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IS CAREER REALLY PLANNED?

Abstract

The current work context implies the challenges of a globalized world, where the successful adaptation to uncertainty and instability can involve situations that result from chance, as well as actions voluntarily taken in order to transform random events into opportunities. The objective of this work is exploratory, framed by the model of planned happenstance, analyzing the role of chance and initiative in the career. The participants were 20 adults, aged between 30 and 35 years, with more than 5 years of work experience and with higher education. Semi-structured interviews were carried out and submitted to a content analysis with NVIVO software. Findings indicate a high frequency of “chances” resulting from informal contacts with friends, former colleagues or employers but also from unpleasant and external events such as unemployment or the extinction of the previous job. Participants reported personal initiatives that resulted in career opportunities as the scheduling of meetings with acquaintances, making visible the willingness to change and the availability to make the initial objectives more flexible, participating in work or leisure activities not directly related with the desired functions. The analysis of the collected data highlights the role of chance and of the initiative of the individual in the construction of his career, as predicted in the Krumboltz model.

Key words: Planned Happenstance; Career; Initiative; Unplanned events

Introduction

With globalization and the fourth industrial revolution (Hirschi, 2018), the contextual factors over which the individual has no control has increased, implying that the number of career transitions that an individual is going through is significantly higher in this generation than in previous generations (Chudzikowski, 2012). In this sense, the process of adapting to the present context involves situations that result from mere chance, flexibility of career goals (Van Esbroeck, 2008), and the performance of actions that individuals can voluntarily undertake to create job opportunities (Krumboltz, Foley, & Cotter, 2013).

Although without much impact into the career counseling theory or practice (Patton & McMahon, 2014), the planned happenstance model (Krumboltz, 2009; Krumboltz, Foley, & Cotter, 2013; Krumboltz & Levin, 2004, 2010) can gain new prominence in the current context of total unpredictability. In fact, for Krumboltz,

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random events and the actions of individuals in the sense of building career opportunities are present in the construction of individual careers. These authors argue that the number and nature of employment and training opportunities are very often the result of environmental events that are generally beyond the control of the individual (Krumboltz, 2009; Krumboltz, Foley, & Cotter, 2013; Krumboltz & Levin, 2004, 2010). In fact, some studies report the role of chance or unplanned events in career decisions (e.g., Bright, Pryor, & Harpmam, 2005; Hirschi, 2009; Kindsiko & Baruch, 2019; Scott, & Hatalla, 1990).

Understanding the role of chance and/or uncertainty in career development and the perception of these “random” events as learning opportunities that occur from the moment of birth and continue in a pattern that alternates between the predictable and planned and the unpredictable and unexpected (Capuzzi & Gross, 2017; Patton & McMahon, 2014) can be a key element in career counseling processes. For this reason, for Krumboltz (2009), more than planning, it is important to be available for “the chances” that become opportunities.

The individual can thus integrate unplanned events in own career and understand the importance of developing and applying his skills of curiosity, flexibility, optimism, persistence, initiative and the ability to take some risks (Krumboltz, Mitchell, & Gelatt, 2011).

The aim of this work is exploratory, analyzing the role of chance and the actions taken by oneself in the careers of individuals.

Research questions

The following questions are addressed in this paper:

In the career path of graduated adults, was there a contribution of incidental or unplanned events?

In the career path of graduated adults, was there a contribution of own initiatives to create opportunities that were favorable for career progress?

Method

Participants

The participants were 20 adults, 10 men (50%) and 10 women (50%), graduates, aged between 30 and 35 years old with more than 5 years of work experience and with higher education. 4 with degrees in Pharmacy, 4 in Psychology, 6 in Management, 2 in Economics and 4 in Chemical Engineering.

Procedure

Data collection was carried out according to international research ethics, namely informed consent, voluntary participation and the use of the data

collected only for research purposes. The participants were informed about the goals of the research prior to give their consent and all of them confirmed their voluntary informed consent to participate in the study. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, in Lisbon, in 2019. Demographic data were collected. The name of the participant was omitted.

These interviews were semi-structured and were constituted by two open questions:

1-Which incidental or unplanned events contributed most to your career path?

2-What initiatives of yours have created career opportunities that you have taken advantage of in your career path?

Data analysis

To analyse the qualitative data, content analysis was used since it permits to make inferences from specific characteristics of a message, using systematic procedures and objective description of the message contents (Bardin 1993; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The semantic criterion was chosen and a deductive and inductive approach was combined in the analysis of qualitative data. After transcribing and reading all the interviews, this content analysis was carried out, with the aid of the NVIVO software, in order to identify themes and categories that represent the content of the interviews emerging from the interview script itself.

The content analysis (Bardin 1993; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) carried out on the participants' interviews allowed the extraction of 2 major categories that are broken down into 8 subcategories each, i.e., 16 subcategories in total that will be presented below. After the 15th interview, saturation was verified, and new categories did not emerge.

To test the reliability of this system of categories and subcategories, it was tried by two judges who independently analyzed and categorized 10% of the registration units, taken from 4 interviews. After this analysis, the categorizations performed by both were analyzed, permitting to conclude that the consistency between the judges was 0.80, which means that they used the same categories in 80% of registration units.

Results

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the categories and subcategories found from the content analysis to the interviews, in response to question 1 - Which incidental or unplanned events contributed most to your career path?

Table 1. *Category 1 and subcategories emerging from content analysis*

Category 1	Fortuitous or unplanned events with an impact on career
Subcategories	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Casual meeting with friends 2. Casual meeting with people I had worked with 3. Unexpected unemployment 4. Dissatisfaction with the functions / company / management 5. Invitation from someone I have worked with 6. Find an ad related to my area of studies 7. Change of spouse's job 8. Temporary jobs / functions

Table 2. *Category 1 subcategories and indicators. Frequencies*

Subcategories	Record units	F
Casual meeting with friends	Conversations with colleagues at a symposium " "Conversations with friends, where opportunities are perceived" "Reunion with a longtime friend" "Conversation with friends and colleagues" "Talk to friends from college"	8
Casual meeting with people I had worked with	"I happened to meet the president of a company where I had previously worked"	1
Unexpected unemployment	"They didn't renew my contract" "The company extinguished the job" "Bankruptcy of (...)" "The fact of being unemployed" "Not having a job with my Bachelor's degree"	6
Dissatisfaction with the functions / company / management	"I was tired of my previous job" "Dissatisfaction with the salary"	3
Invitation from someone I have worked with	"Not losing contact with former employers has given me the opportunity to have my CV running by several people and being contacted by many of them" "I was recommended by one teacher" "It was a colleague who remembered that I would probably be the person indicated and gave my contact to the Manager " "To be recommended to a place by an old boss"	4
Find an ad related to my area of studies	"Casual internet search" "I saw it on the internet, when I wasn't even looking for anything"	2
Change of spouse's job	"My husband's job change"	1
Temporary jobs / functions	"Replacement of (...) during license" "My boss went to another company and her place was vacant" "I accepted a position for a limited time and then ended up staying" "Demonstration of talent and effort in a specific position in a temporary job"	4

In relation to the first question that was asked to the interviewees (Which incidental or unplanned events contributed most to your career path?) it appears that the subcategories that appear most frequently (13) are related to the importance of informal networks: conversations, casual encounters with friends or former colleagues, invitations from friends or people with whom individuals had already worked are many of these fortuitous events.

However, the situation of unemployment also arises with high frequency (6), revealing that the accidents that act as career determinants are often a reactive response to an unpleasant event external to the individual - unemployment, extinction of job position, company bankruptcy, etc. The acceptance of temporary jobs or the temporary replacement of colleagues has also an important role in creating opportunities with a positive impact on the career and is mentioned by 4 participants.

Furthermore, considering the content analysis of the data collected with the second question (What initiatives of yours have created career opportunities that you have taken advantage of in your career path?) the category 2 emerges - own initiatives that contributed to create career opportunities and 8 subcategories, presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. *Category 2 and subcategories emerging from content analysis*

Category 2	Own initiatives that contributed to create career opportunities
Subcategories	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Schedule meetings with people I know 2. Sending spontaneous applications 3. Communicate to friends / getting people know the desire to change 4. Going to interviews even without having much interest in the job 5. Habit to always consult the ads 6. Be available for geographical or job changes 7. Social networks 8. Participate in associations / actions / projects

Table 4. *Category 2 subcategories and indicators. Frequencies*

Subcategories	Record units	F
Schedule meetings with people I know	"Calling people" "A lunch I booked with my former mentor at the first company" "schedule meetings" "Call a colleague" "Didn't lose contact with former employers"	6
Sending spontaneous applications	"I heard a lecture about a company and I was interested. I personally went to speak with the speaker and try to know how I should do so I could apply to this company" "I remade my cv and sent it to several laboratories" "Spontaneous submission of resumes" "Spontaneous application"	4

Communicate to friends / getting people to know the desire to change	"Having informed a friend that I was available" "Talk to friends from college"	2
Go to interviews even without having much interest in the job	"I decided to go to the (...) interview with little conviction that it would be my decision to move so far" "To risk going to an interview, even though the job didn't seem ideal" "Going to an interview for a job that was not what you wanted" "At the beginning it was not an attractive project, but I took a chance"	4
Habit to always consult the ads	"See job ads even when I wasn't looking for a job" "Casual internet search"	2
Be available for geographical or job changes	"Being available to change my residence to in the Algarve" "Availability to travel, namely to Angola" "Replacement of (...) during birth license" "I accepted a position for a limited time and then ended up staying" "Demonstration of talent and effort in a certain position in a company where I knew from the start that I would not stay for long"	5
Social networks	"LinkedIn"	2
Participate in associations / actions / projects	"I volunteered to help with the projects of some friends" "I developed knowledge of other languages"	1

The analysis of the responses reveals that most of the initiatives that translate into career opportunities result from the creation of meetings / contacts with known people and from making public the availability and interest in changing. Significant is the fact that personal contacts are more prominent than social networks, although these also reveal importance for these unforeseen career changes. Proactivity, in various ways – initiating personal contacts or sending spontaneous applications - appears as a major factor in the definition of career paths.

The data collected also highlights the importance of the ability to be flexible in the face of non-ideal situations "I went to an interview, even without having a strong belief that I could get the job", "My plans are flexible" and of accepting changes, being available for travel or for geographical changes. The acquisition of new skills - mastery of new languages - is also noteworthy.

Discussion

The analysis of the collected data highlights the perception of chance events and of own initiatives as influential factors in career decision making. These findings are consistent with earlier work revealing that individuals can benefit from chance or unexpected personal events by recognizing them, and acting according to the expected outcomes (e.g. Bright, Pryor, & Harpmam, 2005; Hirschi, 2009; Kindsiko & Baruch, 2019; Scott & Hatalla, 1990). It also makes clear

the importance of establishing and maintaining formal and informal contacts, at work and outside work, since it is often from this network that opportunities arise. In addition, it emphasizes the need to flexibilize objectives, attitudes and behaviors in order to more easily adapt to changing contexts.

Therefore, considering the challenges and unpredictability of this era in which the only predictable factor is the change itself, workers will have to appeal to their adaptability skills (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996), will have to adapt and flexibilize their career goals to cope with the real context (Hirschi, Herrmann, & Keller, 2015; Hirschi & Vondracek, 2009) and will have to appeal some fundamental skills to transform events in opportunities.

In this context, the question arises: "What is the role of the career counselor?" Probably more important than helping to make a decision at the moment, will be to build change in clients, helping them to develop work habits and personal qualities that will lead them to create a professional satisfying life in a changing world of work. The promotion of skills to deal with unpredictability and to manage own careers, facilitating adaptability and the abilities to take advantage of unexpected events and create opportunities should be one of the goals of career counseling. According to Mitchell, Levin and Krumboltz (1999), these skills are availability to take risks, persistence, curiosity, flexibility and optimism. As stated by Krumboltz and Chan (2005), career counseling must also include the confrontation with dysfunctional and maladaptive beliefs and help clients to develop beliefs and attitudes that favor proactivity, flexibility and, consequently, employability.

This study is not without limitations since the data are based on self-report of a convenience sample. Relations of the perceived chance events and proactivity with sociodemographic variables as gender, educational level, attributional style or age could be the aim of future studies.

Conclusion

Overall, this study supports the concepts of the planned happenstance model, contributing to reveal that there is a role of chance and initiative of the individual in the construction of professional career. These findings suggest that, despite the diversity of contexts and the occurrence of negative events, the individuals' agency, their skills and proactivity can contribute to a satisfactory career path. Therefore, career counseling goals and techniques must stimulate clients for action (exploration), as this can generate unplanned events that can be seen as opportunities for career advancement.

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