different positions or roles during his career, and even to practice in various fields. From this perspective, each person has a unique professional history, designated by the general term of career.

Today's careers or professions are much more diverse and much less predictable than in the past, because organisations are in a permanent change and development. They are forced to keep up with the times we are living by constantly adapting their dimension, goals, strategies, and structures, in order to adapt to the changes in the market. As a result of these changes, there are crafts that emerge while others disappear, so people have to change their careers and to get more involved in their own formation and development.

Career choice can no longer be reduced to a simple individual option for the type of occupation one would "like", but it became more complex, requiring the individual to think deeper, further and to have a better self-knowledge. Career essentially involves the effort of the human

being in order to build and control the future, in the context of a dynamic, flexible and often uncertain labour market.

The issues related to career development are also important for organisations, as they are facing an important issue, "career and career management"—the most important human resources issue faced by organisations today."<sup>3</sup>

Whoever wants a successful career has to be directly involved in building it. This implies the effort of each individual to control their choice, their direction and the development of their career. Self-knowledge and self-assessment involve focusing on self, on their goals, motivations, aspirations, and personal values. Self-knowledge and self-assessment are complex forms of psychological knowledge that involve abilities like self-analysis, intuition, lucidity, responsibility, critical and self-critical analysis, realism and objectivity. The most important outcome of self-knowledge and self-assessment is the discovery of the self-image as a central element of the personality. The self-image ensures the individuals' identity so that they are able to interpret social experiences and to guide their behaviours. The more people know themselves better, the more they will be able to make better career choices. Career management is easier for those who have a fair, positive and realistic self-image.

People with a positive self-image communicate better with others, assess correctly their personal abilities and limits, anticipate with great precision the nature of the difficulties they are to face, they know their rights, exercise them and claim them when necessary, they are active, dynamic, refreshing, trustful and optimistic, they know how to minimize the significance of failures and re-mobilize in unfavourable situations, they have the courage to take risks and responsibilities, they express their thought, feeling and opinions openly, they are natural, sincere, direct, tolerant and confident, they do not feel embarrassed, ill at ease, or inferior to others, they are not in conflict with themselves or permanently dissatisfied with others, they accept the change in environment and are able to change themselves, they accept their own limits and lean permanently.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Zlate, M., *Tratat de psihologie organizațională – managerială*, vol. I, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2004, p.350.

4 Zlate, M., *Tratat de psihologie organizațională – managerială*, vol. I, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2004, pp.375-376.

Building and developing one's self-image is often a tedious process. One often needs assistance from others, sustained effort, sustained work, passion, dedication, ambition, but the outcomes are greater than the efforts. Building self-consistency, building psycho-behavioural regularities characterized by coherence, stability and balance, the emergence of one's identity and self-fulfilment ensure continuity, autonomy, freedom and the conscious and plenary acceptance of one's own existence.<sup>5</sup>

One can direct their actions regarding their career if they are aware of the level of development of their self-consistency through self-knowledge and self-assessment processes. The individual will know what career to choose, how to improve it or change it, if the situation demands for it or if they decide to do so. At the opposite end, if one manifests precariousness, inadequacy or inconsistency in the process of self-knowledge or self-assessment, they will make erroneous decisions in choosing or changing their careers.

Self-image does not ensure performance in choosing a career. For this, the individual has to develop a series of abilities that are also highly objective: the ability to learn, the ability to investigate, the ability to set goals and to develop and implement plans, the ability to make fast and accurate decisions, the ability to know, assess and monitor oneself, the ability to communicate easily, the ability to create their own working tools that would be useful in directing their own career. The number and variety of a person's abilities will lead to certain flexibility, or on the contrary, to certain rigidity in one's career.

## 2. Self-image and emotional intelligence

All theories of personality talk about human personality, the Self, and the concept of self-image. The self-image gives a central place in psychology to the concrete human being along with his/her own issues, his/her personal life and relations, the stages of his/her existence and development, his/her experience, his/her active attitude towards his/her own essence and existence.

Each individual is unique, and this uniqueness allows him/her to reach his/her full potential. Human capacities summarized in creativity,

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem.*

valorisation, self-achievement, responsibility, choosing who they want to be and striving towards that goal, mental and social maturation, mental health, contribute to the development of his/her self-image. Self-image is the opinion of the individual about him/herself and who s/he is. It is a subjective structure formed in several stages and it is influenced by the formation of the Ego, the positive or negative feedback received from the others. It may not always correspond to what others think about the person concerned, but social groups like family, close friends, work colleagues and the religious and political groups influence greatly the formation of one's self-image.

Self-concept<sup>6</sup> represents what we think about ourselves and about who we are. Every time one says "I", one contributes to the formation of the self-concept. This includes everything one knows or believes about him/herself—beliefs, desires, traits, feelings, the image one presents to others. The self-concept is the intimate way of defining oneself. This concept<sup>7</sup> has many facets: the objective facet, called self-image, the evaluative facet, called self-esteem, the facet describing the way one would like to be, called self-ideal, the facet related to one's concepts and abilities, called the consciousness of their own efficiency, the facet related to the way one identifies with social groups, called social identification, and how the sense of self has been modelled according to the cultural context in which one has grown up.

The Self changes throughout life, but it retains it is still a structured, integrated and organized system. The Self coordinates the behaviour of the individual as an organized set of perceptions and an important element of human experience. The Self allows each individual to truly become him/herself. Rogers has developed a new theory on personality development, a theory that introduced the first significant alternative to Freud's psychoanalytic psychotherapy. For Rogers, a healthy personality is simply one who has managed to reduce the tensions between its distinctive components to a level that s/he can master. Thus, he conceived human personality as always being oriented forward. In the opinion of Carl Rogers there is a better part of human personality, one manifested

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6 Ardelean, D., M., *Adolescența, dincolo de mituri*, Editura Universității de Nord, 2009, pp. 75, apud Rogers, Carl, R., Significant aspects of client-centered therapy, in *Amer. Psychologist*, 1946.

7 *Ibidem*.

by the constant desire for growth and development and people have a fundamental need for developing their personalities as much as possible. Rogers argues that we assess all our experiences through this *need for self-actualization*. The experiences that encourage our development are those we perceive as being positive or useful, while we perceive those that inhibit or suppress the self-actualization as being negative or unpleasant. Each person has different capacities and tendencies, so each develops his/her own set of specific values which are often similar to those of others, even if they are not perfectly identical.<sup>8</sup>

Continuing the work of Rogers, Lecky<sup>9</sup> developed the notion of self-consistency. Psychological studies have revealed that, besides self-image, there is another aspect that contributes to a person's success—emotional intelligence. The first to use the term of emotional intelligence was Wayne Leon Payne, in his 1985 doctoral thesis, and he defined emotional intelligence as an ability that involves a creative relationship with states like fear, pain and desire. Payne noted that the individual's adaptation to the surrounding environment is accomplished by both cognitive and non-cognitive elements, and he identified the non-cognitive elements as being affective, personal and social factors essential to the individual's success in life. Later, Mayer and Salovey<sup>10</sup> highlight the interdependencies between emotions and thought and state that emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions as accurately as possible and that of expressing them, the ability of accessing or generating feelings when they facilitate the process of thinking, the ability to recognize and understand emotions and to regulate them in order to promote emotional and intellectual development.

D. Goleman develops the definition by saying that this form of intelligence is made up of self-consciousness, self-control, motivation, empathy, and social skills.<sup>11</sup> According to Goleman, emotional intelligence plays a special role in learning practical skills based on the five elements listed above, each of them having a unique contribution to workplace

8 Hayes, N., Orrel, S., *Introducere în psihologie*, Iași, Editura ALL, 2007, p. 244.

9 Lecky, P., *Self-consistency. A theory of personality*, New York, Island Press, 1945.

10 Mayer, J., Salovey, P., "The intelligence and emotional intelligence", *Intelligence*, 1993, 17.

11 Rocco, M., *Creativitate și inteligență emoțională*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2007, pp. 139 – 141.

performance. Emotional competence combines the process of thinking with that of feeling and shows how much of that potential is translated into our workplace skills. The five dimensions of emotional intelligence correspond to 25 emotional skills, but no one has them all. In order to achieve a remarkable performance, one has to master only a few of these competences—around six of them, as Goleman says—but they have to represent all the five areas of emotional intelligence.

### 3. Career counselling

The first steps towards one's career are taken through a set of vocational orientation activities. It has two major tasks: to identify the most appropriate profession to a person, according to his/her abilities, and to meet the requirements of the economy by providing people who are well-trained in various fields. Research has shown that people oriented towards one profession or another by career counsellors<sup>12</sup> who have used specific psychological methodologies, are more successful in their career.

Professional orientation includes activities that develop the ability of individuals to take and implement well-informed decisions regarding their career path. These decisions can include long-term or short-term choices regarding their vocational goals and the type of education or training they need to pursue in order to achieve these goals.

Career counselling is recommended to both young people and adults. Current practice emphasizes helping the individual to make his own decisions based on a correct understanding of his/her skills, habits, interests, values, and options.

Throughout their lives, young people must progressively make decisions about work and education. Not all of them can do it alone. They need specialists to advise and guide them. This professional help provided through specialised psychological services aims to equip adolescents and young adults with the tools needed in order to make the right career decision.<sup>13</sup>

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12 Rotaru, Ioan-Gheorghe, "Consilierea educațională - de la teorie la practică", în *Buletin Științific*, seria A, Fascicula Filologie, nr.XXIII, Editura Universității de Nord, Baia Mare, 2014, pp. 603-609.

13 Ardelean, D. M., *Adolescența, dincolo de mituri*, Editura Universității de Nord, Baia Mare, 2009, p. 110.



Specialised literature presents a multitude of definitions for the concept of career (Donald E. Super, M., Zlate, Perlmutter and Hall, Gary Johns, etc.). Thus, according to Donald E. Super, “a career is a sequence of occupations, jobs, and positions held during the course of a lifetime.” This definition of a career goes beyond the limits of active life, including prerequisite and post-vocational functions such as those of students (who are preparing for a career) and retirees.<sup>14</sup> It emphasizes the span of the career, including the whole lifespan. Perlmutter and Hall (1992) define career as “a person’s upward occupational moves through a series of positions that require greater mastery and responsibility and that provide increasing financial return.”<sup>15</sup> A third definition is provided by Gary Johns (1998), who defines it as “an evolving succession of professional activities and positions a person can achieve, as well as the attitudes, knowledge and skills developed along the way.”<sup>16</sup> Johns distinguishes two types of careers: an *external career* designed by the objective succession of positions held by a person, and an *internal career*, the subjective interpretation that an individual gives to objective professional requirements. By analysing the definitions presented above, we can reach to a synthetic definition of a career as “the sequence of professions, occupations, positions, activities, experiences and roles exercised by an individual throughout his/her professional life, concurrently with their subjective interpretation leading to distinct professional trajectories.”<sup>17</sup>

In the 1980s and the 1990s a multitude of social and economic changes emerged. These changes had direct repercussions on people’s careers. Among others, we mention the difficulties faced by organisations, which led to downsizing, frequent imbalances between personnel demand and supply, which allowed employment on other criteria than the traditional ones, organizations no longer hire people based on the job descriptions, but based on the candidate’s competences and

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14 Zlate, M., *Tratat de psihologie organizațională – managerială*, vol. I, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2004, apud. Super, D., E., “A life span, life space approach to career development”, în *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 1978, 13, p. 426.

15 *Ibidem*.

16 Zlate, M., *Tratat de psihologie organizațională – managerială*, vol. I, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2004, apud. Johns, G., *Comportamentul organizațional*, Editura Economică, București, 1998, p. 560.

17 Zlate, M., *Tratat de psihologie organizațională – managerială*, vol. I, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2004, p. 352.

values in relation to the whole organisation, loyalty to the organisation becoming primary, the emergence of new forms of employment such as: multidisciplinary operational teams, networking, project groups, transcultural organisations, performance-based remuneration, work from home jobs, the outsourcing, major downsizing led to behavioural and attitudinal changes in the employees who were not fired, affecting the social and affective network of those still working for the organisation.<sup>18</sup>

Below we will introduce some of the causes that have radically changed the context professional development, resulting in important mutations:

- a) Careers used to be characterized by stability, but they are now characterized by mobility, which is evidenced by that jobs/professions/ crafts are changes much more often than in the past, leading to the appearance of a sense of workplace insecurity for many people;
- b) An increasingly less predictable career path – careers have become less predictable, less structured, and less secure for most people.
- c) Moving from careers almost exclusively related to organisations to open careers, based on the idea that workplace is not the only major factor in influencing one's career, but family and experiences from other social circles are as important.
- d) The decreasing importance of an upward trajectory of one's career in favour of complex, variable trajectories—we are currently witnessing an increase in the frequency of entrepreneurial careers over the bureaucratic ones.
- e) The focused is switched from career management to self-management—there is a tendency of people engaging directly in building their own careers.
- f) People no longer focus on the present of their career, but on developing a vision regarding their career path—it is not enough to assess an individual's current career, but it is much more important to evaluate it in perspective.

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18 *Ibidem.*

- g) Concurrent single careers with double or limitless careers, with a slight predominance of the latter—the single career refers to holding a single post, a single position throughout one's lifetime, while double or boundaryless careers refers to career changes, the individual going through several positions, and even professions throughout his active professional life. It is useful to know that those who do not have career boundaries need personal flexibility especially regarding their abilities and the activities to be performed. Boundaryless careers transcend organisations and their structures.

## Conclusions

In the field of psychological sciences, the new career context has led to conceptual changes by replacing professional psychology with career psychology. The choice of a career involves the individual's choice for a job or for certain positions, etc. The moment when the individual makes the decision, as well as the factors influencing it, and the characteristics of the choice itself are equally important. The factors influencing career choices are many and varied, most of them being external. A young adult who makes this decision without being motivated or well-informed can make a good choice regarding his/her future career, but s/he could also make a casual choice that does not fully represent him/her or does not represent him/her at all.

Career orientation is a conscious and voluntary process that tends to have favourable consequences for the individual, as well as for the organisation. It consists in ensuring a better harmony between individual personality traits and the specificity of different professions or occupations.

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