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A SYSTEMS THEORY FRAMEWORK APPROACH TO DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIPS IN YOUTH CAREER COUNSELLING

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Abstract

This paper is focused on discussing youth perception on career counselling services, with the purpose of delineating best practices in active employment behaviour engagement. The main purpose of current study is to analyze the dynamic relationship between perceived employment success and perceived employment assistance in career counselling of 432 youth, last year students from Romania, Turkey, Hungary and Cyprus. The curvilinear relationship highlighted demonstrates that very high and very low scores on perceived employment success are related to a negative perception of employment assistance, while situating on the medium response scores, and gives youth incentives for a positive perception and acceptation of employment assistance, which instead will work in their favour. Perceived employment success and perceived employment assistance prove to be crucial concepts when directly working with clients, because depending on these two perceptions the first beliefs of trust or distrust the career counselling process are formed. Results can be easily approached by the Systems Theory Framework (STF) of career development (McMahon, 2015), that proves to be more efficient that any other approaches in understanding the complex and dynamical process of youth career counselling.

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Keywords: Youth career counselling, Systems Theory Framework, dynamic relationship, perceived employment success, perceived employment assistance.

1. Introduction

The Systems Theory Framework (STF) offers a guide for understanding the core concepts of career counselling traditionally built on the foundation of career theory and counselling theory. Traditional career theory has been focusing on specific discrete concepts relevant to individual system, intrapersonal aspects such as self-concept, and other aspects being overlooked, undervalued or ignored,

along with their nature of interactions. This new perspective acknowledges interaction between system inputs in terms of dynamical and complex instead of static and linear.

Systems Theory Framework (STF) has been proposed as a potential overarching framework for dealing with applying theory into practice in the field of career counselling. Patton and McMahon (1999, 2006) have extended the utility of systems theory in a metatheoretical framework for career theory, mainly designed to redefine career counselling practice. The Systems Theory Framework (McMahon, 2002; McMahon & Patton, 1995; Patton, 1997; Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) represents more than a theory of career development, positioning all career development concepts effectively in both theory and practice approaches.

According to STF, each individual has their own set of characteristics (i.e. gender, race, age, beliefs, values etc.) some of which are permanently designed, while others are influenced by the context in which the individual activates. All these characteristics form the individual level, the first level.
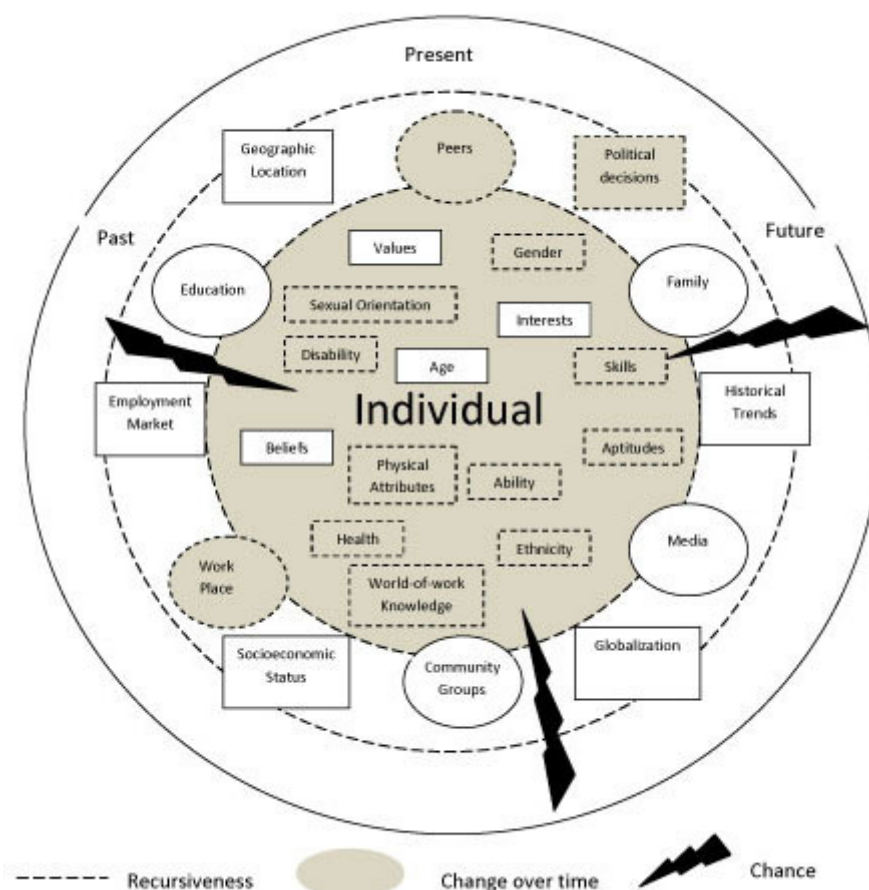

Fig. 1. A Systems Theory Framework for Careers Development (Patton, W., & McMahon, M.,1999)

The second system, the social system is composed by components that can directly influence the individual system like peer group, family and media. The third system is represented by the environmental-societal system, related to particularities like geographical location, employment market specificities and socioeconomic context. Although this outer system is often outside of the individual's control, having less direct influence on the individual system, it is often fundamental to the creation of the

client's life design and perceptions. This system allows for recursiveness events to happen, changing situations over time and chance events occurring, like in any other dynamical system.

2. Methodology

The focus of the present study is to apply the principles of systems theory framework approach in the present career counselling activity, with the purpose of testing the dynamical relationship between two core concepts: perceived employment success and perceived employment assistance, a dynamic career counselling approach.

This study has been performed under an Erasmus project that was focused on the needs of the unemployed youth in the countries of the participating organizations: Romania, Turkey, Hungary, Cyprus, aiming to improve the quality and accessibility of educational and training provisions through the use of ICT as well as to provide new skills for gaining long term employment. The aim of the questionnaire used was to point out young people's identification of vocational counselling needs, unemployment statistics, relevant competencies on the labour market, and current knowledge on active national policies in offering employment opportunities for young people.

The main purpose of current study is to highlight the relationship between perceived employment success and perceived employment assistance of 432 last year students and young graduates from 4 European countries.

Among other questions that are not the subject of this current research, young people were asked to rate (1=lowest, 5=highest) 11 issues that they consider bringing them success in finding a job (Item 22). Aspects regarded referred to: information about available jobs, knowing the right people, having the requested skills, education, experience, doing well in interviews, work-home distance, income, job search skills, having a career plan, knowing suitable jobs.

Regarding perceived assistance, young people were asked to rate (1=lowest, 5=highest) 7 issues that they consider to be helpful when going from unemployed to employed (Item 23). Aspects referred to: high quality information on employment opportunities and trends, greater supportive network for emotional support, ability to speak with employers and employees and learn from them, more centralized job bank and opportunities board (online/offline), short-term opportunities like internships, improved access to skills development, career planning and understanding of professional direction.

A total of 432 youth have voluntarily responded to our online questionnaire in four languages, 38,2% is represented by male respondents and 61,8% by female youth respondents. Regarding respondents' age, 46,1% are aged between 15 and 19, representing last year high school teens, 20,4% are aged between 20 and 24, representing bachelors and 33,6% are aged between 25 and 29, representing students enrolled in master programs.

3. Results

The present research takes position that there is a dynamical relationship between perceived employment success and perceived employment assistance in career counselling process.

In dynamical relationships variables grow together until they reach a certain point (positive relationship) and then one of them increases while the other decreases (negative relationship) or vice

versa. This relationship can be easily identified graphically by a Scatterplot, choosing additional two representations of the regression line: Linear and Quadratic model (Balas Timar, D., Aslan, M., 2016).

The Scatterplot diagram presented in Figure 2, demonstrates curvilinear relationship between perceived employment success on the horizontal axis and perceived employment assistance, represented on the vertical axis.
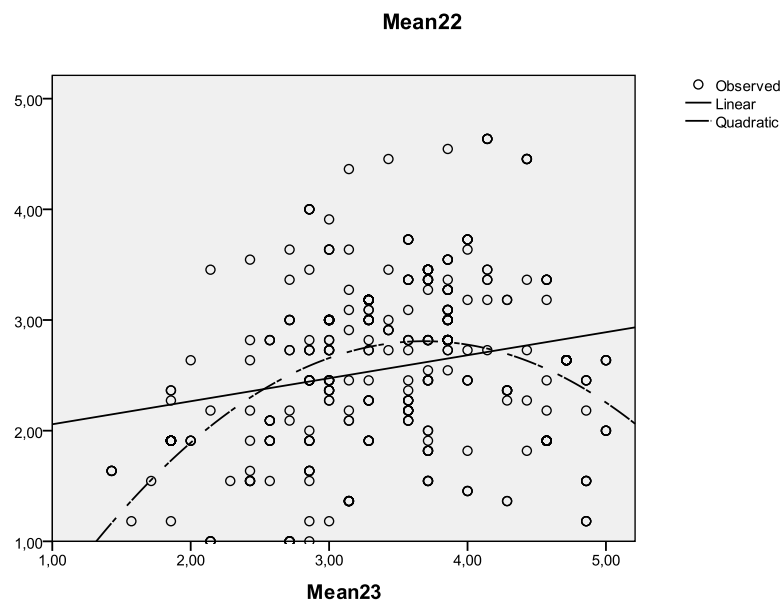

Fig. 2. The dynamic relationship between perceived employment success (Mean 22) and perceived employment assistance (Mean 23)

In order to test our hypothesis that states that between perceived employment success and perceived employment assistance there is a significant dynamic relationship, we have used a confirmatory factor analysis, based on multiple regression analysis for curvilinear effects.

There is a very high correlation between perceived employment success – Item 22 (MD=2,567, SD=0,750) and perceived employment assistance – Item 23 (MD=3,452, SD=0,832) of r = 0,231 significant at a p < 0,01 which methodologically allows us to proceed with confirmatory factor analysis.

In order to test for curvilinear relationship, we have used the hierarchical multiple regressions, the dependent variable being perceived employment success, and the dependent variable in step 1 perceived employment assistance, and in step 2 squared perceived employment assistance.

Table 1 depicts the fitting of the two models, linear – Model 1and curvilinear/ quadratic – Model 2. As we can see in Model 1 the model that supposes linear relationship, perceived employment success accounts for 5% of the variance in perceived employment assistance with an F = 24,215 significant at a p < 0,01. In Model 2, the model that supposes curvilinear relationship, perceived employment success accounts for 18% of the variance in perceived employment assistance with an F = 68,569 significant at a p < 0,01.

Table 1. Linear and curvilinear regression models for perceived employment success depending on perceived employment assistance.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1,850	,150		12,327	,000
	Item22	,208	,042	,231	4,921	,000
2	(Constant)	-1,569	,436		-3,600	,000
	Item22	2,374	,264	2,636	8,975	,000
	Item22_sqrt	-,322	,039	-2,432	-8,281	,000

a. Dependent Variable: *Perceived employment assistance (Item 23)*

All standardized coefficients of Beta (B= 0,231; B= 2,636 and B= -2,432) are significant at p values < 0,01 which gives a high consistency to our both models. Changing Beta coefficient's sign from + to - means that the effect is growing in the opposite direction, which clearly demonstrates the curvilinear relationship between perceived employment success and perceived employment assistance. The additional incremental predictive capacity of 13 percents, added by including the squared perceived employment assistance variable which is accounting for the band in the regression line, clearly prove that there is a dynamic relationship between perceived employment success and perceived employment assistance.

4. Conclusions and Implications

This research brings a dynamical view of understanding the market of career counselling services, mostly dedicated to youth. Perceived employment success and perceived employment assistance prove to be crucial concepts when directly working with clients, because depending on these two perceptions the first beliefs of trust or distrust the career counselling process are formed.

The dynamic relationship demonstrates that very high and very low scores on perceived employment success are related to a negative perception of employment assistance, while situating on the middle scores gives youth incentives for a positive perception and acceptation of employment assistance, which instead will work in their favour. Reviewing the current scientifically literature, we are not aware of any research focused on the dynamic relationship between perceived employment success and assistance offered by career counsellors, thus, this study may help expanding the current body of knowledge on career counselling theory and practice, in order to effectively delineate the efficiency of the STF approach to youth career counselling challenges.

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