

Importance of Career Services in Job Searching Process for Long Term Unemployed Social Benefits Receivers

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Abstract: Career Services should have serious impact on the job searching process for long-term unemployed social benefits receivers. Long-term unemployed social benefits receivers are able to participate in variety of career services at State Employment Agency, free of charge. The aim of the study was to define how long-term unemployed social benefits receivers use career services and do they evaluate them as helpful and important. 44 long-term unemployed social benefits receivers were asked to fill in the questionnaire in order to get information about their experience in using career services (have they ever used them; if yes – how often; does it helped them; are these services helpful; how did they find out the information about it). 26 of the respondents do not know about the possibility to use career services, but those of them (6) who have used them are not sure that it was helpful for them. Results show that career services that are available for long-term unemployed social benefits receivers are not designed for marginalized and unmotivated group; the variety and possibility to obtain them is not enough; the main problem is lack of information about such services for long-term unemployed social benefits receivers.

Keywords: career service, job searching, career management, long-term unemployed.

Introduction

In order to start the research the author needs to define the group of people that are called “long-term unemployed social benefits receivers”. The long-term unemployed social benefits receivers are able-bodied persons who have received monthly benefits for 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.

All of the long-term social benefits receivers are Employment Agency clients as it is asked by the law (Sociālo pakalpojumu..., 2002). Employment Agency provides such career services for the clients:

- career planning (includes variety of different tests, which are created with the aim to find out the right field for job searching; to identify job searching strategy; to find out strengths and weakness in job searching process);
- job searching (includes instructions for creating CV and letter of motivation);
- labour market analysis (shows main tendencies in labour market);
- face-to-face sessions with career counsellor (Darba meklētājiem, 2016).

Most of them are online services and only career counsellor is available for face-to-face sessions. Each session is limited to 45 minutes and you need to make an appointment at least few days (mostly week or even more) before.

In Social Service long-term unemployed social benefits receivers are able to receive social worker consultations; psychologist sessions are available only having some severe conditions (victims of violence, clients after loss of relatives). Being long-term unemployed is not a severe condition to receive psychotherapy (in Social Service terms).

Long-term unemployed are on the margins of the labour market – being out of the business for 12 months or even more, their chance to become full-time employed day by day is decreasing the longer the period (Krueger, Cramer, 2014).

Career services are a new tool in job searching process, especially in Latvia, there is no habit to seek for a help of career counsellor because of our historical background (a lot of long-term unemployed social benefits receivers still do not know about such service and do not understand the importance of it).

Career services are now widely common and obligatory for long-term unemployed social benefits receivers. There is no holistic system in job searching process, it is asked from the client to find a job as soon as it is possible. Rarely some of the long-term unemployed social benefits receivers get some

rehabilitation or any other treatment they need. Being unemployed for more than 12 months does not always mean they do not want to work, very often it means that they have more in-depth problems, which need to be cured. European Commission Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion department emphasize that one of the key steps in successful job searching process is “providing each registered long-term unemployed with an individual in-depth assessment to identify their needs and potential at the very latest at 18 months of unemployment” (Employment, Social..., 2016).

When making investigation on long-term unemployed social benefits receivers and their ability to find a job it is important to emphasize such a term as *employability* - a useful person-centred psycho-social construct for reemployment research, as employable individuals may suffer less psychological harm from job-loss and subsequent unemployment, may more likely engage in job search and more likely gain high-quality reemployment (Fugate, Kinicki, 2004). That is the topic that should be gone through with career counsellor or main goal of any career service – client should become *employable*. Career service should work not only on technical things (CV and motivational letter writing, going through vacant places online), but also identify clients’ fears and doubts about being employed, working on social skills.

Since there is no historical habit of seeking such type of help, it is important for institutions to promote it as regular service which needs to be done if such problem occurs. Institutions that are involved in job searching activities should promote more information and message that it is possible not always to find a job, even if economic situation is positive. Some individuals might have different problems with searching, finding and holding a job and there might be a lot of different reasons – health (also mental) issues, fears, and anxiety, physical or emotional abuse in the past. All this issues should be analysed by professionals and treated properly. Every long-term unemployed social benefits receiver should be prepared to start working and it is the aim of career services.

In the meantime, when a lot of new projects according to career services start in Latvia it is important to know the opinion of the direct potential (or existing) clients of the system about the topic.

Speaking about modern services and institutions that are working with unemployed there should be clear understanding that unemployment is a very costly problem for both – society and individual, it can create even more complicated social problems and that’s why government always will be ready to hire professionals and provide institutions and services with the aim to reduce the level of unemployment (Koen, Klehe, 2012). Because of the pushed idea and wiliness to reduce the level of unemployment the government policy sometimes might be aggressive and not oriented at the individual that is why it is important for professionals to try to push out to the decision making institution right ideas, techniques and methods for correct and effective work with long-term unemployed.

The aim of the study was to define how long-term unemployed social benefits receivers use career services and do they evaluate them as helpful and important.

Methodology

A survey developed by the author consist of 6 questions which represent respondents experience, knowledge and attitude towards career services they are able to receive. The participants were also asked to specify their gender, age, length of unemployment and level of education.

Questions respondents were asked to answer:

1. Do you know about possibility to obtain career services?
2. Have you ever used them?
3. Has anyone (professionals from the institutions) invited you to participate in that type of services?
4. Are career services important activities in job searching process?
5. What kind of services could help you find a job?
6. Do you know any other types of career services available for unemployed?

The current empirical research was carried out in one of Riga Social Service departments. 44 long-term unemployed social benefits receivers took part in this research. The participants of research were following: 31 female (70.5 %) and 13 male (29.5 %) between the age of 22 to 58 (Mean (M) = 39.88, Standard Deviation (SD) =10.4).

Results and discussion

Being middle-age unemployed, with no job experience for at least 12 months in a row means a lot of anxiety and fears in job searching process, in similar way employers are looking at long-term unemployed individuals coming applying for job interviews – most of them are not used to them and are not able to tell good stories about themselves, as well as explain why they should be hired instead of the other applicants. Unfortunately, society has very active, strong, negative stigma about long-term unemployed social benefits receivers – most of the time they might be called lazy, addicted, poor-educated, and not-willing to change and take responsibility for their own lives. In some ways it is partly true, but there are some other important issues that need to be taken into consideration while working with long-term unemployed social benefits receivers in order to help them to get into working track again. Previous researches shows that the least trained and that's why the weakest part is work with self-efficacy or goal of getting positive and strong self-efficacy. This is crucial element of positive self-determination and, as a result, most likely positive job interview experience and positive outcome of this interview (Aysina, Maksimenko, 2016).

Since the only possible career service is career counselling at the State Employment Agency more than a half of all registered unemployed are using this service (Laskova, Brokane, 2014). Even more than 70 % of all registered unemployed are willing to attend additional language training, and not only Latvian language (for Russian speaking inhabitants) is the top choice, a lot of unemployed are choosing English, Norwegian, German and Swedish in order to go to work abroad in the future. While offering any type of service for long-term unemployed social benefits receivers it is important to realize their reasons for taking part in those services - work, career, or personal achievements are pushing people to use services.

The background of the 44 respondents, who are long-term unemployed, shows that most of them have secondary education (34 respondents), 8 of them have higher education and only 2 of them have primary education. Unemployment periods vary starting from 12 months to 123 months.

Answering the first question 18 respondents (only female) mentioned that they do know about available career services for them, 26 (13 female and 13 male) respondents do not know about available career services, but all of the respondents are registered at the State Employment Agency and they should be aware of available career services.

Answering the second question "Have you ever used them? [career services]" only six respondents (female) answered positively. 38 respondents replied that they have never used any career services (female – 13; male – 25).

Answering the third question "Have anyone offered you to use them [career services]?" 20 respondents (female) replied positively and 24 (female-11; male -13) replied negatively. It doesn't fit the answers received to the first question, it is not possible to be offered to use the service and not know about it, otherwise, some of the respondents might considered that knowing about service means participating in it. This reply doesn't fit into reality of State Employment Agency, because it is obligatory for every registered unemployed visits career counsellor at least once, so it should be offered to all of the respondents and explained what it means and why it is important to agree and participate. Another explanation is that many of the long-term unemployed social benefits receivers are unemployed for so many months and years that they just can't remember what was offered to them so long ago.

Answering the fourth question "Are career services important tools in job searching process?" only 8 respondents (female) answered positively, 36 respondents (female – 23; 13 – male) consider career services as not an efficient tool in job searching process. It is not a surprise, because the average age of the respondents is 39, but career services have a bit less than 10 years' history in Latvia. There was no such thing as "career service" when personality and habits of respondents were building up.

Answering the fifth question "What kind of career service you know [besides State Employment Agency]?" all of the respondents replied negatively. Long-term unemployed social benefits receivers often visit Social Service and State Employment Agency. The only offer State Employment Agency has is career counsellor sessions; Social Service does not offer career services. For future Social Service development, it would be very helpful to add career services (at least to offer career counsellor sessions). The author considers that every long-term unemployed social benefit receiver needs to have their own

development plan and career counsellor might be a great support. Development plan might be a free will on a paper that could be a good guide, created by the long-term unemployed social benefits receivers themselves. There is an opportunity to create it without any support and help, but considering that all of the respondents are unemployed for such a long period it means that they have some difficulties with planning and, maybe, with putting their plans on a paper and following them. Answering the last question “What kind of services can help you find a job?”, received data are described in Table 1.

Table 1

Additional possible assistance for job searching

| Possible Service | N, respondents |
|---|---------------------------|
| Additional Latvian language classes | 14 (female – 8; male – 6) |
| PC using classes | 8 (female – 7; male – 1) |
| Health services (dental care programme) | 16 (female 7; male – 9) |
| Sessions with psychologist | 3 (female) |
| Opportunity to re-educate | 29 (female – 20; male -9) |

According to the table above, most of the respondents wish to get involved into re-education system. The average age of the respondents is around 40 years old and it means that they got their qualification in the 1990s, since then labour market has changed dramatically – a lot of new skills and knowledge are asked from employees, some of the professions do not exist anymore or transferred into technics and IT related. It also might be related with the respondents’ wish to get more educated in PC using field since now even shop sales assistant are required to use it on a daily basis, but for those who got education in 1990s and don’t use it in everyday life (for long-term unemployed social benefits receivers it might be very topical because of the low income not all of them are able to buy PC for home use and pay for the Internet); it might give additional insecurity going into job interviews and tests. In this research stereotype that women are worse with working with technics is not proved– from 8 people mentioned PC classes as tool to opportunity find a job 7 were women, they are willing to introduce new technologies to their life, but not always able to do so. The biggest issue is health problems, since health care is free of charge only for kids in Latvia, getting cured in adequate way becomes privileged, which can be taken only by few of the long-term unemployed social benefits receivers. It is not a surprise that dental help is mentioned as primary – there is no possibility to get discounts on social benefits for using dental services, but they are the most expensive medical treatment that average human need to get done. Dental health problems give a lot of insecurity for long-term unemployed social benefits receivers, because of such problems it is hard to participate in job interviews and give a good first impression – since major problems with teeth creates negative image in general. 14 respondents mentioned additional Latvian language classes as service that can help them to find job – 25,8 % (Latvijas iedzīvotāju..., 2016) of inhabitants in Latvia are native Russian speakers and some of them can have problems with fluent Latvian because back then it was possible to get an education only in Russian (Latvian – as additional language), for 10 years now all secondary schools have 60 % of the school programme in Latvian, so in the future this problem should disappear. Only 3 respondents mentioned a need of private sessions with a psychologist that might be not a lack of problems that can be solved by attending that type of support, but a lack of habit to identify individual’s inner problems and possibility to solve them in order to move forward not only in emotional context, but in life in general.

Overall, respondents mentioned that in order to get a job they need a re-education possibility, but at the same time they don’t see career services as a needed tool in job searching process, which means that they are not able to understand fully what it means to receive high quality career service. Probably, it is not a problem of long-term unemployed social benefits receivers; it is mostly a problem of a lack of information about career services (availability and general information about what career services can do). State Employment Agency should work more on informing society and their clients about what exactly career counselling can give to unemployed – it is not a re-education process, but it is, definitely, an education, which broadens up mind and brings new ideas on how to cope with future and deal with problems.

According to the authors experience in direct work with long-term unemployed social benefits receivers, the portrait of this client group and their attitude to any attempts of help or services that are provided for them is mostly negative or neutral. It makes it harder to work and to achieve some changes and positive

result. The author considers that the use of career services should be based only on free will, when long-term unemployed are send to career counsellor as way of punishing – it is waste of time for both – professional and client. Any career services are based on deep, inner work that client should be doing with career counsellor guidance, sad truth is that only a few of long-term unemployed social benefits receivers are ready for it and are unemployed because of some complicated reasons, most of them have inadequate wishes for future work and are not willing to find a job, they more likely are satisfied with the lifestyle they have and are making fiction of job searching in order to keep receiving social benefits. That is a huge problem of social security system in Latvia and it needs to be changed dramatically, unless we want to wait while society is ready for changes.

Conclusions

Career services are not widely common among long-term unemployed social benefits receivers and they are not considering it as an important and useful tool in job searching process, but there are some important features and keynotes that should be taken into consideration while working with this target group:

- most of the long-term unemployed social benefits receivers are not aware of a possibility to use career services as a tool in job searching process;
- long-term unemployed social benefits receivers do not consider career services an important and useful tool in job searching process;
- long-term unemployed social benefits receivers consider more realistic services useful and needed in order to find a job (free dental services, re-education, additional language or IT courses);
- State Employment Agency and other institutions providing career services for unemployed should invest in popularization of their services for long-term unemployed, because the employment of this group is extremely important for the budget of municipality and government.

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