

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY OF STUDENTS AS PROSPECTIVE SPECIALISTS IN THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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### Abstract

Universities play an important role in providing a wide range of services and connecting all stakeholders, such as employers, alumni, and other community members to prepare students for future employment, establish networking with labour market representatives, assist them in integrating into the labour market, and develop students' as potential specialists' employability skills, thereby fostering their career development in the university educational environment. The aim of this study is to analyse the career related theories and propose a career development model for economics and business-focused universities. The following research methods were used: desk study, analysis and evaluation of scientific literature (theoretical research method); reflection of personal experience (empirical research method). The theoretical research emphasised modern career-related theories and resulted in a proposal for a career development model for a university. A mandatory course that formally prepares students as prospective specialists for employment and internship, exposure to the labour market via internship, networking events, and mental support provided by qualified psychologists, university teachers as part of an academic advising programme and alumni organized in the form of an alumni mentorship programme, are the main pillars of the proposed career development model.

**Key words:** career services, career development, counselling, employability.

### Introduction

Individuals' career paths have changed within time due to various factors such as increased automation and machine learning, the rise of the gig economy, global competition, and reforms to labour markets and government policy. Having a number of jobs during a lifetime is now widely expected for the majority of the labour market (Bridgstock, 2019; Bridgstock, Grant-Imaru, & McAlpine, 2019) and long-term employment relations have become quite a rare phenomenon. Together with the change of individuals' career paths, career counselling goals and methods have also changed over the last 50 years in response to the increased employment uncertainty, industrialization, mass education, and the possibility of full employment (Evangelista, 2015).

The shift in careers led to the transformation of career counselling from an occasional into continuous process. While previously career counselling was in place when a student or recent graduate entered the labour market, or when a company shut down and its employees had to find new employment places (Evangelista, 2015), now career counselling helps people of all ages manage their careers and make the best possible choices in terms of education, training, and employment by promoting reflection about the individual's strengths and weaknesses, matching those with the individual's plans and goals, and with the current situation of the labour market (UNESCO ..., 2019). It also plays a significant role in terms of inclusion, increasing the chances of people from disadvantaged groups (National Forum ..., 2022). In addition to that change, universities have become part of the knowledge triangle, the goal of which is to

bring together the worlds of academia, industry, and research, putting an emphasis on entrepreneurship and innovation (European Institute ..., 2022). As a result, the role of universities also changes, emphasising the need of strengthening connections with the labour market and collaborating to achieve common goals, such as preparing students for employment and developing students' employability skills as prospective specialists (Katane & Troshkova, 2023).

The aim of this study is to analyse the career related theories, and propose a career development model for economics and business-focused universities.

### Materials and Methods

The topic of career counselling is relevant among different researchers which is proved by a number of publications (Evangelista, 2015; Lara & Vess, 2014; Pryor & Bright, 2022; Savickas, 2005; Stuart, 2014).

The theoretical study highlighted the key concepts about how and why individuals make career decisions (Savickas, 2005; Pryor & Brights, 2022). If, in accordance with the construction theory (Lara & Vess, 2014; Savickas, 2012; Savickas *et al.*, 2009), the life trajectory and life design have been discussed, then the career theory of chaos emphasises the importance of complexity, change, and chaos (Pryor & Bright, 2003). So individuals as dynamic and complex dynamic systems seek survival and purpose. Now it is suggested to accept and prepare for the uncertainty of everyday life in the context of career management (Pryor & Bright, 2022).

In addition to academic and research activities, universities participate in the knowledge triangle, which connects research, education, and innovation,

and one of the universities' responsibilities is to link students and researchers with the labour market (Unger & Polt, 2017).

Desk study, analysis and evaluation of scientific literature (theoretical research method), as well as reflection of personal experience (empirical research method) were used in the current study.

### Results and Discussion

By analysing the current career management models at various universities, considering the career related theories, and given the author's experience, a career development model for business and economics-focused universities has been proposed.

Before moving on to the key career related theories and the proposed career development model, it is essential to begin with the definition of a career notion. In this article a career is viewed as a sequence of work experiences that an individual has during the working life, whether at one company or different ones (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2018).

One of the widespread career related theories, career construction theory (Savickas, 2005), explains why and how individuals choose certain jobs. The theory offers a framework for understanding occupational behaviour across the lifespan and tools for career counsellors to use in directing clients into fulfilling jobs. It takes into consideration the diverse, developmental, and dynamic perspectives of vocational behaviour which enable researchers and counsellors to examine how individuals build careers through the application of life themes to integrate self-organisation of personality and self-extension of career adaptability into a self-defining whole that motivates to work, guides occupational choice, and designs vocational adjustment. The theory investigates the essence of vocational personality types and people's diverse preferences, involves the study of how individuals adapt to the difficulties of vocational training, job transitions, and traumas and brings to the subject of how and why the themes of an individual's personal life affect their professional decisions.

In a number of publications, further discussion of life trajectory and life design has been addressed (Lara & Vess, 2014; Savickas, 2012; Savickas *et al.*, 2009). Life design interventions involve clients reflecting on how they use their strengths and skills to build their lives and meet their needs. In order to build careers that express a client's self-concept, clients reflect on themselves, receive feedback, and imagine possible selves. As part of the process of constructing careers that express the clients' self-concepts, reflection on self, receiving feedback, and imagining possible selves are integrated. The five presuppositions of life-design counselling are ecological contexts, complex dynamics, nonlinear casualties, multiple subjective

realities, and dynamical modelling (Savickas, 2005; 2011; 2012).

Another holistic approach to careers is presented in the chaos theory of careers (Pryor & Bright, 2003) that emphasises complexity, change, and chance. Individuals are complex and dynamic systems that seek both survival as well as meaning and purpose, according to this theory. A career counsellor's role in this regard is to encourage individuals to pursue their life goals and meaning by teaching them how to understand their diversity and complexity. Accepting and remaining open to new possibilities is crucial which has been discussed in the recent research (Pryor & Bright, 2022) and which suggests people to accept that uncertainty is now a part of everyday life and that wealth, power, or experience can guarantee protection from it. According to the theory, individuals should instead be aware of, and able to adjust to and prepare for, real-world uncertainty, at least in the context of career management.

Another term that is often used by researchers is career management, the most essential part of which can be viewed from either the individual's or the company's point of view, is adopting a proactive approach to managing an individual's own career (Stuart, 2014). By developing self-management skills and taking a proactive approach, individuals can identify the areas where some actions and support are needed and areas where they progress well.

The notion of adaptability was observed in M. Savickas's (Savickas, 2005) research, in which the adaptive individual is defined as an individual who is concerned about his/her vocational future, increasing personal control over his/her vocational future, displaying curiosity by exploring possible selves and future scenarios, and increasing confidence in his/her aspirations. Increasing a client's career adaptability is a key goal of career counselling.

In accordance with another theory, the social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002; Stajkovic & Stajkovic, 2019), self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals are three factors that are significant for educational and vocational interest development, choice making, and performance attainment. An individual's self-efficacy relates to an individual's personal ideas about his or her ability to undertake specific actions or courses of action. Individuals are more likely to get engaged with, pursue, and succeed at tasks for which they have high levels of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy beliefs are changeable and are derived from four basic sources of information: personal performance successes, subjective experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional conditions. Outcome expectations are views about the consequences or results of specific behaviours. Personal goals are

viewed as intents to organise and direct one's behaviour in the absence of immediate positive feedback and despite unavoidable negative consequences. People tend to choose goals that are fit to their perceptions of their own skills and the consequences they anticipate from pursuing a certain course of action.

Returning to the changes in career development, they initially in many countries first started with helping people figure out what courses to study or which professions they wanted to pursue and included the assistance for young people that is centred on preparing them to make informed decisions about further education or entry into the workforce (Evangelista, 2015). Career counselling as a part of career development is still quite often viewed as something occasional and needed in such cases when a student graduates and moves on to the labour market, or when a company closes, and its employees have to find new jobs.

Due to the constant changes in the labour market, now career counselling is viewed as a continuous process that assists people of all ages in managing their careers and making the most suitable choices in terms of education, training, and employment by encouraging self-reflection about their own strengths and weaknesses and matching them to their plans and goals, as well as matching this information with the real circumstances of the labour market (UNESCO ..., 2019). In addition to that, career counselling facilitates economic and social inclusion of people from various backgrounds and helps them reach their full potential and get employed (National Forum ..., 2022). Because of the necessity of an individual's skills to remain marketable and competitive in the labour market and avoid unemployment, more individuals are investing their own money and spare time in developing various skills, and they seek out career counsellors on a regular basis to identify the best ways for developing their skills (Evangelista, 2015). Career counselling is carried out in close connection with other services such as education and training, which could include regular meetings to discuss professional development, weekly support meetings for those looking for work, carrying out job search activities, and mediating on behalf of members of disadvantaged groups (Evangelista, 2015).

In relation to providing career related services, career development models are introduced in universities that play a significant role in providing services to ensure students' as prospective specialists' readiness for employment and their integration into the labour market (Staiculescu, Lacatu, & Richiteanu Nastace, 2015). Career guidance, career fairs, workshops, internships, career resources, assessment, academic advising, career courses for credit, and many other services are now all part of the modern career

development offered by universities in collaboration with external members like alumni, enterprises and other members of the community (Hayden & Ledwith, 2014).

The career management model in universities is a structured model that incorporates a number of services that assist students build employability skills, prepare for future careers, and at the same time, on an institutional level, help the university retain talents (Achenreiner *et al.*, 2019).

The author's proposed career development model (Figure 1) for business and economics-focused universities includes five components: a mandatory course in which students gain theoretical knowledge and prepare for future internships and employment; a mandatory internship in which students put their theoretical knowledge into practice; events organised in collaboration with employers and alumni; advising and mentorship programs; and psychological support and career counselling services.

One of the main components of the career development model is related to the preparation of students as prospective specialists for the internship and future employment and is a credit-based course for all students. Before starting an internship at companies, students need to be well-prepared and receive necessary support from the university, which could be done by integrating workshops on career-entry 'or' career design into their curricula, where possible measures regarding how to proactively and effectively shape students' labour market entry are presented (Ebner, Selenko, & Soucek, 2021). This idea is also supported by other researchers (Bridgstock & Hearn, 2012; Hayden & Ledwith, 2014; Reardon *et al.*, 2022) and is close to the author's views that a mandatory course has to be designed to prepare students as prospective specialists for the labour market. Throughout the course, students prepare their resumes and cover letters, engage in and arrange mock interviews, learn how to conduct professional communication with employers and co-workers, and develop their leadership abilities. The course has to be credit-based and is a part of a mandatory curriculum because the employability skills trained during this course are essential for all student groups.

After the first and second year of study, students do internships at real enterprises where they are exposed to the labour market and apply their theoretical knowledge to practice. Credit-based internship is one of the key components of career services at universities since all stakeholders, beginning with university students, employers and universities, benefit from them. For students, internships give a possibility to be exposed to the labour market, apply their theoretical knowledge to practice, thus improving their employability skills (Kapareliotis,

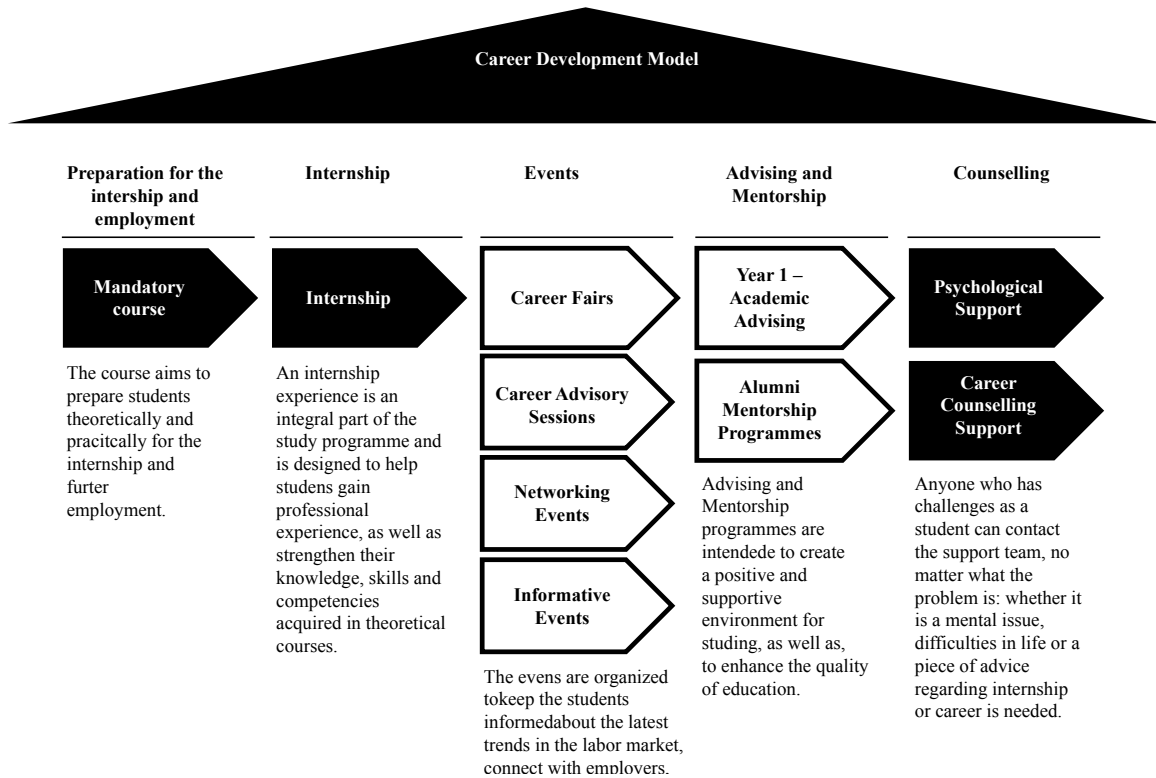


Figure 1. Career Development Model in a University Educational Environment.

Voutsina, & Patsiotis, 2019). In addition to that, doing the internship can reduce fears and uncertainty about future employment (Ebner, Selenko, & Soucek, 2021). During internships, employers can screen interns and see whether they are suitable for open positions. Universities, in addition to providing students with a possibility to apply the knowledge and skills gained during theoretical studies into practice and acquire specific skill sets required by the job market. Organising internships for students helps maintain closer connection between universities and the labour market (Kapareliotis, Voutsina, & Patsiotis, 2019). In the proposed model, even though the internship is credit-based, students are allowed to choose an internship of their choice and preference and will need to find a placement themselves, thus developing their presentation skills (Katane & Troshkova, 2023) and the ability to approach employers in a professional way.

In order to establish connections with the labour market representatives, to create a professional network and also secure an internship or employment placement, various workshops and events, such as career fairs, are organised in cooperation with employers and alumni. Slightly changing the definition stated by S. Batistic and A. Tymon (Batistic & Tymon, 2017), in this case, networking is a process of establishing and maintaining personal and professional connections with a group of employers or alumni in order to generate a bank of resources, such as contacts, information, and support.

Continuing the topic of networking, an alumni mentorship programme is organised for second- and third-year students. In accordance with the study (Guccione & Hutchinson, 2021), mentoring is widely used in different universities in career related contexts and provides individuals from various backgrounds to establish professional connections, go through difficult situations and challenges with the support of a mentor, expand their horizons, and discover what works best for them. Mentoring can be viewed as coaching conversation combined with additional information, advice, or guidance based on the mentor's expertise (Guccione & Hutchinson, 2021) or a process when a person of superior rank guides an entry-level individual (Savage, Karp, & Logue, 2004). Alumni mentoring is a program designed to promote students' confidence and encouragement and improve their learning experience (Preethy & Smitha, 2023) by providing support and helping reduce stress caused by the lack of skills and motivation and issues in socializing with peers. Mentoring programs, both formal and informal, are used in university and professional environments to assist students and new professionals grow personally and professionally (Skrzypek *et al.*, 2019) and establish professional contacts used for networking (Preethy & Smitha, 2023). Alumni mentoring improves students' perceptions of graduate employability, their overall student experience, and their willingness to become mentors to future students (Dollinger, Arkoudis, &

Marangell, 2019). The participation in the alumni mentorship programme is voluntary and is based on students' as prospective specialists' initiative. Besides all the above-mentioned advantages, students have a possibility to develop their leadership skills (Katane & Troshkova, 2023) as the programme is expected to be student-driven.

While second- and third-year students can be engaged with the alumni mentorship programme, for the first-year students it is mandatory to attend individual academic advising sessions four times per year and discuss students' academic performance and challenges of the academic process with a university teacher. Academic Advising helps organise a smoother transition from schools to universities and keep student retention. Although university teachers do not organise direct career counselling, they influence a lot on students' as prospective specialists' career choice. During academic advising sessions, students set academic, career, and life goals (Allen & Smith, 2008). An important factor is belonging to the community, which advisors play a large part in developing (Tinto, 2016). Students are able to build connections with supportive representatives of the university, interpret their experiences, and make well-considered choices when receiving advice. Putting together different learning experiences is a crucial step in building a unique academic identity (McGill, 2021).

Because of the growth in mental health issues that people are currently facing (World mental..., 2022), individual psychological help is offered and appears to be an important component of the career development program. Psychological readiness is also a component of the competitiveness of a specialist, indicated in one of the previous studies (Katane & Troshkova, 2020).

In addition to the previously mentioned services, it is quite essential to provide support to students as prospective specialists with career counselling support, especially needed when students, despite their acquired knowledge and abilities, may

become frustrated with the present labour market's uncertainties or the variety of available options or if the case of disadvantaged group representatives are involved (Evangelista, 2015; Savickas, 2005).

### Conclusions

1. In the last 50 years, there has been a significant shift in the focus of both career paths and career counselling, moving from the temporary to the long-term, as individuals now take a more active role in managing their careers. Through the development of self-management skills and by applying a proactive approach, professionals can point out the areas in which individuals need additional help and the ones in which they progress well.
2. Primary aims of career counselling is to find fulfilling work and help clients become more adaptable in their chosen profession. In addition to that, a career counsellor's job is to help people see the complexity and variety in their own lives so that they can pursue the things that matter to them.
3. In accordance with the career theory of chaos, complexity, change, and chaos are emphasised. People are ever-evolving systems that look for not only the means to their own survival but also some higher meaning in life.
4. Three factors that are significant for educational and vocational interest development are choice making, and performance attainment are self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals.
5. The proposed career development model comprises the mandatory course that formally prepares students as prospective specialists for employment and internship, exposure to labour market in the form of internship, networking events, including alumni mentorship programme, and mental support provided by qualified psychologists and university teachers as a part of academic advising programme.

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