Factors Influencing Women's Career Change

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Abstract: The paper deals with the results of research on the factors influencing women's successful careers. The research aim is to identify the most important women's skills, personal qualities and the factors that affect women's career change or career choice. A questionnaire survey of women was carried out to achieve the aim. The number of respondents was 1087. The survey found the most important influencing factors in women's career development were the education level, the number of jobs in the place of residence and the psychological climate at the job. The research found that the most essential personal qualities were as follows: purposefulness, enterprise and insistence, ability to organise one's own work and abilities to work in a team and make decisions independently. The research will contribute to the understanding of the factors influencing women's successful careers and their role in cases of women's career change or unemployment. Career counsellors and personnel selection professionals may use the findings in their career counselling.

Keywords: women career, personal qualities, skills, factors influencing careers, adult education.

Introduction

Lifelong education policy in Latvia is based on an idea that the personal growth and self-enhancement of individuals have to be promoted at each stage of their life and in all spheres of life throughout the entire lifetime, thereby creating prerequisites for building up every resident's enterprise and adaptation abilities and contributing to social inclusion, employment and active civil participation (Par programmu..., 2009; Mūžizglītības politikas..., 2007/2009; Mūžizglītības politikas…, 2011; Mūžizglītības politikas…, 2013).

Since individuals usually get their first profession early in their life, their profession change most often takes place at the adult age, although for women the situation may be different – an early family life and bringing up children can hinder getting the basic profession. Therefore, lifelong education enables individuals to learn and enhance themselves within their profession, thereby reaching a higher qualification level, or to get another profession and reintegrate into the labour market and to get satisfaction and bring success.

American scientist and pedagogue D. R. Wetzel did research on adult and lifelong education in the USA. He writes that lifelong education is essential nowadays to all employees – those who currently work and those seeking a job – and that it is required to persistently renew and expand working skills. It is important to discuss problems together with adults, considering further education that focuses on a college degree or a master's degree and their advantages and, at the same time, doubting about financial costs and the time spent to acquire a degree. He gives a simple answer to clients – working in the same company for the entire lifetime is now a rare phenomenon, as there is real global competition. Consequently, the majority of adults are forced to change their careers several times during their lifetime. Accordingly, their knowledge and skills have to be continuously renewed and expanded. These and other reasons are present, therefore lifelong education is necessary (Wetzel 2009a, Wetzel, 2009b).

The successful choice and development of a career is influenced by the skills acquired at school and in the life, and there are also various exogenous factors that affect women's career change in various life situations.

One of the research studies carried out by D. Bite at LLU focused on Women's Professional Careers in Small Towns, in which she found that in small towns the social environment and infrastructure were closely associated with the employment situation; therefore, purposeful career growth was possible only in a limited number of professions and jobs. Women most often implement their professional careers in the so-called women's professions: pedagogy and health care and are mostly employed in national and municipal government institutions and enterprises. Various gender segregation manifestations in small

towns are determined by gender and age stereotypes. Women's activity in small towns is often restricted by the attitude of others; for this reason, women in small towns face various barriers hindering their careers, for example, various kinds of control over women due to close relationships, poorly developed infrastructure in small towns, etc. The mentioned research does not provide convincing arguments that women intentionally choose small towns as the environment where to pursue their careers (Bite, 2010).

There are interesting research studies done by K.Caprino (Caprino, 2015), who is a researcher and a work and life coach in the USA, regarding women's professional careers. She writes that women who pursue a successful career for many years, in their mid-life years, feel that their professional life and identity do not satisfy them, i.e. do not function as planned. This research found that the majority of women of women faced at least one of the implicit working and private life crises mentioned by the author, among them chronic health problems, financial dependence and the painful loss of ones' identity. K.Caprino compares a professional crisis to an alarm bell that brings real changes in women's working and private lives. A real professional crisis is more than a problematic period. The majority of women believe that it is a turning point in the particular situation, and it takes time to reassess the situation. K.Caprino mentions a few implicit working and private crises:

- chronic health problems; women do not accept the idea that they have chronic diseases and do not undergo medical treatment sufficiently, saying: "I cannot solve my health problems";
- inability to talk – a woman cannot be an advocate for herself, being afraid of criticism, rejections or punishment;
- financial problems; women stay in a negative situation for a long period because of lack of money;
- inability to use one's own abilities and talents in the job;
- women struggle to balance their life and job;
- women do jobs that they like to do.

A number of authors such as A.Miller, M.Profita and M.Miller have written about career change and advice on how to do it best (Miller, 2015a; Profita, 2015; Miller, 2015b). American scientist Ph.D. E.Ostrow (Ostrow, 2012) is a life and career coach, and at present life and career coaching is a very popular practice in the USA. She practises and studies women's careers and career change. Based on her practical experience and research, she suggests several steps how women can change their career in their mid-life years, for example: listen to your body, pay attention to your intuition and learn to say "no". Speak up! Learn to express yourself when feeling got stuck. Overcome your fears! Be open! Relax! (Overcoming the…, 2015).

Career change for women in their mid-life years differs very much from what it is in their twenties or thirties. In their mid-life years, women tend to think and analyse the time period between their reality in life and their dreams. Women understand and wish their life to be interesting because there will be no second opportunity.

In the breakdown according to levels of education, the greatest number of the registered unemployed has professional education, i.e. 35.2 % of the total number of the registered unemployed. The unemployed with the level of higher education account for 12.2 % of the total number of the unemployed, but women as a social group account for 71 % of the total number of the unemployed with the level of higher education. Only high level of proficiency demanded in the labour market can save a specialist. A genuine professional will never be unemployed (Stalidzane, Dislere, 2012).

The **research aim** is to identify the most important women's skills, personal qualities and the factors that affect women's career change or career choice in case of unemployment.

Methodology

The present research was carried out within the doctoral study programme at Latvia University of Agriculture, Institute of Education and Home Economics. The author started her research by using social networks such as draugiem.lv, facebook.lv, twitter.com, requesting women to fill in questionnaires at the Jelgava, Bauska and Dobele Regional Departments of the State Employment Agency (SEA), at the State Police's Zemgale Regional Department or speaking in person and sending questionnaires to women living both in Latvia and Lithuania via e-mail. A pilot survey was conducted from 30 December

2011 to 6 January 2012, and then 39 women participated in the survey (Rācene, 2013). The present paper summarises the results of a survey done in 2015, in which 1087 women took part. The present research employed a sociological research method – a questionnaire. The statistics method, $\square^2$ test, using the SPSS program and MS Excel, was employed to process the data.

Research specific tasks are:
1. to theoretically discuss women's skills and the factors influencing careers;
2. to analyse the most important women's skills and the factors influencing career change in the view of the respondents.

The survey was conducted from 1 June to 18 August 2015, sending 2000 questionnaires via e-mail to women in Latvia and Lithuania, as well as distributing questionnaires in person. There were received 1087 valid questionnaires back, of which 909 were from women living in Latvia and 178 were from women living in Lithuania. Women were surveyed both via e-mail and via social networks: www.draugiem.lv, twitter.com, facebook.com. The questionnaire was designed using questionnaire matrixes available on the website www.visidati.lv in order that respondents could fill in their questionnaires in an easy and comfortable way. The data were processed employing the grouping method, the descriptive statistics method, MS Excel and SPSS (Paura, Arhipova, 2002). By employing an MS Excel descriptive statistics tool, the statistical indicators of the women who took part in the survey could be identified (Table 1).

Table 1

Age characteristics of the women surveyed

No	Statistical indicator	Sample population (respondent age)
1	Average	42.22
2	Mode	32
3	Median	43
4	Range	55
5	Minimum	19
6	Maximum	74
7	Number of respondents	1087

The Table 1 data revel that women aged 19-74 took part in the survey; the age range was 55 years; the number of respondents was equal to 1087; the mode equaled 32, the median age was 43, and the arithmetic average age was 42.22.

The mode is a type of averages, which appears most often in a set of numbers (Arhipova, Bāliņa, 2003). Most of the women who took part in the survey were aged 32. The median is the middle value of the given numbers or distribution in their ascending or descending orders (Arhipova, Bāliņa, 2000; 2003). The distribution of respondents by education level was as follows: 41.2% had a master's degree, 27.7% a bachelor's degree, 16.8% a higher professional degree, 5.7% a secondary professional degree, 3.4% had an unfinished higher education, 2.9% secondary education, 1.7% a doctor's degree, 0.4% chose the reply option "other" and 0.2% had primary education.

The respondents were asked about their occupation: most, i.e. 25.17% of the respondents represented state administration, 8.84% the administrative area, 8.70% the financial sector and 3.21% were unemployed.

Results and discussion

Results of the survey on women's career change

The respondents were questioned about to what extent they were ready to change their job or occupation and to rate their readiness on a scale within a range from "1" to "5". On the scale, "1" means you are not "currently" ready to change your job and "5" means the change of your job or occupation is

necessary very much. Of the respondents, 41.7% replied that they were not ready to change their job, while 9.8% were determined to do it (Figure 1).
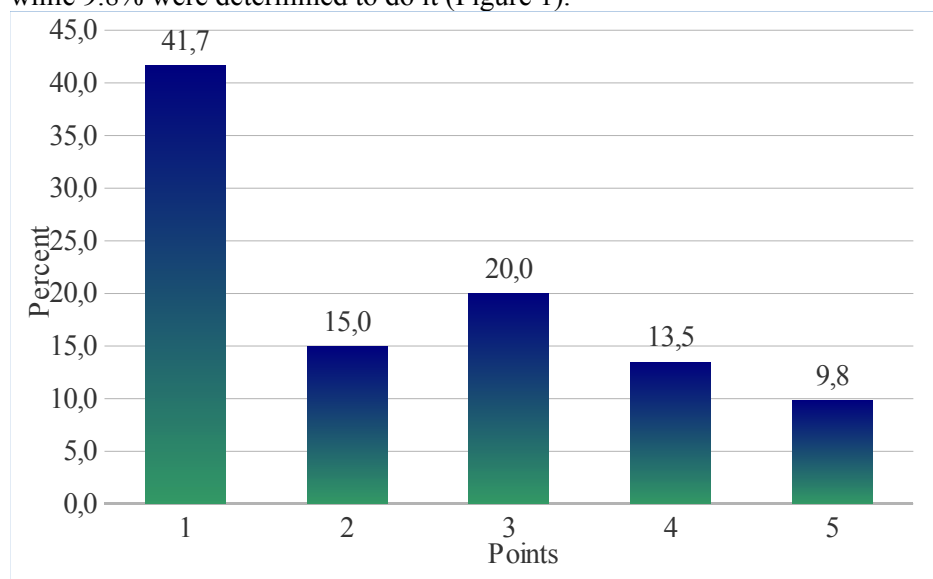

Figure 1. **Respondents' ratings of their preparedness to change their occupations**, *replies expressed* **in percentages, ratings in points**. Data acquired from 1 June 2015 to 18 August 2015 in an anonymous survey of women, n=1087

The respondents were asked about what conditions or events could influence them to make a decision on changing their job or occupation. The conditions or events mentioned in the questionnaires were as follows: a higher wage; mutual relations in the working team; an absolute dislike of the job; an interesting job offer; a significant decrease in the wage; a job closer to the place of residence; dismissal from the job; change of the place of residence; a psychologically unfavourable environment; getting a new profession; a microclimate in the working team; unemployment; career opportunities; a better and more interesting job; family conditions; sudden changes in the job duties; working hours that are incompatible with the child's upbringing and the kindergarten's working hours; frustration with the current employer (if the employer abused one's work or its fruits); greater social guarantees; war; routine; flexible working hours; emotional burnout; and mobbing at work.

Factors influencing women's careers

Career choice factors considerably influence women's careers (Karjeras attīstības…, 2008):
- *parents' intentions concerning their children in childhood*. Children who were in the focus of family attention and persistently enjoyed care, love and respect, when becoming adults, might desire the satisfaction of such needs. In the future, they will be very sensitive to the attention of others and to positive attitudes. Consequently, they are attracted by the professions enabling them to contact others and enjoy their respect. Such individuals prefer a job that can help others while doing it or a profession related to culture, perhaps, art or entertainment;
- *necessity to realise one's abilities*, i.e. to achieve self-actualisation. Individuals do what, in their opinion, gives the greatest satisfaction and promote their personal growth;
- *interest in the profession*. The source of interest is literature, movie heroes as well as successful and interesting television shows. If individuals are not prepared and inappropriate for their dream jobs, such jobs might become a burden and usually lead to the change of the profession;
- *prestige*. A profession is chosen depending on the understanding of its prestige in society;
- *the gender role factor*. For example, women rarely choose a scientist's career, being doubtful about their ability in science. Women prefer professions that allow them to dedicate more time to their family (part-time employment, less efforts and lower time consumption, but in this way their career growth opportunities are limited and lower wages are earned) or traditional "women's professions" such as pedagogy or health care;

- *orientation towards the social values established in society*, which reflects the choice of the profession path;
- *necessity for security and protection*. Preferring a secure job providing stable incomes, a good education and investment in it may be viewed as an action and even as motivated searches for personal security;
- *psychosomatic diseases* that developed as a result of such a situation might be serious and even dangerous for one's life, particularly if the threat of family breakdown adds to the destruction of personal identity for individuals in this period.

To identify the most essential factors in women's choice of a profession from the perspective of respondents, a question on factors influencing successful careers was included in the survey. The respondents were asked to rank the given factors by importance. There were five reply options beginning with "1" – no influence through to "5" meaning great influence. The reply option "great influence" was selected for analysis. It is necessary to examine the distribution of respondent replies and identify whether the replies match with the theoretical distribution of observations (Table 2).

Table 2

Factors influencing women's successful careers

Data acquired from 1 June 2015 to 18 August 2015 in an anonymous survey of women, n=1087.

No	Factors	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1.	Age	297	268.3	28.7
2.	Gender	94	268.3	-174.3
3.	Family status (married, unmarried)	111	268.3	-157.3
4.	Experience of family (parent's experience in their profession)	82	268.3	-186.3
5.	Children (yes, no, number)	215	268.3	-53.3
6.	**Education level**	**558**	**268.3**	**289.7**
7.	Place of residence	259	268.3	-9.3
8.	Financial situation	198	268.3	-70.3
9.	Number of jobs in your place of residence	**443**	**268.3**	**174.7**
10.	Physical capacities	152	268.3	-116.3
11.	Lifestyle	161	268.3	-107.3
12.	**Attitude of your supervisors**	**438**	**268.3**	**169.7**
13.	**Psychological climate**	**439**	**268.3**	**170.7**
14.	Distance from home to the workplace	236	268.3	-32.3
15.	**Partner support**	**341**	**268.3**	**72.7**
Test Statistics				
				Factors
Chi-Square				1126.770
df				14
Asymp. Sig.				0.000

Conclusion: Since the p-value = 0.000 < 0.05, one can conclude with a 95% probability that the distribution of respondent replies is quite uneven (Paura, Arhipova, 2002). Based on a $\square^2$ test, one can observe a significant prevalence of the number of replies for Factor 6 "Education level". This means that most of the women surveyed mentioned the education level as the most important factor. The number of jobs in the place of residence was ranked second, the psychological climate was ranked third, the attitude of supervisors was ranked fourth and partner support held fifth position.

According to the respondents, the following factors also influence women's successful career development: the wish to achieve some goal; prejudice; a coincidence of circumstances; influential acquaintances; personal traits; career opportunities at the job; the woman's own wishes; nationality; religious beliefs; competition in the labour market; public opinion; ability to represent oneself in the

right way; attitude to one's own growth; wage size; competence, positivism, external appearance; internal feeling, a psychological state; confidence in oneself as a strong or a weak individual; interest in a particular field and readiness to raise one's qualification; ability to plan and organise one's work and life on the whole; a sense of responsibility and the skill to independently make decisions.

Table 3

Importance of personal qualities

Data acquired from 1 June 2015 to 18 August 2015 in an anonymous survey of women, n=1087.

No	Personal qualities	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1	Wish to help others	131	407.7	-276.7
2	Patience	376	407.7	-31.7
3	**Enterprise**	**726**	**407.7**	**318.3**
4	Sensitivity	153	407.7	-254.7
5	Persistence	677	407.7	269.3
6	Purposefulness	728	407.7	320.3
7	Ability to keep secrets	305	407.7	-102.7
8	**Ability to cope with stress**	**621**	**407.7**	**213.3**
9	Thirst for knowledge	337	407.7	-70.7
10	Reliability	507	407.7	99.3
11	Sincerity	130	407.7	-277.7
12	Skilfulness	435	407.7	27.3
13	Empathy	175	407.7	-232.7
14	Talkativeness	181	407.7	-226.7
15	Ability to control oneself	512	407.7	104.3
16	Determination	570	407.7	162.3
17	Creativity	415	407.7	7.3
18	Self-confidence	566	407.7	158.3
19	**Logical thinking**	**619**	**407.7**	**211.3**
20	Diligence	435	407.7	27.3
21	Loyalty	394	407.7	-13.7
22	Sense of duty	533	407.7	125.3
23	Courageousness	404	407.7	-3.7
24	Tactfulness	375	407.7	-32.7
25	Tolerance	209	407.7	-198.7
26	Accuracy	335	407.7	-72.7
27	Honesty	408	407.7	0.3
28	Politeness	323	407.7	-84.7
29	Sense of humour	195	407.7	-212.7
30	Good observation ability	352	407.7	-55.7
31	Order and tidiness	277	407.7	-130.7
32	Insistence	528	407.7	120.3
33	Discipline	522	407.7	114.3
Test Statistics				
				Qualities
Chi-Square				2312.445
df				32
Asymp. Sig.				0.000

The diversity of professions is very broad. To choose an appropriate and desirable profession, first of all, it is necessary to examine oneself – what personal qualities are possessed and what qualities have to

be built up – as well as the description of the desired profession and to identify whether the profession match with the wishes. Accordingly, the author included in her survey a question about personal qualities. The respondents were asked to indicate which of the given personal qualities influenced women's successful career development. There were five reply options beginning with "1" – no influence through to "5" – great influence. The reply option "great influence" was selected for analysis. It is necessary to examine the distribution of respondent replies and identify whether the replies match with the theoretical distribution of observations (Table 3).

Conclusion: Since the p-value = 0.000 < 0.05, one can conclude with a 95% probability that the distribution of respondent replies is quite uneven. Based on a $\square^2$ test, one can observe a significant prevalence of the number of replies for Quality 6 "Purposefulness" and Quality 3 "Enterprise". It means that most of the women surveyed mentioned purposefulness as the most important personal quality, followed by enterprise in second position, persistence in third position, ability to cope with stress in fourth position and logical thinking in fifth position.

Skills contributing to women's career development

The Lifelong Education Memorandum defines six key ideas, the implementation of which would contribute to women's career development and competitiveness. One of the ideas puts focus on acquiring new basic skills. By acquiring new basic skills, women can increase their employment opportunities, as economic and social changes transform and raise the standards for the description of basic skills that are minimally needed to actively participate in the working, family and public lives. New basic skills, which are mentioned in the Lisbon Strategy, represent skills in information and communication technologies (ICT), foreign languages, technological culture and business as well as social skills (A Memorandum on Lifelong…, 2000).

A skill is an ability to perform some activity according to the required quality and quantity; it is a prerequisite for completing the activity. It involves a degree of knowledge and techniques that allows employing what was acquired for purposeful activities. Individuals develop part of their skills through naturally getting experience (e.g. the skill to walk), while other skills are acquired by practising by oneself or under the guidance of a professional (e.g. computer skills). The skill is developed through versatile and repeated practices and may be perfected endlessly. General skills meeting social and economic needs in Latvia are classified as follows (Mikuda, 2004):

- social skills (to cooperate with other individuals, to tackle problem situations, to listen to other individuals, to convince others about one's opinion, to use body language and the language of gestures, etc.);
- organisational and management skills (to assume responsibility, to execute the work task precisely, to organise one's own work, to find a solution to a problem, to act in changing situations, to make decisions independently, to lead other individuals and to develop one's own career purposefully);
- computer skills (to use a computer for processing texts and numerical data and for information searches and communication);
- foreign languages skills (Latvian, English, German and other languages).

To identify the respondents' opinions on the skills needed for a successful career, they were asked to indicate which of the given personal qualities influenced women's successful career development. There were five reply options beginning with "1" – no influence through to "5" meaning great influence. The reply option "great influence" was selected for analysis. It is necessary to examine the distribution of respondent replies and identify whether the replies match with the theoretical distribution of observations (Table 4).

Table 4

Woman's rankings of the most important skills needed for the successful development of women's careers

Data acquired from 1 June 2015 to 18 August 2015 in an anonymous survey of women, n=1087

No	Skills	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1	**Cooperate with other individuals**	**631**	**536.7**	**94.3**
2	**Tackle problematic situations**	**644**	**536.7**	**107.3**
3	Listen to other individuals	420	536.7	-116.7
4	Convince others about my opinion	470	536.7	-66.7
5	Use body language and the language of gestures	150	536.7	-386.7
6	Assume responsibility	599	536.7	62.3
7	Execute the work task precisely	583	536.7	46.3
8	**Organise one's own work**	**702**	**536.7**	**165.3**
9	Find a solution to a problem	635	536.7	98.3
10	Act in changing situations	524	536.7	-12.7
11	**Make decisions independently**	**646**	**536.7**	**109.3**
12	Lead other individuals	468	536.7	-68.7
13	Develop one's own career purposefully	509	536.7	-27.7
14	Use a computer for work with texts	509	536.7	-27.7
15	Use a computer for work with numerical information	464	536.7	-72.7
16	Use a computer for information search	540	536.7	3.3
17	Use a computer for communication	437	536.7	-99.7
18	Knowledge of foreign languages	550	536.7	13.3
19	Presentation skills	553	536.7	16.3
20	Basic skills in management	565	536.7	28.3
21	Leadership	520	536.7	-16.7
22	**Ability to work in a team**	**689**	**536.7**	**152.3**
Test Statistics				
				Skills
Chi-Square				539.079
df				21
Asymp. Sig.				0.000

Conclusions of the research are: since the p-value = 0.000 < 0.05, one can conclude with a 95% probability that the distribution of respondent replies is quite uneven. Based on a $\square^2$ test, one can observe a significant prevalence of the number of replies for Skill 8 "Organise one's own work" and Skill 22 "Ability to work in a team". It means that most of the women surveyed mentioned the skill to organise their own work as their most important skill, followed by ability to work in a team in second position, making decisions independently in third position, tackling problematic situations in fourth position and cooperating with other individuals in fifth position.

According to the respondents, the following skills also influence women's successful career development: the skill to manipulate people; the skill to influence men's opinion; the skill to write grammatically correctly and without orthographic mistakes; the skill to keep a conversation; the skill to see things in context; the skill to cooperate with like-minded individuals; the skill to be dressed tastefully, in an appropriate manner; the skill to keep an interesting conversation about out-of-office topics in an informal atmosphere (parties, coffee breaks at meetings, etc.); the skill to control oneself in

various situations; the skill to respect the team's interests; the skill to combine the family life and the job; the skill to drive a car; the skill to be silent when your opinion is not needed; the skill to balance the working and the family lives; the skill to separate paid employment from private life work; the skill to make contacts fast, "to network"; the skill to impose one's views, etc.

Conclusions

- Women's career affects the essential theoretical factors of professional choice – parent's setting in childhood period, the need to fulfill their potential, it means to achieve self-actualization, interest in the profession, factor of gender roles, orientation to the social value system what is established by society that reflects to the conscious way of professional choice, the need for security and defenseas well as psychosomatic illnesses which developed in case of unemployment.
- According to the empirical research study, the respondents acknowledged the education level as the most important factor influencing career development. The number of jobs in the place of residence was ranked second, the psychological climate was ranked third, the attitude of supervisors was ranked fourth and partner support held fifth position.
- The women surveyed mentioned purposefulness as the most significant personal quality, followed by enterprise in second position, persistence in third position, ability to cope with stress in fourth position and logical thinking in fifth position.
- The women surveyed acknowledged the skill to organise their own work as their most constructive skill, followed by ability to work in a team in second position, making decisions independently in third position, tackling problematic situations in fourth position and cooperating with other individuals in fifth position.

Recommendations

- The author recommends that career counsellors as well as personnel selection professionals familiarise themselves with the research findings to be used in their daily work.
- The author recommends that education institutions and centres consider the research findings in designing their study programmes in order that learners build up the most important skills needed to make a successful career.
- Employers are advised to get familiarised with the factors, thereby seeking to enhance the working environment for their potential employees as well as to develop a bonus system in order that employees feel comfortable and appreciated at their job.

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