

A REFLECTION ON UNIVERSITY STUDIES AND FURTHER CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF CHOSEN CULS FACULTIES' GRADUATES

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Abstract

The article is focused on professional orientation and direction of the careers of graduates of Faculty of Economics and Management (FEM) and Faculty of Agrobiography, Food and Natural Resources (FAFNR) at Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CULS).

The general information and theoretical part is devoted to the topic of career, its concept and definition, and it deals with chosen determinants of career orientation and career development. The concept of career is considered within the sphere of specialized terminology mainly used in humanities disciplines, it defines subjective and objective career. Moreover, the concepts of life developmental tasks and career maturity are being mapped. The existence of typical stages of development is also discussed, for which there are typical qualitative differences on the level of information, in relation to a given profession and in motivation towards the profession (with regard to the stage that includes university studies). Significant influence of objective and situational factors, which interfere with career orientation and the choice of a profession, is further included. A look at a person's personality with respect to the determinants of career orientation and career development also forms a part of the general information part.

In its first part of the empirical section, the article is focused on the concept and definition of career from the beginning of the 1990s. This includes the views of Czech as well as foreign authors. In the second part, the article tries to present practical consequences of students' career orientation and it deals with processing an estimate whether the observed faculties' graduates remain working in the field related to what they studied within five years from graduation. A part of the study is also formed by a description of the main motives leading to choosing a profession during university studies. The chosen attributes were monitored among a selected group of students, which was formed by graduates of the daily Masters programmes at Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, specifically at Faculty of Economics and Management – Operations and Economics programme and Business and Administration programme, and at the Faculty of Agrobiography, Food and Natural Resources regardless of studied programmes. The students graduated at least a year and maximum five years prior

to the conducted research. The data were collected with the help of a survey. The survey included 17 items and was sent out electronically. The respondents marked which facts and to what extent distinctly influenced their professional direction given by the studied programme during their studies at the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague. They also answered an inquiry whether they remain working in the profession that they prepared for during their studies, or (if applicable) the survey tried to find out why their career took a different direction.

Key Words

Career, career development, career maturity, career orientation, choice of profession

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Introduction

The working career topic has a long tradition among work and organizational psychology as well as in other psychology and non-psychology disciplines and fields. Career direction, career choice and career development are multilaterally significant issues that are related to an individual, his/her family, to an organization and to society as a whole.

The term “career” (from the French *la carrière* – profession, course, path) is often used for its content and in various connotations and it has multivalent use. It appears in colloquial language, we see it used in its wider dictionary definition, and it forms a part of specialized terminology used mostly within humanities disciplines that are focused on an individual in relation to the context of work. In specialized terminology, as we come across it in mainly psychological, sociological works, and in publications focused on personnel management, andragogy etc., the term deals with the concept of career as professional advancement in the work place, and its indivisible part is formed by a person’s orientation and ambition on the one side and on the other side by the conditions and opportunities created by the organization. We talk about a career in connection with employees’ training, their development, with creating opportunities and steering career growth.

Bělohávek (1994), with reference to Clark’s differentiation, distinguishes between an objective career and a subjective career. An objective career is usually presented in structured CVs, which are e.g. worked out when applying for a job. Usually in a chronological order it presents education history, employment, an overview of abilities and skills and work experience gained up to that time. It consists of a summary of individual predispositions, which serve to evaluate the suitability of a candidate for the given position. A career conceived in this

form reflects the formal requirements of an organization, which emerge from the organization’s system of work positions, and from them arising qualification requirements, career opportunities within the organization (career maps), system of working with people, etc.. It is also subjected to factors given by a broader external environment context such as changes in the labour market, demographic trends, situational limitations and opportunities (Kirovová, 2000).

A subjective career predominantly shows inner reflection of the above given facts and their significance for an individual. It is connected with personal goals and aspirations, with a person’s value orientation, attitude, interests, motivational tuning and mainly with his/her self-reflection. “It is related to personal appraisal of success during individual professional development phases” (Štikar and col., 2003, page 119). It reflects the person’s own subjective idea of a working life. It is connected with the individual’s self-concept, with his/her perception of the world and his/her place in it, with value hierarchy, and with the person’s orientation toward life goals and wanted lifestyle. A subjective career is described in terms of an individual’s career orientation, subjective career anchors, integration of working life into personal life, and in terms of career development during individual life stages. Sparrow and Hiltrop (according to Kirovová, 2000) consider subjective career - in relation to the changes in the economic and social environment of developed industrial countries, as well as to changes in organizations’ structures and in relation to the dynamics of the changes – to be more significant for understanding an individual’s career development.

They point out the importance of individual differences, which effect the manner and the level of coping with changes in a dynamic environment of a modern organization. In the

concepts of many distinguished experts focused on career counselling, an important role is played by the life stages, that an individual goes through, on the way a person views his/her career development. In relation to this, as is stated by Vendel (2008), the concepts of **life developmental tasks and career maturity**, which was made popular by Super, caught on in counselling psychology that is focused on career counselling. Super (according to Koščo and col., 1980) defined developmental tasks as a set of expectations, which social environment (society, family etc.) has of an individual, who is going through certain developmental phases. The concept of career maturity expresses the existence of typical developmental stages, for which there are typical qualitative differences on the level of information, in relation to and in motivation towards a given profession. Career maturity – in opposition to immaturity – manifests itself by more comprehensive knowledge regarding the profession, regarding the character of the activities and the demands placed on the person working in the profession. It is connected with having a specific idea regarding the sense of the needed education and the need to obtain necessary skills with respect to future activities related to the profession, and with being aware of the conditions that are necessary in order to succeed in the profession.

In relation to our research's focus, in which the monitored population is formed by "fresh" graduates of Masters programmes that finished their studies a minimum of one year and maximum five years prior to the research, we mainly focused on the last of the three elementary developmental phases that are determined by the level of achieved education (age 6-15 (elementary school), age 15-19 (secondary school), age 19-25 (university studies)). According to developmental psychologists this last phase is on the boarder of early adulthood.

In the early phase of adulthood young people do not fantasize as much as adolescents do. Children's and adolescents' illusions transform into hopes and visions. They are more realistic, more pragmatic, they abandon black and white perception of the world, and they are made stronger by life experiences and by more distinctly manifesting abilities. In this phase of life, personality development occurs on the level of self-concept and in relation to other people. Individualization is directed toward reaching a stable, realistic and acceptably positive identity. Freedom in decision making is linked together with the acceptance of responsibility, self-trust is supplemented with the ability to estimate one's own strength, and the way we behave is corrected by controlling one's emotions. An individually specific way of understanding and accepting roles is connected with the stabilization of an individual's character, values, attitudes and lifestyle (Vágnerová, 2007). Langmeier and Krejčířová (2006) point out that among this age group interests are fully developed, moral values are stable, legal conscience in relation to the surrounding world, nature and other people has already crystallized.

Performing a profession or temporarily performing some work activity brings young adults a specific experience. When specific competencies are put into effect at work it leads to the acceleration of personal development, to the adjustment of one's own self-confidence, to specifying the content and importance of roles in the network of interpersonal relationships. Experiences gained in the work environment lead to the amendment of life goals and plans, they have impact on our idea of further life fulfilment and they amend perspectives that were created up to that point in time. Furthermore, an individual becomes strongly aware of his/her present, although temporary, incorporation into

society's structure and a certain form of lifestyle is stabilized (Farková, 2009).

In the meantime university students see work as a source of necessary financial means and experience. Overall these are temporary contacts, unbinding, they are purposeful for the organizations as well as the students. If these contacts with work experience are connected with future professional orientation, then they give an important insight into future reality, which may have a significant correctional effect on their studies' orientation, possibly on studying as a whole. During the university studies period students verify that they chose the right university studies, the right school and the right programme. Important indicators for them can be study success or lack of it, interest or lack of interest in a group of specialized subjects, anticipation of possible (dis)satisfaction with work on the basis of work experience received during internships and temporary work. It is possible to say that during the first two years of university studies it is being decided whether the student will stay in school with respect to the student evaluating the correctness of his/her previous choice. During the last two years of university studies specialization and future direction is being tuned, but it does not have to be definite. Finishing a university may have several "outcomes", the most frequent are: 1. Identification with the future professional direction and working in the profession; (2) Acceptance of professional direction, but not working in the profession due to the situation on the labour market and other objective reasons; (3) Not accepting the profession's orientation that results from the studied programme and changing orientation to another field of human activity; (4) Acceptance of the profession's moratorium (according to Vágnerová, 2007) in the form of studying at other universities, continuing at a

Doctorate's degree programme or applying for study stays at home or abroad.

Super (1980) in his practically oriented articles, Blocher (according to Vendel, 2008) in a worked out overview of relevant studies from the end of last century and in a study worked out in the first decade of the current century (Philips, Christopher-Sisk, Gravio, 2001; Kenny, Bledsoe, 2004; Patton, Creed, 2007 and others), identically refer to a distinct lack of direction and orientation among young people (especially secondary school students, but often also university students) when choosing a career. This mainly has to do with insufficient amount of necessary information that allows for goal-directed professional orientation and choice, and this is connected with indecisiveness and with the delay of making a decision. It further has to do with having only a vague idea regarding the requirements and the demands individual professions have on an individual, with the existence of unrealistic plans that were influenced by important people, information from mass media etc.. For the time being, in addition to that comes insufficient ability to evaluate the situation on the labour market, which is connected with preferences of some groups of professions or with restrictions and limits in other fields. On the whole the given authors agree that such a situation creates space for social pressure and often unqualified influence coming from the family, peers, friends and purposeful influence of mass media.

The given studies and the opinions of their authors thus point to the considerable effect of **objective and situational factors**, which interfere with career orientation and the choice of a profession. Among prominent theoreticians on career choice mainly Super and Holland mention these factors in empirically oriented passages of their publications. Super (1980) determined 4 groups of such factors (loosely worded):

- Family and family background –includes father’s and mother’s profession, socio-economical status of parents, parents’ financial situation, parents’ aspiration for their children’s occupation, their attitude towards their children’s education, mutual relationships within the family etc.;
- Situation in one’s own family - status, number of dependent family members, age, state of health, aspiration of life partners etc.;
- Contemporary general situation – current socio-economical status, financial situation, regional membership (town – country), incorporation into subculture, race or religion etc.;
- Current economic state of society – general economic situation in the country, situation on the labour market, changes in the structure of professions in the given stage of the society’s development etc.;

Super states that the given conditions occur in various combinations and they influence individual professional development in such a way that they can support it, suppress it, or modify it in a specific way.

Holland (1973) speaks more generally regarding the influence of environmental factors, to which he attributes the same effectiveness as to personal factors when choosing an occupation and for career development. He states that external effects in relation to professional orientation and career choice have the greatest effect in the period of early adolescence and gradually their effect decreases due to the influence of growing career maturity (in the sense of Super’s concept).

It is obvious that objective and situational determinants distinctly interfere with career orientation, career choice and further career development. During their positive constellation they

can support individual preferences of an individual, they can be in compliance with his/her orientation, wants, and aspirations and goals. However, they can be in sharp contrast and form large barriers against individual direction and effort. From the point of view of counselling activities the given determinants represent contextual factors, which counsellors point out and they encourage the choice of other or supplementary variants of career orientation and the choice of occupation, keeping in mind the potential and the orientation of the individual’s personality.

A university that acts responsibly is not only an indifferent component in the student’s choice of career. It is further interested in its graduates’ career paths, it works with them, organizes events for them, organizes clubs. The university is also interested in finding out whether it fulfils its pedagogical mission and really prepares professionals for working in the field that the students chose. In order to verify the career orientation of Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CULS) students a scientific project was carried out at the Faculty of Economics and Management (FEM) and Faculty of Agrobiography, Food and Natural Resources (FAFNR) in 2008. The project was performed in the area of career counselling, and it took into consideration the particularities of CULS, student population and conditions that influence their professional focus and subsequent career development. Part of this project, which was organized by the Department of Psychology at FEM CULS, also processed an estimate whether the graduates remain working in a profession that is related to the programme they studied within five years from graduation. The results of this inquiry among a group of selected students are presented in this article.

Material and Methods

The term “career” and its concept is rather broad. Therefore, it is necessary to deal with the definitions of career, with their comparison and to determine common and diverse characteristics, with the help of which the term can be defined. We will focus on Czech and some foreign authors in an illustrative rather than an exhaustive manner from the beginning of the 1990s. Růžička (1993, page 10) gives the following definition: “By a professional career or a working career or also by a person’s professional path we understand the period, during which the person is incorporated into the work process, which means from the person’s entry into his/her first employment relationship (job) until the last employment ends.” In his concept a career is defined by a sequence of positions, jobs or professions that an individual holds throughout his/her work life. It is dependent on a person’s functioning in an organization and its distinct determinants are personality traits, goals and the orientation of a person on the one side, and opportunities that are created within the organization on the other side. According to Růžička professional career represents a certain advancement of an employee within a business organization, which can be monitored according to objective criteria. In the context of a person’s life path a professional career is understood to be an important source for feeling satisfied with one’s life. The given concept of the author does not change even in his later works (Růžička, Koš, 1997; Mayerová, Růžička, 2000; Mayerová, Růžička, 2001).

Bělohávek (1994, page 11) in his treatise dedicated to personal career defines career as: “... a life path, especially then professional path, during which a person gains new experience and fulfils his/her own personal potential.” He conceives career as a natural process, and during its course a person fulfils his/

her personal potential, is enriched by new experiences and develops his/her personality. The author leans toward objective and subjective differentiation of a career and he leans toward evaluating its success through a set of criteria. This author also uses the same concept in his collected work (Bělohávek, 1996).

Rymeš (1995, page 155) talks about a professional path as a synonym for a working career and he understands it to be “... a sequence of individual professions, positions and work roles, which result from person’s deliberate decisions, from inevitabilities that are created in the given organization and from sudden opportunities.” Professional career has continuous development, which includes rises and falls as well as remaining on the same level, and its course is the result of the company’s operation, respectively the organization’s and individual’s cooperation (as a synthesis or a compromise). The author placed an emphasis on the concept of a professional career as a process of accepting and performing professional positions and roles, the fulfilment of which does not occur without problems and conflicts. In the more recent thematic work on this issue that is a part of a more broadly conceived overview (Štikar and col., 2003), the author leans towards differentiating between objective and subjective careers and he places greater emphasis on a biodromal view of a working career.

Bedrnová, Nový and col. (2007, page 532) give a more generally formulated definition of a person’s working career (professional path) as: “... the course of his/her profession from the person’s entry into his/her first employment relationship (job) until the last employment ends...” The authors consider working career to be significant phenomena in the context of an individual’s whole life. Attention is paid to an individual’s need for self-fulfilment, which has an important place especially among

specific forms of career development (move upward, move sideways etc..)

The definition and characterization of a career among foreign authors is very close to the ones we see among domestic authors. That is why we only chose those authors, whose characterization is broader, more complex, and hence incentive for forming our approach towards a career concept.

Clark's career concept (1992) is extensively characterized – by career he understands a continuous professional path in a person's life, which is formed by a sequence of jobs and work activities. Within the framework of a career he differentiates between aspects that are related to the given profession or position and formalized conditions of career advancement, and between aspects that are related to the person him/herself (abilities, experience, his/her orientation and ambition). According to the given author a career can be perceived as a succession of component life stages, or as a continuous working life, which includes il/logicalities or in/continuity in his/her own development.

In Butcher's and Harvey's career concept (1998, page 78) there is an obvious emphasis on the person's own activity, initiative and responsibility for the development of his/her professional path. It rises from the characteristic of a career, which is understood to be "... a process of setting up a personal path in an organization's context ..." with emphasis on the development of a wide range of skills, which will allow an individual to take over the initiative in an organization's changing environment (opposed to a passive expectation that the organization will take care of him/her.)

On the basis of theoretical information and in connection with our research plan **H1 hypothesis was formulated**: The extent of representation of individual sources of motivation that

influence the choice of profession differs among FAFNR and FEM graduates.

The data was collected with the help of a **survey** that was processed "ad hoc" and adapted for the research's purpose. The survey included 17 items and it was sent out electronically to graduates that completed their studies within 1-5 years prior to the survey. The graduates were addressed by an introductory motivation letter with a direct entry into the survey that was placed on an internet address. Beside basic personal data the respondents marked, which facts and to what extent motivated them during their studies at Czech University of Life Sciences Prague and distinctly influenced their professional orientation given by the studied programme. The final question dealt with whether they remain working in the profession that they prepared for during their studies; if applicable it tried to find out the reason for their career's detour.

The questionnaire contained the following items:

Basic information:

1. Faculty you study (chose)
2. Programme of your study (free answer)
3. Prevail form of your study (chose)
4. Year of your graduation (free answer)
5. What is your highest university degree obtained during your study at our university (chose)
6. Gender FEMALE/MALE
7. Age (chose)

University education:

Which facts motivated you and distinctively influenced your vocational specialization based on programme during your study at CULS? Please, give the answer to all suggested options and qualify their significance. For evaluation use following scale: very distinctively –distinctively- less distinctively – not at all

1. Studied subjects
2. Professors
3. Role model
4. Family
5. Internship during studies
6. Temporary work and other work activities
7. Acquaintances and friends
8. Other influences (please mention which one)

Present time:

Do you work in a profession on which you were prepared during your study at CULS? YES/ NO

If your answer is NO: state purposes of the diversion

The questionnaire was presented in Czech language.

Results

The selected group of students was formed by graduates of daily forms of Master degree studies at Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, at Faculty of Economics and Management - Operations and Economics programme and Business and Administration programme, and at the Faculty of Agrobiolgy, Food and Natural Resources regardless of the studied programme, and who completed their studies a minimum of one year and not more than five years prior to the survey (Table 1). Data from 224 respondents from the selected group of graduates were received, out of which 154 were FEM graduates and 70 were FAFNR graduates (Table 2). The graduates were addressed electronically. In order for them to fill out the questionnaire a direct link to an internet address was created.

FEM	FAFNR	Total
Absolute number	Absolute number	Absolute number
2376	736	3112

Table 1: Basic group of graduates

FEM			FAFNR			Total		
Absolute number			Absolute number			Absolute number		
Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Woman	Men	Total
107	47	154	58	12	70	165	59	224

Table 2: Selected group of graduates

Items from the Graduate Survey meet H1 hypothesis. The survey tried to find out on a four level scale which facts motivated graduates throughout their studies and had significant influence on their professional orientation given by the studied programme. We present the results in a unified form on the basis of pre-set dichotomic yes/no signs and in the order from the most preferred factors to the least preferred (Table 3 and 4).

Order		FEM	
		Distinctly or very distinctly (%)	Less distinctly or indistinctly (%)
1.	Family	59.5	40.5
2.	Studied subjects	58.4	41.6
3.	Temporary work and other work activities	50.7	49.3
4.	Role model	41.5	58.5
5.	Internship during studies	40.2	59.8
6.	Acquaintances and friends	40.9	59.1
7.	Professors	31.1	68.9
8.	Other influences	0.0	0.0

Table 3: Overview of motives leading to the choice of a profession among FEM graduates

Order		FAFNR	
		Distinctly or very distinctly (%)	Less distinctly or indistinctly (%)
1.	Studied subjects	71.4	28.6
2.	Professors	52.8	47.2
3.	Family	44.3	55.7
4.	Role model	42.8	57.2
5.	Temporary work and other work activities	37.2	62.8
6.	Internship during studies	35.7	64.3
7.	Acquaintances and friends	32.9	67.1
8.	Other influences	0.0	0.0

Table 4: Overview of motives leading to the choice of a profession among FAFNR graduates

Among the motives that most distinctly influenced their choice of profession FEM graduates present family and studied subjects, further on temporary work and other work activities, role model, internship during studies and the influence of acquaintances and friends.

FAFNR graduates put studied subjects as the most distinct motive.

A classical χ^2 test of homogeneity was used in order to analyse the difference in distribution of all monitored variables between both faculties.

A significant difference was found in the influence that professors within CULS had on the professional orientation of the respondents (χ^2 (df = 3) = 12.31; p = 0.006). Professors very distinctly influenced FAFNR graduates rather than FEM graduates.

There are not any differences in the group of other motivational factors between FEM and FAFNR graduate students.

Therefore, we can state that the degree of representation of individual motivational sources that influence the choice of profession among FAFNR and FEM graduates significantly differs within the factor of professors.

In the period between a minimum of one year and maximum five years from graduation 68.2% of FEM graduates and 67.1% of FAFNR graduates work in the profession that they studied (Table 5).

Faculty	Work in the field (%)	Work outside of the field (%)
FEM	68.2	31.8
FAFNR	67.1	32.9

Table 5: Overview of graduates' working in the profession

17.5 % of FEM graduates and 17.1% of FAFNR graduates held a managerial position in the period when the research was done.

2.6% of FEM graduates and 12.8% of FAFNR graduates gave as the reason for change of profession a low number of job opportunities in the given field; 26.2% of FEM graduates and 4.3% of FAFNR graduates were tempted away from performing their studied profession by an interesting offer.

Discussion

The goal of the research aimed toward processing an estimate whether the graduates remain working in positions connected with the programme they studied up to 5 years from completing their studies. The research showed that at both faculties almost seventy percent of graduates within the interval of one to five years still work in the field that they studied. The reason why FEM graduates left their profession is most often due to an interesting offer (this reason is given in more than a quarter of responses), and among FAFNR graduates it is the lack of work opportunities in the given field. Therefore, we can state that FAFNR graduates showed a greater tendency to continue in the chosen field than FEM graduates. The received data correspond with earlier findings that since childhood FAFNR students predominantly manifest the tendency to prefer such interests and professions, which are connected with the subject of their studies. FEM students are less specifically oriented in their interests and subsequently in their choice of a profession.

When comparing both faculties we can state that among FAFNR graduates there are practically as many graduates represented at managerial positions as among FEM graduates.

From the point of view of comparing ambitions from the time of university studies with the actual reality, it is interesting for us to find out the ratio of persons that during the monitored time frame held a managerial position. FEM students, who according to the results of previous research distinctly preferred the choice of a managerial position during their secondary school studies, and who in their first year of undergraduate studies and last year of graduate studies showed the strongest tendency to become leaders, hold this position by approximately 70%. In the group of FAFNR graduates, who in the previous research showed minimum leading ambitions in the area of career

choice, the amount of representation at managerial positions was practically the same as among FEM graduates. We explain this paradox by our belief that graduating from a Master's programme is a formal prerequisite for receiving a managerial role, and many times this is regardless of the studied programme or the university's focus or the fact whether the individual primarily shows managerial ambitions or not.

Conclusion

In further reference to contemporary approaches towards career matters and mainly then career choice, the research set as its goal to work out an estimate whether FEM and FAFNR graduates remain working in the profession that is connected with the programme they studied, and to cover the motives that most distinctly influenced their choice of profession. The results of the conducted research opened new space for determining and providing high-quality university education with regards to the real application of the specific field of study with respect to the graduates' careers.

This field in the future could be extended for effort to affect detailed representation of various professions within the frame of work assertion of graduates FEM and FAFNR or differences in work assertiveness between males and females.

Another interesting direction for future research could be the detailed analysis of the difference in degree of influence the career choice by professors at FEM and FAFNR, which could be an important source of information for superiors of monitored faculties and for teachers to improve the educational process.

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