

BULETINUL Universității Petrol – Gaze din Ploiești	Vol. LXI No. 1/2009	67 - 70	Seria Științele Educației
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COUNSELING

G.C.D.F. Experiences in the EU Labour Market

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Abstract

While in the United States, career counselling and school counselling are the most important fields of activities of the G.C.D.F., labour market integration has become an important issue in Europe. European activities and projects like E.Q.U.A.L., E.S.F. etc. have often a focus on labour market integration. In many European countries, a real, integration industry' came into existence during the last decades. However, there is still a great demand for qualified staff. Many agents who are active in the field of career services or labour market integration do not have an academic education or vocational training but are experienced practitioners with a lot of evidence-based skills and network resources. In this paper, five areas of activities are identified where these practitioners could profit from a G.C.D.F. training.

Key words: *G.C.D.F., labour market integration, career services, school counselling, rehabilitation, human resource management.*

Increasing need for guidance and orientation

In the global economy of today, individuals are making more complex career choices. From the mid 1990's on, it has been recognized in the United States and other countries that the need for guidance and counselling could not be satisfied any longer by full professional staff only. In the future more practitioners will have to be included who have voluntarily sought and obtained certification that ensures that they have met substantial requirements for training, experience, and supervision. These practitioners also have to commit to ethical practice which is necessary for the provision of quality guidance services. The Global Career Development Facilitator (G.C.D.F.) credential was created to promote quality career guidance services by paraprofessional practitioners. The G.C.D.F. came to Europe at the time when the employment situation in many European countries and mainly in Central and Eastern Europe escalated. The increasing unemployment among young people caused a great demand for vocational guidance. Until the 1990s, career planning in Europe had closely been connected or left completely to the educational system. It had been the task of teachers and school psychologists to identify the aptitude of the school leavers. However, the range of choices available for them had been limited and determined by local factors. Thus, the decision situation had not been very complex at all, and mobility was relatively limited.

With the introduction of free labour markets in Central and Eastern Europe and the structural transformation of the whole European labour market as a consequence of globalization, the chance of the educational system to take influence on vocational choices of young people and the ability to give them some orientation has been declining. Changes on the labour market are more rapid than before, apparently devaluating the experience of former generations. Migration processes have contributed to irrelevance of formal competences because certificates of the countries of origin were not accepted in the destination countries of the migrants. Also in Western Europe young people do no longer want to orient themselves to the career patterns followed or proposed by their parents or teachers. They are influenced by peers, other role models, media, and by cultural and sometimes religious traditions. Many young people have been disengaged from school, while they are not able to find a job. Since the mid 1990's, the intellectual level of the school leavers has been in stagnation in many European countries like e.g. Germany, Ireland, and U.K. As appears, job choices are made in a less rational and way, because it is more and more difficult to evaluate the information. We estimate that about 60 % of the young people choosing a field vocational training follow the labelling of the occupation rather than the content, although they should know that they should make a rational choice. This means that boys choose occupation like "mechatronics" while girls choose jobs labelled with the words, "assistant" or "service".

Career services and school counseling

Similar problems can be observed in the tertiary educational system. More and more young people took the chance of an extended tertiary education, while their job chances did not grow as they had expected before. Migrants met even more problems because their competence portfolios seldom fit to the needs of the economy of their destination countries. They often abandon university without a degree. This means that vocational guidance has to be provided in more individualized way, taking into consideration not only the formal grades of the pupils and students, but also their transferable competences and individual backgrounds, their culturally diverse experiences and their complex motivations. To provide this sort of guidance, experienced practitioners are welcome with close contacts to various fields of employment and to the cultural communities of their clients. However in some European countries career education and guidance provision has been based on a partnership between schools or colleges on the one hand and external services on the other hand. Those external institutions have ongoing contacts with students and links into the curriculum. The external service can offer professional career guidance expertise, links with the labour market, and impartiality. Together, they can provide a high-quality programme in theory. In an O.E.C.D. review carried out some years ago (1), the partnership approach emerged as the strongest model compared to all other guidance models. Other countries have either a school-based service (e.g. the US) or a completely external service which is not very efficient (e.g. France, Germany). Only the UK has had the merits of both. The partnership model is still in place in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In England, however, it is in disarray (2). England is moving towards a completely school-based system like it can be found in the U.S.A. The career service was addressed mainly at young people who had fallen out of education, training and employment, or were at risk of doing so. Career advisers were replaced by personal advisers, with a broad remit. Only two in five young people are now seen individually by a personal adviser, who may or may not be a trained career adviser. So one could conclude that it would be the best solution if career counseling started very early providing advice for all pupils, beginning in primary schools, and be carried out in cooperation with external services. Until now, less than 5 % of the German G.C.D.F. work in school counseling or university career services.

In some European countries, we can observe a gradual shift from private to public funding for career counseling and career facilitating, which means that there is a market developing for such services. This market has emerged e.g. in Switzerland and the Netherlands, while in other countries the tradition of private responsibility for your own career choice has not yet developed. In Germany, about 10 % of our GCDF are working on their own account, many of them in cooperation with the Federal Labour Agency.

The need to increase adaptability and employability of the workforce

Some excesses of the welfare state have contributed to deactivate job seekers. In some regions of Germany or of the U.K., already the third generation is unemployed or underemployed. Also low-income workers have to be taught career planning and encouraged to undergo additional training and education. This refers to many countries, among them Czech Republic, Spain, and mainly to Germany. Germany has the highest proportion of long-term unemployed among all unemployed in Europe while Denmark has a very low rate, having successfully made use of methods comparable to the GCDF tools for years.

The G.C.D.F. can play an important role in the labour market integration of long-term unemployed, as it is shown in Germany. The German; Hartz reforms' of 2004 have created a big labour market for G.C.D.F. because the integration efforts were supported by the creation of special agencies who used to employ experienced practitioners instead of academic and non-academic administrative staff. Of about 230 German CCDF, at least 60 % are engaged by these new labour market integration institutions called Job Centers, or by the Federal Labour Agency, cities and districts. Many of them work in particular projects for training and integration of young people, migrants, women returning to work, or 50+ long-term unemployed (as a good example see www.leila50plus.de, a project where only G.C.D.F. are employed). They are working as case managers, integration coaches, personal contact persons, or team leaders and supervisors. Many of these projects have been financed by ESF, EQUAL, or other European programmers.

Experience from Germany indicates that paraprofessional GCDF with good networking capacities, a good knowledge of local employers, and good interview skills achieve better results than specialists who have come directly from tertiary administrative and legal studies at the university of the Federal Agency.

Labour market integration for people with disabilities and mental health problems

While in the past many people in their fifties and early sixties had to leave their jobs because of heart diseases, degeneration of links or intervertebral discs, rheumatism etc., the most pressing problems today are mental health problems of people under 35 years, many of them being female. The number of burn-outs and bore-outs, depressions, obsessive-compulsive disorders, nutritional disturbances, alcoholism or psychosis is increasing due to work-load and work intensification, stress, or ganging, mainly in the customer-related working areas. Kind-and-gentle workplaces can hardly be found any more. But also traditional rehabilitation schemes, including a training of two years and more, are not successful because most of them they have been designed to integrate manual workers in the services. The service sector, however, is just an area from where mentally handicapped people come from after conflicts with bosses, colleagues, or customers. Thus, the success rate of the very expensive and professional German rehabilitation system has gone down from about 80 to less than 50 %.

If people with mental problems shall be integrated into the labour market, they do not only need a therapy and training but also coaching, and guidance. Something has to be done for their self-esteem and their self-efficacy assumption. Also their employers need additional information and support. Of all German G.C.D.F., 10 to 15 % are employed in this sector. Of course they are not working as therapists but as integration coaches and case managers. E.g. people with obsessive-compulsive disorders can be successfully employed in quality management.

Human resource management

About 5 % of the German G.C.D.F. work in private human resource companies, or as human resource managers in industry and services. This is the latest but maybe most dynamic sector of G.C.D.F.

It will become even more important in the future. They are busy in testing and assessment, recruitment and placement, and also in the adjustment of trainings schemes and working places to the particular conditions of groups of workers. Often they are employed by temporary employment companies who take more and more responsibility for the human resource management of small and medium-sized companies. In Germany, the number of temporary workers has been increasing continuously from about 200,000 in 2003 to nearly 700,000 in 2008.

The figures given above concerning the employment situation of German G.C.D.F. are not representative for the whole EU. This has to do with the high rate of long-term unemployed among all German unemployed which has led to the employment of many G.C.D.F. in the 'integration industry', but also with the high professional standards of German social workers, case managers and social pedagogues who provide a well-established alternative profile to the G.C.D.F. The social worker is much more institution-oriented in his work and needs to have considerable knowledge of social law. However, the need for individualized guidance and orientation will increase the demand for a more client-centred approach, based on solid knowledge of occupational fields and job profiles.

References

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Experiențele G.C.D.F. pe piața muncii din Uniunea Europeană

Rezumat

În timp ce în Statele Unite consilierea carierei și consilierea școlară sunt cele mai importante câmpuri de activitate ale G.C.D.F., integrarea pe piața muncii a devenit o problemă importantă în Europa. Activitățile și proiectele europene ca E.Q.U.A.L., E.S.F. etc. s-au concentrat adesea pe integrarea pe piața muncii. Mulți dintre agenții care activează pe piața serviciilor în carieră sau a integrării pe piața muncii nu au educație academică sau instruire vocațională, dar sunt practicieni cu experiență care au abilități bazate pe lucrul direct și rețele de resurse. În acest articol sunt identificate cinci arii de activitate în care acești practicieni ar putea beneficia de instruire G.C.D.F.