

Graduates beliefs about career management *

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Summary: Career management is increasingly becoming an individuals' matter, despite the various activities organized by the different institutions to support career development and planning. An exploratory survey was conducted to determine what kind of beliefs graduates have about career management. Results indicate that graduates are aware of the importance of university knowledge for getting a job, the importance of knowledge and investment in education for positioning in the labor market, so they give priority to development opportunities that business brings opposed to the material rewards.

Key words: graduates, career, employability, education, competitiveness

Rezime: Upravljanje karijerom sve više postaje stvar pojedinca i pored različitih aktivnosti koje se organizuju u okviru različitih institucija kao pomoć karijernom razvoju i planiranju. Sprovedeno je istraživanje eksplorativnog tipa da bi se utvrdilo kakva uverenja imaju diplomci o upravljanju karijerom. Rezultati ukazuju na to da su diplomci svesni značaja fakultetskog znanja za dobijanje posla, značaja koji znanje i ulaganje u obrazovanje imaju za vlastito pozicioniranje na tržištu rada, tako da prednost daju razvojnim mogućnostima koja donosi posao naspram materijalnim nagradama.

Ključne reči: diplomci, karijera, zapošljivost, obrazovanje, konkurentnost

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1. INTRODUCTION

Studying is a mean of obtaining certain knowledge and skills that are prerequisite for performing certain tasks, but do not fulfill completely demands set by employers. More and more graduates increase competitiveness on the job market. Diploma is not a good enough guarantee for getting a job within targeted profession. Changes in employing philosophy are reflected in a change of career concept that differs from previous concept of finding one job for a whole life. Students are not aware enough that they need to work on their employability and have a misconception that their degrees tie them to particular careers (i.e., [2]) . On the one hand, employers and government agencies seek to enhance better match between university programs and job demands. The challenge is to identify which skills should be integral to the teaching process (i.e., [9]) . On the other hand, it is expected of an individual to take responsibility in managing his/her own career. It is recommended that the undergraduates take an active role in career planning (i.e., [6]) .

The development of career plans in the early stages of an undergraduate's course help the student clarify what skills and competencies to develop before graduating (i.e., [9]) . Career planning involves making plans and organizing somebody's life so that the environment resources are used for self-development. Career planning involves activities that aren't necessary job-related. According to research study, the most important asset for improving one's competitiveness is learning ability, followed by knowledge of foreign language(s), cooperation, information technology skills and interpersonal relations (i.e., [13]) . Not so long ago, young people were showing a high level of career dependency, or, in other words, they were relying on other people for career opportunities (i.e., [7]) , whereas today, active participation is expected in networking that helps finding suitable employment (i.e., [12]) .

Many students have expectations regarding initial jobs but don't have a career plan; therefore it is recommended that universities develop courses so that the students could learn career planning skills by attending programs as a part of their syllabus (i.e., [6]) . Students should be encouraged to reflect critically on the decision making process during career management (i.e., [2]) . The job market is highly competitive and no longer offers traditional career paths, thus formulation of strategic career plans during the undergraduate's course is important for establishing goals and clarifying what relevant skills should be developed during the undergraduate study (i.e., [9]) . The changing nature of graduate employment and the shift towards self-managed careers in a demanding and competitive job market sets career strategic planning as an imperative for all university graduates (i.e., [8]) .

Researches extracted the most important features that students attribute to attractive organizations. In the first place is "invest heavily in the training and development of their employees", followed by "care about their employees as

individuals", "clear opportunities for long-term career progression", "variety in daily work" and "dynamic, forward-looking approach to their business" (i.e., [11]) . The importance of training and development is also present in previous studies, which found that graduates are more interested in opportunities to learn and grow than in chances for organization advancement (i.e., [3]) . Significance of intrinsic rewards is growing increasingly important as opposing to extrinsic rewards which is typical for generation Y, a popular name for the generation born during 80' and a few years before and after that period (i.e., [4]) .

Students that failed to use career services have more difficulties on the job market and don't perceive their employability as well as the others (i.e., [2]) . Universities today work on the improvement of student employability by directing their resources toward student employment preparation, student portfolios, career planning and career services (i.e., [8]) . Gathering and analyzing information about the careers of students after graduation is a fundamental form of institutional accountability (i.e., [1]) . Students expect that the courses of career development will concentrate on developing skills in résumé writing and obtaining career counseling, but at the end of the course they realize that they have gained abilities for career management through developing self-awareness skills, goal-setting and development of plans for their long-term career aspirations (i.e., [8]) .

Career and life are inseparable, and career is described as a tool to a happy life, both in spiritual and pecuniary terms (i.e., [6]) . Difficulties of graduates in Serbia are particularly great because there is a large gap between supply and demand in job market. Main cause is insufficient and outdated knowledge of both employed and unemployed personnel as a result of technological stagnancy of Serbia (i.e., [10]) . Education reform has been launched as a way to harmonize the demands of the labor market and employers with the outcomes of the educational system. Knowledge is increasingly seen as a driving force for the efficient operating of companies and society in general (i.e., [5]) . Young graduates in Serbia are faced with the problem of unemployment at the very beginning of their career. Therefore we have decided to examine what are the beliefs of graduates considering career management in Serbia.

2. METOD

Research was conducted by a questionnaire on a sample of fourth year students from Faculty of Security Studies, University of Belgrade, and from Business Faculty, Singidunum University in Belgrade. The aim was to establish what are the needs for special training of graduates for finding a job and what are their attitudes towards continuous education and traditional career. Furthermore, we aimed to determine if there were statistically significant differences between graduates from Faculty of Security Studies and those from Business Faculty in certain aspects. Research was conducted during the eight semester thus we call

those students graduates since they are nearing completion of their studies and beginning of their professional career. The total sample is consisted of 202 students, 120 girls and 82 boys. Among them, 25 of these students have an average grade of less then 7.0; 90 students have an average from 7.1 to 8.0; 53 students have an average from 8.1 to 9.0; 23 students have an average above 9.1 and 11 students didn't answer to this question. The questionnaire consisted of 49 items about the relation to knowledge, attitudes towards education, the factors that affect getting a job (the most common type of sentence was "In order to obtain future job ... is important"), the expectations about first job and future career (the most common type of sentence was "I want the job to be..."), and the need for additional training how to find a job (the most common type of sentence was "I need training for..."). The responses to statements were given in a form of five degrees Likert scale. In data processing, in addition to descriptive statistics, we also used multivariate statistics.

3. RESULTS

First, we will show how certain items were rated, and then we will bring out the results of main component factor analysis and the results of discriminative analysis which points out differences between students of University of Belgrade and those from Singidunum University. Table 1 shows the highest evaluated items by respondents (over 4.50). From these statements we can conclude that most of the graduates consider knowledge to be an important aspect for success on work and that knowledge should be constantly invested in. A large number of respondents expressed satisfaction with themselves due to learning.

Table 1. Highest evaluated items in the questionnaire.

For success at work we need to broaden our knowledge constantly	4,71
It's worth to invest in knowledge and training	4,71
Knowing a foreign language is important at work	4,66
I would invest money in my education	4,64
The more I learn, the more satisfied I am	4,64
I am ready to take seminars and courses for my next job	4,57

Table 2 shows the highly evaluated items (above 4.00) by respondents. Statements shows that most of the respondents consider high education important for success at finding a job and at work and are willing to invest in their

education and informing as well as to continue their studies. Beside these convictions, in this group we also have convictions about the importance of knowing people on high positions who can provide help in finding a job.

Table 2. Highly evaluated items in the questionnaire.

In order to obtain a future job, ability of self-presentation is important	4,50
In order to obtain a future job, knowledge is important	4,37
I'm planning to continue my education (master, specialization, training...)	4,30
In order to obtain a future job, it is important to inform myself about organization	4,23
Those that know people on high positions progress easier during career	4,20
I want my first job to be a place were I can "learn my craft"	4,19
I believe faculty influences personality development	4,10
In order to obtain a future job, connections are important	4,04
In order to obtain a future job, diploma is important	4,00

Among medium evaluated items (i.e., Table 3) are those about the need for a job that enables material safety, about readiness to volunteer and change place of residence on account of work. Also, here are statements about the need for training that develops interpersonal skills and enables good performance at job interviews. It is interesting that a job with fixed working hours is still highly rated, although it is something that is slowly disappearing in the modern days of working on internet. Fixed working hours probably reflect the safety of job and free time for family after working hours.

Despite highly evaluated statements that speak about the need for continuous education, items considering need for training related to finding a job are evaluated relatively low (i.e., Table 4.). Items related to the use of University Center for Career Development show similar evaluation. So do the items expressing how well had the university prepared students for work. These evaluations show that in Serbia services related to career management are not developed enough and that graduates are not aware of what they could gain from such services.

Table 3. Medium evaluated statements in questionnaire.

To me, a job means earning money and having a comfortable life	3,99
University graduation means a lot more chances for getting a job	3,99
I want a job with fixed working hours	3,90
I want my first job to be a place where I will earn well	3,90
I want my first job to be a place for progressing to top management	3,90
Education so far meets my expectations	3,83
I am ready to live abroad because of work	3,73
I am ready to volunteer	3,58
I am ready to change my place of residence because of work	3,57
I need a training to develop interpersonal skills	3,53
I need a training to perform well at a job interview	3,53

Table 4. Low evaluated statements in questionnaire.

I need a training about how to find a job	3,36
I plan to use services of University Center for Career Development	3,34
I want a job where the boss determines specific tasks	3,33
I need a training for writing resume, CV, biography, etc.	3,24
Faculty prepared me well for future job	3,24
In order to obtain a future job good physical appearance is necessary	3,20

Among lowest evaluated items was a need for training in teamwork (i.e., Table 5) which is in contrast to contemporary emphasis on teamwork through media and literature. In this group we also found items claiming that respondents do not want to spend a lifetime in one organization which is in line with today's fluctuation of labor force. The lowest evaluated item was that gender is important for obtaining a job, which indicates that students deny gender inequality in choosing a job.

Table 5. Lowest evaluated statements in questionnaire.

I need a training in teamwork	2,84
I need a training in time-planning	2,79
I want to spend a working lifetime in one organization	2,68
I want my first job to be a place were I will stay until retirement	2,66
In order to obtain a future job, gender is important	2,58

By factor analysis we wanted to determine which main topics are present in the background of items graduates were evaluating. We have extracted ten factors using principal component analysis. The first factor we have called "The need for training to find a job" (shortly: Career Training), because it includes all the items about the need for training. This factor has biggest reliability (Cronbach's Alfa = 0,870). The second factor we called "Faculty knowledge as a path to employment" (shortly: Faculty knowledge) because it includes items claiming that faculty, diploma, gained knowledge and the ability of self-presentation improve chances to find a job. Also, it includes the items expressing satisfaction with learning and education. We have called the third factor "Other means to get a job" (shortly: Connections) because it includes statements claiming that job can be obtained thanks to physical appearance, gender, connections and lying during the job interview. Name we have given to the fourth factor is "Importance of Knowledge" because it included items claiming we should constantly expand our knowledge, inform about the organization we apply for work in, that knowledge of foreign languages is important for obtaining a job and items about satisfaction through learning. The last three factors include items formulated to determine reasons that affect getting a job.

The remaining factors, except the sixth, talk about future job and career. We named the fifth factor "Traditional Career" because it is composed by items that talk about wanting to spend a working lifetime in one organization within which one could gradually progress. We named the sixth factor "Investing in Education" (shortly: Education) since it is composed of items that talk about the willingness to invest in education through continuous education, seminars and volunteering. The seventh factor we called "The Job for High Income" (shortly: Income) because it includes the items that talk about the need to find a job that will provide high income and comfortable life, even if it means doing a job we don't like. The eight factor we called "Willingness to Work in Another Place" (shortly: Place of Work) because those statements express willingness to change residence on account of work, or willingness to work abroad. We have called the ninth factor "Classical Job" because it is composed of items that talk about wanting a job with fixed working hours in which supervisor determines tasks. The tenth factor we named "First Job for Training" (short: Learning Through Work) because it speaks of the need to obtain practical skills and knowledge at work.

Table 6 shows average values of factor expression. Overall the most pronounced factors are related to knowledge and education (Faculty knowledge, Importance of Knowledge, Education) together with Learning Through Work. Medium pronounced factors are Income, Place of Work and Classic Job which means that finding a job that will provide steady income is an important consideration in the minds of graduates. The least pronounced are Traditional Career and Career Training which indicates that graduates are more reliant on the concept of workplace change and employment on the basis of knowledge than on seeking a job for entire life span. It remains for explanation why do graduates poorly express the need for training that builds specific skills (job search, interpersonal skills, teamwork etc.) even though they value learning, knowledge and investment in education. Factor Connections is composed of many differently evaluated statements therefore the average value does not give an adequate interpretation of that factor.

Table 6. Mean values for listed factor on subsamples.

	whole sample	University in Belgrade	Singidunum University
Importance of Knowledge	4,56	4,47	4,66
Education	4,42	4,46	4,39
Learning through Work	4,19	4,12	4,27
Faculty knowledge	4,00	3,78	4,22
Income	3,67	3,71	3,64
Place of Work	3,65	3,80	3,50
Classic Job	3,63	3,74	3,52
Traditional Career	3,24	3,40	3,07
Career Training	3,21	3,28	3,15
Connections	3,20	3,28	3,12
N (number of respondents)	202	101	101

Regression analysis shows statistically significant differences between Universities on following factors: Faculty Knowledge, Importance of Knowledge, Traditional Career, Education and Place of Work. Mean values are given in Table 6. Based on the canonical discriminant function we found that the canonical coefficient is 0.538 and the proportion of individual factors can be seen on Table 7. Groups of students divided by Universities vary more than one standard deviation based on canonical discriminant function.

Table 7. The matrix structure of the canonical discriminative function.

Faculty Knowledge	-0,705
Traditional Career	0,406
Importance of Knowledge	-0,365
Place of Work	0,222
Education	0,116

4. DISCUSSION

Results obtained on a sample of students in Belgrade show that graduates highly value knowledge, learning and education and connect them to better prospects of finding a job. Most graduates express desire to continue investing in education which is in accordance with results of foreign researches stating that young people are in the first place interested in further education opportunities (i.e., [11] and [3]).

Surprisingly, a need for training is not as valued as we would expect it to be from someone who declares for investment in education and continuous learning. We especially emphasize the contrast between the two items: item "In order to obtain a future job, ability of self-presentation is important" was evaluated with 4.50 whereas item "I need a training to perform well at a job interview" was evaluated with 3.53. This difference can be explained in several ways. Perhaps graduates believe that they already possess good skills in self-presentation and do not require training in this domain. Version of this explanation could be that graduate have unrealistic opinion of themselves and consider a need for such a training to be a sign of a lack of skill rather than a wish to improve existing skills. A second alternative explanation may be related to poor or low-quality supply of this type of training in our market. Third type of explanation is related to difference between cognitive and behavioral component of an attitude. In other words, although most graduates support the importance of knowledge because it is an attitude promoted by public opinion, they are not equally ready to invest effort in the implementation of this attitude, meaning they are not willing to invest in education through expression of the need for specific training. Fourth type of explanation is connected to the expectations that specific training will increase chances of getting a job. The expectations are probably low; hence the extent of training needs is weaker. These finding suggest that there is a need for a broader action that would improve the work of career centers in the universities, motivate students to use the services of such centers more, as well as introducing of university programs and courses to develop students' basic knowledge of career management and appropriate skills (i.e., [2] and [8]).

Wishes for traditional career (binding for one organization) and classical job (working under control of a boss during fixed work hours) are not highly spread

among the questioned graduates which confirms the fact that changes in the job market have created different expectations from career. Among the items about work, the strongest one speaks of the need that a first job should be a place to "learn a craft" (AS=4.19) indicating a contemporary view that career is built on knowledge and experience. Then they point out the importance of providing comfortable life (AS=3.99) which is the main reason why people seek employment. For graduates, providing for a living also means financial independency from their families. Other authors have noted increasing prevalence of intrinsic motivation, in addition to extrinsic, among younger generations (i.e., [4]) .

When considering factors which secure getting a job, graduates consider foreign language knowledge to be most important (AS=4.66), followed by the ability of self-presentation (AS=4.50) and knowledge (AS=4.37). Only later do they mention knowing people at high positions (AS=4.20) and connections (AS=4.04). This way of ranking factors speaks in favor of relying on their own resources in finding a job, but it also emphasizes the importance of social networks. These attitudes are in accordance with the theoretical observations of career management where two factors have been identified: personal resources (knowledge, skills, abilities) and social networks (acquaintance with a large number of people connected with our profession) (i.e., [9] and [12]) .

Differences between graduates from Business Faculty and from Faculty of Security Studies are most pronounced when it comes to attitudes towards knowledge and education and then towards career. Graduates from Business Faculty state clearly that faculty knowledge is important to find a job, and state out the importance of knowledge, and, unlike their colleagues from the Faculty of Security Studies, they value less traditional career that binds them to one job, they are less willing to change a place of residence and are less willing to invest in education. Students from the Business Faculty have a clearer idea about job opportunities and more job choices than students from the Faculty of Security Studies. Therefore the obtained difference in evaluating importance of faculty knowledge and knowledge in general for getting a job can be observed in light of these differences. In other words, the diploma from Business Faculty is needed in a larger number of vacancies for various positions while the diploma from Faculty of Security Studies is associated with a limited number of job types. On the other hand, it is possible that students from the Business Faculty recognize the importance of faculty knowledge better because private faculties invest in marketing more and strive to connect knowledge and practice better than it is the case with the state faculties. Considering that factors Faculty Knowledge and Importance of Knowledge also talk about the satisfaction with education and learning, we could say that students of Business Faculty show greater satisfaction with the process of expanding personal knowledge than the students of Faculty of Security Studies.

Next significant difference between graduates from Business Faculty and Faculty of Security Studies is in their perspective on traditional career. Given that the results are low in total (i.e., Table 6); the difference indicates that students from the Business Faculty have given up from traditional career as an

unrealistic expectation to a greater extent than students from Faculty of Security Studies. Thus, career advancement is less and less seen within one organization. Instead it is seen as a movement through jobs in various organizations. These findings could also be interpreted in the light of the differences between faculties. Namely, diploma from Business Faculty is required for jobs in both public and private sector, while diploma from Faculty of Security Studies is more linked to the public sector.

Difference regarding the factor Importance of Knowledge indicates that students from Business Faculty consider foreign language knowledge and informing about organization more important for finding a job. This difference can be explained by some objective data. Namely, Singidunum University includes as a part of its program a foreign language school, so every student can learn various languages of his/her choice. This is a practical way of indicating the importance of foreign language skills in a future career, and students with knowledge of various languages increased chances for finding an adequate job in the labor market. Besides this, it can be concluded that the students of Business Faculty have more developed proactive attitude towards finding a job because they show more interest in gathering information about organization and in developing ability to represent themselves during a job interview. A proactive attitude towards employment is probably due to a fact that the students of Business Faculty attend the course Professional Development and Business Skills (or nowadays Development of Career and Business Skills) during their studies.

Finally, it should be noted that our sample is convenient; therefore we cannot make generalizations on the whole student population in Belgrade. The research is explorative in character with a tendency to point an important aspect of preparing graduates for entering the labor market.

5. CONCLUSION

Examined students' beliefs indicate that it is not enough to open career centers at universities, instead, the importance of active involvement in career planning and career management should be explained to students. Students should become aware of the importance of continuous training and development of transferable personal skills that are necessary regardless of vocation and workplace. Introduction of courses about career management in academic studies is just one way to help the students. The second is to maintain alumni networks for data collection and obtaining feedback on the quality of studies and the work with students. The third is to connect faculties with economy through various forms of cooperation. The fourth is investment in development of career centers based on monitoring the effects of their work. The fifth is to evaluate the academic program in relation to success of graduates in the labor market.

The graduates are aware of faculty knowledge and continuous education benefits on career development. They are motivated by achievements brought by both intrinsic (e.g. satisfaction in learning and mastering job) and extrinsic (e.g. income) awards. Graduates are not aware of the importance of training for career management and therefore it is necessary to bring them closer to a new field and explain to them the importance of learning specific skills for career development.

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