

## PERCEPTIONS OF INFLUENCES ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT AMONG LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED SOCIAL BENEFITS RECEIVERS

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**Abstract:** The number of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers is increasing in Latvia. It adds additional burden to municipal budgets and does not allow society to have full usage of human capital of those people, as well as it causes social and psychological problems to unemployed themselves. The aim of the research is to find out the way how the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers perceive their career development influences to create a suitable career guidance model for a target group in future. On the basis of the Career Systems Theory Framework (STF), using a questionnaire developed by the authors, 46 long-term unemployed social benefit receivers registered in Riga Social Service were asked to take part in the survey. The respondents described their career management competencies as average. Statistically significant correlations between the level of education and importance of goal-directed career management were found; those of respondents with a higher level of education assessed their career success higher and showed greater necessity for further career guidance. Negative assessment of the environmental-societal system elements dominated in the career influences assessment of the respondents, the most important positive career influences according to respondents were elements of the individual system – ability to learn, as well as one's own values, interests and skills.

**Keywords:** career influences, career management, long-term unemployed social benefit receivers.

### Introduction

Topicality of the research is proved by the increasing number of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers in Latvia during the recent years. For example, as the number of the population of Riga decreased by 4.3 thousand (from 703.5 thousand in 2010 to 699.2 thousand in the end of 2011), the number of the municipal social benefit receivers increased by 10.6 thousand (accordingly from 71.9 to 81.5 thousand). In the beginning of 2012, 12% of the population of Riga received social benefits paid by the municipality. Due to increasing number of benefit receivers, the social benefit funds were increased by 33%. Riga Social Department found out that there were more than 10 thousand unemployed in the city who did not receive any benefits and were potential receivers of social service benefits. It was also found that the average period of receiving benefits had been increased. There is a paradoxical tendency – the level of unemployment decreases, however, the level of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers increases at the same time (Moors, 2012).

The long-term unemployed social benefit receivers are able-bodied persons which have received benefits more than 12 times within the last three years and were jobless at least 9 months (Pētījums par..., 2007), and have been receiving social service support at least for the last six months.

The research carried out by the State Employment Agency (SEA) confirms that the long-term unemployed persons (individuals having a status of an unemployed person for more than a year) usually justify their desire to remain in the register of the SEA with a necessity to receive assistance in their efforts to find a job and social assistance (Reģionālie pētījumi..., 2006). Researchers state that *poor motivation is the reason for long-term unemployment in many cases* (Reģionālie pētījumi..., 2006, 71), a large part of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers tends to avoid active collaboration activities to find a job, less than 40% of the social benefit receivers with employment problems have found a job within year (Moors, 2012).

A. Kolesnikova points out that the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers have common psychological features – they have poor abilities to interact with the surrounding social and economic environment, and their abilities to assess professional compliance of their skills with the labour market requirements are not developed, they have insufficient knowledge regarding occupations, employers'

requirements, as well as an inadequate level of self-confidence (Колесникова, 2003). Thus, it shows insufficiently developed career guidance competencies and non-commitment to assume responsibility for building one's own career.

Nowadays individuals are expected to manage their own careers (McMahon, Tatham, 2008). Career management can be seen as a process of continuously balancing and integrating internal and external aspects of career. Career management competence involves externally and internally oriented self-management capabilities. The former required to *identify and exploit career opportunities, to see opportunities on the horizon and reinvent one's self accordingly, and to build effective professional networks*, the latest – to *maintain a realistic positive sense of personal priorities and values, including having a sense of one's career orientation* (Bridgstock, 2008a).

Individuals are expected to build and maintain a positive self-concept, to interact positively and effectively with others, to change and grow through the course of life, to participate in lifelong learning supportive of their career goals, to locate and effectively use career information, to develop understanding about the relationships between work, society and the economy, as well as to be able to secure/create and maintain work, make career-related decisions, maintain balance among their life roles, develop understanding about the changing nature of life and its roles. They have to be able to understand, engage in and effectively manage their own career-building process. Individual career development is a unique and creative process, influenced by his or her personal characteristics and affected by his or her family, community and cultural values, as well as by geographic, economic and political circumstances (MCEECDYA, 2010).

It can be stated that in order to develop a career development support programme for the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers, it is necessary to research perception of the target group regarding their career development and career guidance.

The aim of the article is to publish the results of the theoretical and empirical research carried out by the authors of the article on perception of career development influences among the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers.

## Methodology

The theoretical part of the research consists of the study and theoretical analysis of the scientific and methodological literature on career development and career management.

To assess perception of career development influences among the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers, as well as of their perception of career management competences, career success, and importance of goal-directed career management, the empirical part of the research was provided.

Research questions:

- How do the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers assess their career?
- Which career development influences do the long-term unemployed social benefits receivers consider as the most significant and how do they assess their influences?
- How do the long-term unemployed social benefits receivers assess their career management competencies?
- How do the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers assess importance of goal-directed career management?

The current empirical research was carried out in Riga Social Service. There were 46 long-term unemployed social benefit receivers participating in the research. The participants of the research were as follows: 37 female (80.4%) and 9 male (19.6%) between the age of 21 to 59 (Mean (M) = 36.5, Standard Deviation (SD) = 11.2).

A survey developed by the authors consists of the Career Development Influence Self-Assessment Scale (29 items), Career Management Competence Self-Assessment Scale (11 items).

The Career Development Influences Scale based on the Systems Theory Framework was adapted from earlier studies (Bridgstock, 2008b). There are 29 items included in the adapted version (Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) is 0.91; original version's  $\alpha=0.93$ ): 17 individual influences ( $\alpha=0.90$ ), 6 social/

contextual influences ( $\alpha=0.79$ ) and 6 societal/environmental influences ( $\alpha=0.78$ ). Degree of each influence on career development is rated on a bipolar seven-point Likert type scale, ranging from “strongly negative” to “strongly positive”.

The Career Management Competence Self-Assessment Scale ( $\alpha=0.87$ ) is based on the 11 competencies outlined in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (MCEECDYA, 2010). Clarifying descriptors were provided for each competence and each item.

Participants were asked to define a term *career* and, according to their definition, to rate their career success on a 0 – 5 Likert scale (ranging from “not successful at all” to “very successful”) and to evaluate importance of goal-directed career management in their career on a 0 – 5 Likert scale (ranging from “not important at all” to “very important”).

The participants were also asked to specify their gender, age, length of unemployment and the level of education, as well as to express their opinion regarding the necessity of further career guidance.

## Results and Discussion

While carrying out the study and theoretical analysis of the scientific and methodological literature on career development and career management we found out that according to traditional career theories a career is defined as *a succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered, predictable sequence* (Wilensky, 1960), however, the modern career theories emphasizing individual nature of each person’s career, regard it as *the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time* (Arthur, Hall, 1989,9) or the sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person (Arnold, Silvester, 2005, 521). Career development is a lifelong process of managing learning, work, and transitions which desirable result is achievement of individually significant, self-defined aims approaching desirable life style more and more (Hiebert, 2006).

W. Patton (2008) has found two key themes in the current career theory literature: the on-going drive for convergence of career theories and the influence of constructivism. Constructivist career theorists recognize individuals as *active agents in the production of their careers* (McMahon, Watson, 2008, 280) and stress the importance of regarding the individual in his or her spatial and temporal context (Patton, 2008). Unlike traditional career perception, modern career perception emphasizes individual responsibility for development of one’s own career, highlights the role of each person regarding development and management of his or her own career, and sees it as the most significant prerequisite of objective and subjective career success (King, 2004; Arthur, Khapova, 2005; Ng, Eby, 2005).

U. Bronfenbrenner, the author of the bioecological model of development, stated that *development takes place through processes of progressively more complex, reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving bio-psychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time* (Bronfenbrenner, Evans, 2000, 117). Proximal processes (enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment) serve as engines of development and are described as *a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person, the environmental context – both immediate and more remote – in which the processes taking place, and the social continuities and changes occurring over time through the life course, and the historical period during which the person has lived; and, of course, the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration* (Bronfenbrenner, Evans, 2000, 118).

D. Super maintained the idea of personal and situational determinants of career development. Personal determinants consist of the individual’s *genetic constitution, modified by his or her experiences (the environment and social determinants) in the womb, the home, and the community*, social determinants are *the geographic, historic, social, and economic conditions in which the individual functions from infancy through adulthood and old age* (Super, 1980, 294). Situational determinants consist of the social structure and economic conditions, historical change and socioeconomic organizations as remote situational determinants and employment, school, community, and family as immediate situational determinants. Personal determinants include biological heritage as remote determinant and

intelligence, specific aptitudes, academic achievement, needs, values, interests, attitudes, self-awareness, and situational awareness as immediate determinants (Super, 1980).

The Systems Theory Framework (STF) considers individuals as inseparable from their contexts, which are defined as systems of influence (McMahon, Watson, 2012). The STF locates the individual within myriad of social influences and describes *influences in terms of content and process and positions those influences at (and across) the levels of the individual system and the contextual system, which is conceptualised as the social system and the environmental-societal system* (Patton, 2008, 145).

*The individual system of influences* includes age, gender, values, beliefs, sexual orientation, ethnicity, health, physical attributes, disability, and ability, interests, skills, personality, aptitudes, self-concept and world-of-work knowledge. *The social system* includes the proximal social system which comprises family, peers, community groups, education institutions, media, and workplace, *the environmental-societal system of influences* consists of political decisions, historical trends, employment market, geographic location, socioeconomic status, and globalisation. The environmental-societal influences distal to the individual are crucial to the social construction of context (Patton, 2008).

According to J. Holland's suggestions, everyone has a Personal Career Theory (PCT), the individualized conceptualization of how careers and work unfold and operate, resulting from their unique life experience (Reardon, Lenz, 1999; Lee, Johnston, 2001), *the collection of beliefs, ideas, assumptions, and knowledge that guides individuals as they choose occupations or fields of study, explains why they persist in them, and is used by people as they go about making careers decisions* (Reardon, Lenz, 1999, 103). Everyone has assumptions of what will contribute to successful, satisfying work and non-work activities, and how to achieve career and life goals (Lee, Johnston, 2001).

PCT's can range from weak, primitive, incomplete and invalid to strong, valid, complex and comprehensive, it is functional, if the strategies used by individuals to pursue their career development are effective (Reardon, Lenz, 1999; Lee, Johnston, 2001). Understanding of client's perspective (or PCT functionality) is crucial to decide what kinds of interventions might be useful based upon how well client's PCT is serving them, because interventions might range from simply providing additional information and support, to helping restructure client's individual PCT. Individuals with functional PCT may simply *need suggestions as to how to access specific occupational information such as occupational information, job leads on the internet, resume preparation, and/or emotional support*, clients with problematic PCT's (e.g., problems in decision-making, work adjustment, or career planning) need to help *addressing basic assumptions and reworking their PCTs* (Lee, Johnston, 2001, 180).

D. Brown suggests that *the subjective frame of reference of human beings is the only legitimate source of knowledge. Events occur outside human beings. As individuals understand their environments and participate in these events, they define themselves and their environments* (Brown, 2002, 14). *Knowledge is constructed within the individual in relation to their experience, and cannot be taught ..., theory cannot be applied to individuals; they construct their own personal theory* (Patton, McMahon, 2006, 162).

Thus, understanding of career influences is crucial for individual's proactive engagement in and effective management of his or her own career-building process. Authors of STF suggest career counsellors to discuss each career development influence from the STF *with reference to the client's understanding of its presence within his or her career*, as well as to provide *a discussion of how the client understands the interaction between influences in his or her life* (McIlveen, Patton, 2007, 232).

In the empirical part of the research we found out that distribution of career self-assessment of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers does not statistically significantly differ from the normal distribution (Kolmogorov – Smirnov  $Z=1.252$ ,  $p=0.09$ ). Central tendency indicators of the career self-assessment ( $M=2.11$ ,  $SD=1.32$ ) show that the respondents choose response options that were closer to the negative assessment to assess their career – 29 respondents (63%) choose the assessment that was less than the average one, 7 respondents (15% of respondents, 5 females and 2

males) were of the opinion that their careers were unsuccessful, 2 respondents used the maximal mark ("5") to describe their career success (4% of respondents, 1 female and 1 male). Differences of career self-assessment between the gender subgroups were not statistically significant (Mann-Whitney  $U=161.0$ ;  $p=0.88$ ), statistically significant moderate correlation was found between the respondents' level of education and their assessment of career (Spearman's rho ( $r_s$ ) is 0.33,  $p=0.02$ ). It means that those respondents with a higher level of education assess their career success higher.

As for assessment of the necessity of further career guidance, there are statistically significant ( $\chi^2=6.87$ ;  $p=0.03$ ) differences between male and female assessments. More than a half of males (5 respondents) and approximately one fourth of females (9 respondents) state that they do not know whether they need further career guidance, 21 female respondents (57% of the total amount of female respondents) and only one person of male respondents acknowledge the necessity of guidance, 7 female respondents and 3 male respondents give a negative response to the question on the necessity of further career guidance. In total 14 respondents chose the option "don't know", 10 respondents chose the option "no", and 22 respondents chose the option "yes". It has to be pointed out that the assessment regarding the necessity to have career development assistance is not related to the career assessment. Comparing the career assessment in separate ("don't know", "no", "yes") groups, good assessment congruence was found ( $\chi^2=0.53$ ;  $p=0.77$ ). The necessity of further career counselling is related to respondents' level of education. Although differences are not statistically significant ( $\chi^2=8.74$ ;  $p=0.13$ ), it can be seen that as the level of education increases, the necessity for further career building assistance also increases.

Comparing assessments of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers regarding importance of goal-directed career management, it was found that there were statistically significant differences among the gender subgroups (Mann-Whitney  $U=750.5$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Mean value of the female group ( $M=4.08$ ,  $SD=0.92$ ) is higher than that of the male group ( $M=2.78$ ,  $SD=1.40$ ). Statistically significant moderate correlation between assessment of respondents' level of education and importance of goal-directed career management ( $r_s=0.37$ ,  $p=0.01$ ) was found. In general it means that those respondents with a higher level of education assess significance of conscious, purposeful career management higher.

Table 3

### Central Tendency Indicators of Career Management Competencies

Competency	Mean	Standard Deviation
Build and maintain a positive self-concept	3.22	1.13
Interact positively and effectively with others	3.61	1.06
Change and grow throughout life	3.43	1.00
Participate in lifelong learning supportive of career goals	3.54	1.22
Locate and effectively use career information	3.52	1.09
Understand the relationship between work, society and the economy	3.00	1.44
Secure/create and maintain work	2.67	1.35
Make career-enhancing decisions	3.07	1.02
Maintain balanced life and work roles	3.43	1.24
Understand the changing nature of life and work roles	3.26	1.31
Understand, engage in and manage the career-building process	3.26	1.37

Respondents describe their career management competencies as average (Table 1), the ability to secure/create and maintain work has the lowest assessment, the ability to interact positively and effectively with others has the highest assessment. Distribution differences of career management

competencies regarding gender subgroups are not statistically significant (all calculated Mann-Whitney  $U > 112.5$ ;  $p > 0.13$ ); comparing self-assessment of career management competencies within the educational subgroups using the Kruskal-Vallis Test, statistically significant differences are not found (all calculated  $\chi^2 < 7.49$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ).

Individually assessing each career management competency within a context, statistically significant moderate correlation was found between the level of respondents' education and their readiness to *participate in lifelong learning supportive of career goals* ( $r_s = 0.40$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). It shows that those respondents with a higher level of education assess their readiness to participate in lifelong learning supportive of career goals higher.

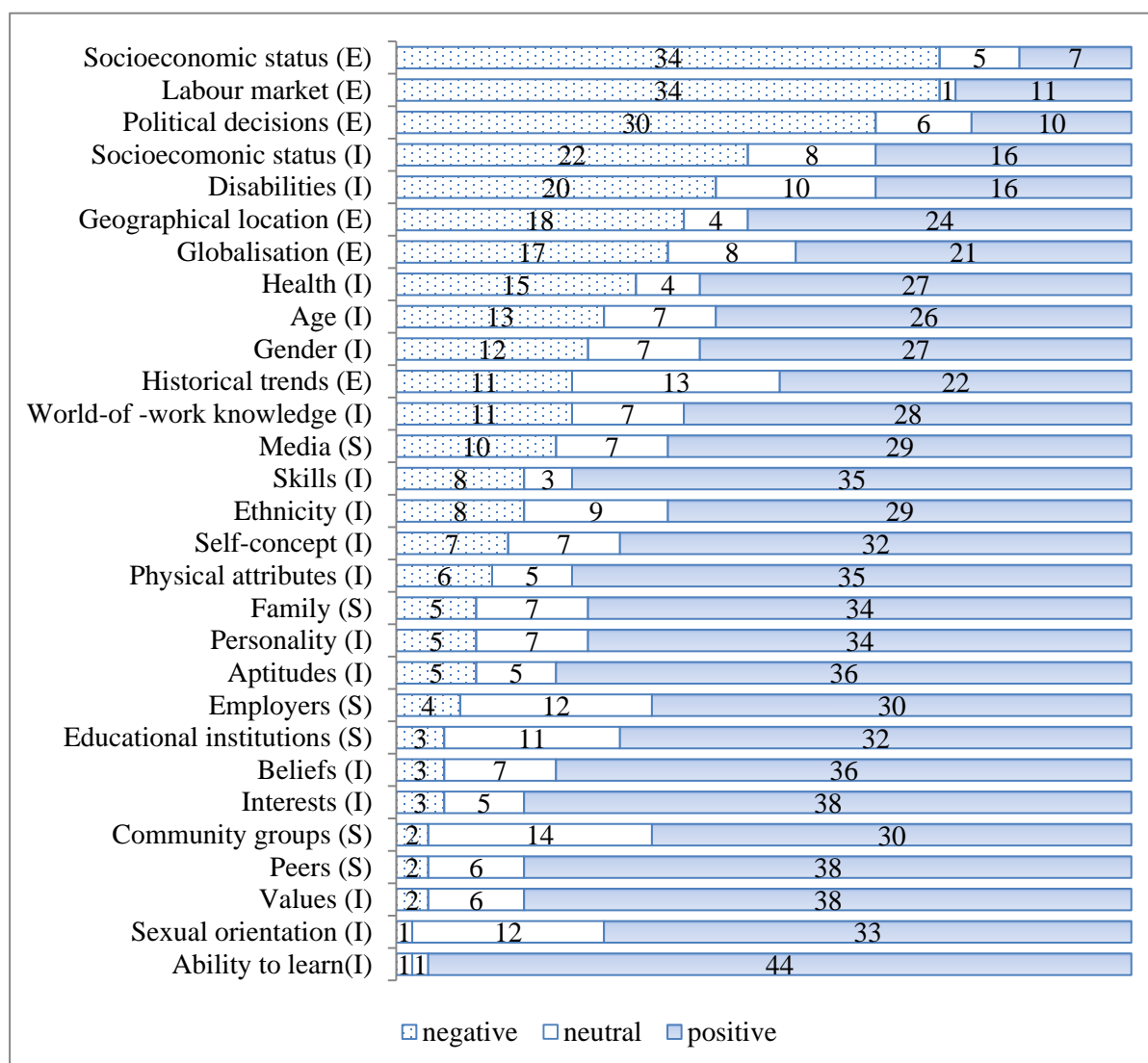


Figure 1. Distribution of career influences self-assessment of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers (number of respondents, sample size N=46) (I – individual system of influences, S – social system of influences, E – environmental-societal system of influences).

The long-term unemployed social benefit receivers are of the opinion that the most significant factors negatively influencing career development during the survey are as follows: socioeconomic and political environment, labour market, as well as a social and economic status of the family, geographical location and globalization; positive influence, in its turn, is ensured by the ability to learn, values and interests, as well as by peer support (Fig.1).

Distribution differences of career influences regarding gender subgroups of the long-term social benefits receivers are not statistically significant (all calculated Mann-Whitney  $U > 103.5$ ;  $p > 0.08$ );

comparing self-assessment of influences using the Kruskal-Vallis Test, statistically significant differences among the educational subgroups are not found (all calculated  $\chi^2 < 5.59$ ;  $p > 0.13$ ).

The older respondents are, the more negative is their assessment of influences of their gender ( $r_s = -0.55$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), health ( $r_s = -0.39$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and especially – the age ( $r_s = -0.75$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) to career development, also the number of negative assessment regarding globalization influence increases ( $r_s = -0.35$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ). Those respondents who are unemployed for a longer period of time assess political environment as a career influencing issue more negatively ( $r_s = -0.43$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

## Conclusions

When developing support programmes for the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers, it is recommended to consider the following conclusions of the research:

- Self-assessment of career (as defined by respondents themselves) complies with the normal distribution, a major part of the respondents considers their career as at least satisfactory; it means that it is necessary to research career perception of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers further.
- The major part of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers sees the elements of distal, *environmental-societal* system of influences as the most negative, cumbersome factors which, according to the results of the theoretical study, only partially influence development of individual career; however, they are significant in order to develop the context of career development. The major part of the respondents sees their ability to learn, their values and interests, as well as the peer support as the most significant positive career influences.
- The long-term unemployed social benefit receivers do not assess significance of the immediate social environment as career influence sufficiently, a lot of respondents point to the community groups and educational institutions as to neutral influences, which, together with the *environmental-societal* system which has been acknowledged as negative environment for career development, create threats of social outlawing.
- The respondents assess their career management competencies as average, and the abilities to interact positively and effectively with others ( $M=3.61$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ) and to participate in lifelong learning supportive of career goals ( $M=3.54$ ,  $SD=1.22$ ) are assessed higher, however, readiness to secure/create and maintain work is assessed lower ( $M=2.67$ ,  $SD=1.35$ ).
- The long-term unemployed social benefit receivers with a higher level of education express greater readiness to assume responsibility for development and management of their career ( $r_s=0.37$ ,  $p=0.01$ ), likewise they show greater readiness to participate in lifelong education ( $r_s=0.40$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), as well as to accept help rendered by career support professionals.
- The female long-term unemployed social benefit receivers express greater readiness to assume responsibility for their career management than male, comparing assessments regarding importance of goal-directed career management, it was found that mean value of the female group ( $M=4.08$ ;  $SD=0.92$ ) was higher than that of the male group ( $M=2.78$ ;  $SD=1.40$ ), differences among the gender subgroups is statistically significant.

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