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Proposal: Presentation and Paper

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### **Drop-out Prevention by Career Counselling**

The presented paper is based on an examination of the role of face-to-face counseling in dropout prevention at the five largest universities in Hungary. A parallel study was carried out at the University of Heidelberg in Germany in order to collect the impacts of university counseling, the outcomes and the satisfaction of the students with the achievements.

Keywords: Drop-out prevention, impact of career counseling services

#### General Description

The modularly designed university education provides students with a multitude of decisions, which can be difficult to cope with without detailed planning. In addition to the burden of studying, there are age-specific development tasks or the part-time work, contributing to the stress of the students. Their coping strategies determine whether they can master the pressures or whether their current personal resources are not sufficient. Maladaptive coping strategies and/or dysfunctional cognitive attitudes can permanently lead to emotional and psychosomatic disorders (Olah, 1995, Margitics, 2005) and trigger drop-out.

#### Research questions:

1. Are academic and professional information sufficient for an informed decision?
2. Does university counseling (face-to-face) offer added value compared with interventions based on information?
3. What makes university counseling effective?
4. How can the counselling quality be measured and what indicators/quality marks are relevant?

#### Theoretical foundations

With the conversion to the Bologna system multiplied the time and performance pressure on students in Hungary. A strong competition for state-funded student places, incurred by compressed courses time pressure and a greater number of "second chance" students who begin their studies at a later stage of life, generate counseling needs of study counseling. Studies show that a wrong decision in choosing university studies increases the risk of dropping out (Kiss, László Puskás Vajda, 2015 Kiss et. al. 2009). Students complain about lack of interest in the subject, about their incapacity to contact with fellow students and teachers. They often can not identify themselves with the subject and the related professional opportunities.

On the basis of the cognitive information processing approach (Peterson et al., 2002), career and study-related information, self-experience and the development of career management skills contribute to the fact that advice seekers can reflect their situation and make informed decisions. For a stable decision about study programmes and professional paths, the knowledge of the relevant professional fields, an exchange with relevant persons in the target area in order to collect information on the activities and the work environment is essential (see also CIP model; Rübner, Sprengard, 2011, p.28).

Within the frame of the "Life Design model", Savickas (2005) describes career choice in the 21st century as a continuous willingness to redefine own career, which manifests itself in four important activities. The adaptive person takes care of the future (concern), is curious as to how the prospects develop in the selected area (curiosity), conducts conversations with persons of relevance (parents, teachers, consultants, experts) about professional opportunities, about planning activities (consulting) and finally develops study- and career-related self-efficacy, which enhances the confidence to implement their own plans (confidence).

As a theoretical basis, the phase concept derived from the empirically based problem-solving psychology can also be used as a basis. A "dialectical" type of problem is often to be assumed by the counselor, while at the beginning neither the goal is clear, nor the necessary methods on the way are known. According to Dörner, problem solving is a strategic tool for reducing this indeterminacy. Counseling is then understood as an aid to solve a significant problem. In this rough goal and function definition, most of the counseling approaches and definitions have a common denominator (see Schiersmann / Thiel 2012, p. 51). Professional counseling is characterized by the fact that it has a "plan" or develops a pictorial idea of the content, steps or stages or phases in which the complex process of counseling can be structured heuristically. This is especially necessary if the problem is complex (Schiersmann / Thiel 2012, p. 51). At the same time students can develop and use problem-solving competence to master the challenges relevant to them (see Weber 2014).

## Methods

In Hungary, a sample (N = 792 subjects) was collected in order to identify the challenges in the student lifecycle, to identify possible structures of the factors

leading to the study breakout with qualitative and quantitative methods.

Tools:

- The student life event list has been compiled on the basis of an analysis of client needs (Lisznyai, Puskás-Vajda, Kiss, 2011).
- Study-related self-efficacy. We measured the study-related self-efficacy expectations with a target-group version of the General Self-Efficacy Assessment Scale of Kopp, Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995).
- Attitude toward studying. The items describe the emotional relationships and the cognitive attitudes towards the study and the study-specific behavior of the students (Kiss et al., 2009, Kiss, 2010).
- WOC. As a component of the resilience, the survey included the pattern of coping strategies of the students. The WOC (Ways of Coping of Lazarus and Lautier, 1978) was chosen as a measuring instrument in a Hungarian adaptation (Rózsa et al. 2008).
- CES-D. The subjective mental health of the students was recorded with the CES-D Inventory (Radloff, 1977).
- SCCI. The Student Career Construction Inventory (Savickas, Porfelli, 2011) is a list of 25 relevant items to assess the current state of Student careers in the career planning process. The Hungarian adaptation (Kiss, 2013) led to a slightly modified factor structure.
- Career Maturity Inventory (CMI-S). The CMI-S overall score (Crites, Savickas, 2011) serves as an indicator of the career selection process. The individual subscales describe the components of the adaptability concept.

In Germany, the Student Service Impact Inventory (Kiss/Weber, in Press) questionnaire was developed and implemented in a Practitioner Research Project (Kiss, 2016), in cooperation with the Heidelberg Study Center/Career Service. The theoretical framework is formed by the systemic-solution-oriented consulting approach (Schiersmann / Weber, 2013) and the quality features of the BeQu project ([www.beratungsqualitaet.net](http://www.beratungsqualitaet.net)). The 19 items build to two factors which account for 56.4% of the total variance.

- Factor 1 "Satisfaction with the general conditions and the advisory activities"
- Factor 2 describes the "impact of counseling, the increase in self-organizing capacity of the client and changes that have occurred through the consultation process".

The formulation of the items allows to use the questionnaires both in the course counseling and in the Career Service to evaluate the consultations.

Results

In Hungary, 167 people (21% of the overall program) took part in a counseling process. On a five-stage Likert scale, they are willing to use the services again (4.6 points). It has been possible to find a common wavelength with the counselors (4.4 points), as well as to get appropriate feedback at the right moment and to develop new ideas (3.9 points). Counseling has contributed to solving problems related to study / professional choice. (3.3 points).

An informed decision on the choice of a career or profession is identified as an important factor to prevent drop-outs from study programs. Particularly strong, direct positive influence has the participation in counseling concerning the maturity to choose a profession. The success of the counseling is reflected in a higher level of self-efficacy as well as in the correction of the negative cognitive attitudes and diminished drop-out thoughts and the procrastination of the clients.

The sample at the University of Heidelberg consists of  $N = 732$  persons. The SSII scale has high reliability values: the satisfaction items (Chronbach alpha 0.890) and the self-organization items (Chronbach alpha 0.879) form two distinct factors.

The clients have received the desired support for self-organization at both ZSB (Central Study Counseling Service) and CS (Career Service). From the view of self-organization ability, time investment is an important factor. The direct results of the counseling (output), the effectiveness, the suggestions received to support self-reflection, the concrete assistance in the counseling and the possibility of developing own solutions, were similarly assessed in the two institutions. Satisfaction with the counseling session: the conversation atmosphere and competence of the consultants are positively assessed. The score is 3.74 (ZSB) and 3.66 (CS). The difference is significant but the effect of the difference is low (Cohen  $d = 0.159$ ).

Student counseling supports developments in the career selection process. The detailed plans for the future increase the resilience of students. These protect against dysfunctional cognitive attitudes, which can contribute to a considerable extent to drop-out. Students with future plans and CMS strategies are better protected against the strains in the study (Lazarus, 1999), they assess the problems as less threatening and have more resources to cope with the situations.

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