GUIDED ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR KNOWING AND PRESENTING YOURSELF

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Abstract

In this article, the process of creating the seminar, „Knowing yourself and making a career decision", is described and evaluated. The main objective is to illustrate the significance of a theoretical approach to designing a seminar, both from a form- and content-oriented aspect. We operationalize self-knowledge as self-concept information in order to measure the effects of the seminar. The formal aspect of the seminar is connected with the selection of activities that lead to realization of objectives of the seminar. Using CIP model and careership model, we created our own model that led us to choose activities connected with production (lectures, type I exercises, testing, interviews) and processing of self-concept information (lectures, type II exercises, discussion). Upon literature review, we decided on the seminar's topic, i.e. content aspect (identity, values, lifestyle, interests, skills, and abilities). For the purposes of evaluation, we created a questionnaire that measures competencies before and after the seminar considering various career domains (job-finding activities, learning through work experiences, knowledge of competences in the labour market, career goals, knowledge and skills related to the seminar). The sample consisted of 53 participants from five seminars. The results of the research confirmed the hypothesis that seminar-participants produced more self-concept information in self-assessment of their own competences after completion of the seminar. We also extracted main skills for self-management of one's own career: the ability to identify one's own competencies; adequate verbal formulation of competencies and relevant personality traits, reviewing relevant self-concept information in the context of career decision making; preparing relevant self-concept information for presenting yourself in a résumé and interview.

Keywords: *career competences, learning from experience, seminar evaluation, self-knowledge, metacognition*

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Introduction

Literature does not offer sufficient research considering the process of thinking and problem-solving in the process of creating a specific seminar. This article aims to describe the process of creating a specific career seminar that would help students develop career competencies prior to graduation. When we look at career seminars for students, we usually find seminars about how to write a **résumé**, how to write a motivation letter, how to behave during a job interview, etc. A question to ask ourselves is: What is missing in those lists? All these seminars aim to teach students how to present themselves. However, in order to present ourselves properly, we need a high level of self-awareness and proper communication skills. Even though the topic is rather important, there are almost no seminars organized regarding this issue.

We[2] decided to fill the gap and create a seminar with the aim to teach students self-knowledge in order to be able to present themselves later on. The next question pertains to how we communicate the self-knowledge described with the words "know yourself". Answers can be found in the concepts defined within cognitive psychology. The self-concept is a construct developed to describe the totality of a person's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, ratings, and predictions about themselves as an experiential object and as a participant in interaction with the physical and social environment (Havelka, 1992). This definition clearly links self-concept to the social environment. No one is isolated from the environment in which one lives, so any self-concept is a product of social experience and contributes to interpersonal relationships (Babić & Kordić, 2014).

We did review the literature about self-concept, especially the relationship between self-concept and interpersonal relationship, emotions, presenting to others, knowing oneself, etc. In order to be able to measure the learning process during the seminar we had to operationalize a self-concept and we decided that every bit of knowledge about oneself, which we call self-concept information, would be a unit of measure. We developed a model of self-concept information management in the service of career management as the basis for creating the seminar "Knowing yourself and making a career decision ".

When designing the seminar "Knowing yourself and making a career decision", in order for the thinking and decision-making process to be evaluated an evaluation procedure that tracked changes concerning self-concept information in participants before and after the seminar was developed. Further in the text,

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we will describe the phases of that process: use of model of self-concept informa-tion management to create activities of the seminar, use of the literature review to extract topics of the seminar, developing an evaluation procedure, research results, and conclusion.

Activities of the seminar "Knowing yourself and making a career decision"

In designing the seminar, it was first important to determine the circumstances in which the seminar would take place and who the participants were. Nowadays, it is important for an individual to permanently continue their education and training, to develop competences in order to better self-manage their careers, especially because job changes are relatively frequent. Therefore, we were inter-ested in an individual approach to a career management. Secondly, we targeted a population of the final-year college students who have little or no work experi-ence. Thus, we started from the fact that "getting to know yourself and making a career decision is a personal matter and will come to the fore in people who take an active role in managing their careers and who invest in education to develop their competences" (Babić & Kordić, 2014, p. 44).

We needed a theoretical approach that explained cognitive processes we used during the process of acquiring self-knowledge and making a career decision. We relied on the CIP (Cognitive information processing) model (Peterson, Sampson, Lenz, & Reardon, 2002) and the careership model (Hodkinson, Sparkes, & Hodkin-son, 1996), and created a modified model we called model of a self-concept infor-mation management in career management context (SCIM). This paper illustrates the main structure of these models in brief. CIP model has four components: the domain of self-knowledge, the domain of occupational knowledge, the domain of decision-making skills (general information processing skills – CASVE: commu-nication, analysis, synthesis, valuing, execution), and the domain of executive processing (metacognition). The careership model has three dimensions: lifestyle choices (depend on social environment), progress of the individual over time (de-cisions made in the light of changes in the environment), and social interactions with others (decisions made in a social setting).

Our model uses three domains of CIP model (self-knowledge, self-concept information processing skills, and metacognition), and social environment and social setting from the career model. We operationalized self-knowledge as all the information that one uses in describing and understanding oneself, and we referred to it as self-concept information. Self-concept information is formed and changed under the influence of spontaneous experiences through social interac-

tion and social influence. We differentiated between two kinds of social influences on self-concept information: standardized experiences (self-knowledge acquired through standardized situations in which one evaluates information about oneself in a specific domain of self-knowledge, such as psychological testing), and perceptions of others (about one's own characteristics).

Regarding the self-concept information processing skills, we differentiated between two main phases: production (of self-concept information collected for further use) and processing of information. Processing includes extraction (extraction of career-relevant self-concept information), categorization (grouping of self-concept information into categories), analysis (detecting links between categories), synthesis (highlighting important career topics), and conclusion (highlighting significant career implications).

We viewed metacognition as a theoretical understanding of a particular experience-grounded basis presented through self-concept information organized in a meaningful whole, and as a knowledge of procedures that aid us in acquiring self-knowledge and making career decisions. Thus, metacognition denoted two groups of phenomena: skills for self-concept information management and knowledge about the process and procedures by which we come to conclusions about ourselves.

To cover all these elements of the model of self-concept information management, we proposed various relevant activities to be a part of the seminar. Primarily, we used lectures to develop knowledge about the process, thus developing metacognition. For the production of self-concept information, we used type I exercises, namely testing and interviews. For the processing of self-concept information, we created type II exercises. We used discussion for developing metacognition and information processing skills. However, in order to create concrete activities, they had to be organized in regard to the topics meaningful for self-knowledge.

Extracting topics of the seminar

Review of relevant literature enabled us to extract the following areas of self-knowledge: identity, values, lifestyle, interests, skills, and abilities.

Identity is important, because it pertains to a person's belonging to certain social groups and points to the different roles that people play in life. For example, gender, age, nationality, marital status, education, occupation, and the like, represent different aspects of identity. Furthermore, identity also includes work experience. We presented our identity with two Type I exercises, "Who am I?" and "Work biography".

Values are important because they direct people toward higher goals, help them choose between different alternatives, and serve as general standards for evaluating behaviour. One feels good when one behaves in accordance with one's value system. That is why values are also significant for a career. One strives to synchronize their career with their values. The activities we created to cover the topic of value included "List of peak and work values", "Questionnaire Values", and "Me in the future".

Lifestyles reflect the dominant orientation of a person in consuming time and money (Babić & Kordić, 2010). Career has a significant impact on lifestyle. It was represented by the exercise "My lifestyle".

Interests indicate a person's focus on activities that bring them pleasure. Usually a person chooses education and occupation according to their interests. We represented this topic by "Questionnaire Interests".

Assessment of personal abilities and skills is also important to decide whether one could do a job well or not. We think that it is important that one listens to close people about their advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, assessment of abilities and skills was represented by "Questionnaire Skills" and by the exercise "Interview with a close person".

All these activities are important for the production of self-concept information. After passing these activities, every seminar attendee had a database full of self-concept information. Now we needed the activities that will help process the collected data, which are described in the next chapter.

Processing self-concept information

It was easier to develop and create activities for production of self-concept information, than to create activities for its management and processing. A database in MS Excel was created for the process. In the top row, we named columns. The first column was self-concept information, the second one for code, the next seven columns were for activities pertaining to production of self-concept information, and the last one for categories. We entitled the activity 'Coding and Categorization'. Participants were asked to read written material from previous activities and mark every self-concept information with a sign, i.e. code. They had to put information in column "self-concept information" and a code for that information in the column "code". Participants were the ones who decided on the type of code they would use. After that, they had to write frequency in the column for particular activity. When they went through all the activities, extracted all the

self-concept information and put them in the database, we could see the activities they participated in and the frequency of self-concept information.

The next step was to read self-concept information and see how it could be grouped. Grouping depended on a way of thinking and an implicit theory of personality. Every participant wrote the categories in the far-right column "category". After writing categories, we were able to sort the data according to categories and see how many self-concept information loaded every category. In a group setting, we discussed each case and categories, whether they were well chosen and what could have been the alternatives. Once a satisfactory solution was found, we proceeded to the next step.

The next activity was named Highlighting topics. Participants were asked to look at categories and to think about main topics connected to the relationship between their personalities and career. We recommended the use of divergent thinking. This step proved to be difficult when a participant had a low amount of self-concept information and a narrow range of categories. As previously stated, the seminar was aimed towards students near the end of their studies. Even though we expected to have somewhat different audience, i.e. profiles among the students, it is possible that we got a spectrum of personalities with various intelligence types, due to a number of factors.

After highlighting the topics, the participant's task was to integrate self-knowledge and discuss some career implications (activities "Integrating self-knowledge" and "Performing career implications"). This was a highly creative step and usually needed the support, direction, and suggestions from the seminar leader. All these activities were part of a group discussion meant for learning from the group process and exchanging opinions, suggestions, and solutions. The next step was for the participants to carry out career implications.

Evaluating the seminar "Knowing yourself and making a career decision"

In the previous chapters, we described the process of creating a specific seminar. We highlighted the importance of theories and models, especially about cognitive processing, topics connected with self-knowledge, and about learning processes. We operationalized self-knowledge through self-concept information (relevant to measure the quality and effectiveness of the seminar). We suppose that knowing self-concept information would enable self-assessment of one's own competencies. The objective of the seminar "Knowing yourself and making a career decision" was for participants to achieve better processing of self-concept information in the context of independent career management.

Evaluation means the systematic application of procedures and techniques to determine whether a particular activity has achieved the goals for which it was initiated (Weiss, 1998). In our research, we had to evaluate success of the seminar through participants' achievements connected with the seminar. We established a clear connection between objectives of the seminar and indicators that measure them. Therefore, we decided to use test-retest situation and measure self-concept information before and after the seminar among the various career domains. We created a questionnaire that measured competencies through self-assessment. The hypothesis was that seminar participants would produce more self-concept information in self-assessment of their own competences after completion of the seminar.

We saw the production of self-concept information as an expression of verbal fluency that signified the creation of a large number of ideas and helped in creative process of finding different solutions to a particular problem (Feldhusen, 2002). In evaluating the seminar, we tried to avoid a kind of questionnaire that measures the quality of seminars on a superficial basis. For example, the increasing trend of customer satisfaction research to assess the quality of service used and in evaluating educational programs (Blackmore, 2009). Critics indicate that the questionnaires used are most often aligned with teacher-centred models of teaching (D'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997; McKeachie, 1997), and largely inconsistent with learner-centred models (Kolitch & Dean, 1999). We tried to avoid what critics said that is not commonly included in the questionnaires: the types of questions concerning the increase in student knowledge, the extent of lecturers' encouragement for feedback from students, and expectations of workload (Davies, Hirschberg, Lye, & Johnston, 2010).

We also tried to avoid questionnaires with Likert scale because of a non-content-related component of systematic measurement error; for example, the tendency to give positive answers to items irrespective of the content of those items, which is called acquiescence (Watson, 1992). There are two kinds of explanations for acquiescence, from motivational and from the cognitive perspective (Knowles & Gordon, 1999). From motivational perspective, the reason could be that respondents try to avoid either a negative self-image or possible condemnation from the researcher. From the cognitive perspective, respondents do not fully reflect on items of a questionnaire.

Method

The survey was conducted with questionnaires on a sample of the final year students from Belgrade who participated in seminars "Knowing yourself and making a career decision" (N = 53). Five seminars were organized with two seminar leaders. Seminars lasted for two months, comprised of two-hour weekly meeting.

We created questionnaire grouping items based on the following topics: (1) self-assessment of personal job-finding activities (informing); (2) self-assessment of learning through work and similar experiences (competences gained through experience); (3) knowledge of competences and their importance in the labour market (competences sought by employers); (4) career goals; (5) self-assessment of knowledge and skills related to seminar "Knowing yourself and making a career decision" (test: what they want to gain; retest: what they gained); (6) self-assessment of fulfilment of expectations from the seminar (only in the retest).

We used quantitative analysis by measuring and comparing number of self-concept information used in test and retest situations (topics 2. – 4.). We also used qualitative analysis (topics 5. and 6.) for assessing changes.

Results

The first career domain "informing" consists of only one question, self-assessment of information on employment opportunities. This was also the only item given in the form of a five-step Likert scale, so that it was easy to make a comparison between the test and retest situations. In the test situation, the measured average response was $M = 3.69$ and in the retest situation $M = 4.04$. The difference of 0.35 was statistically significant at the .001 level (see Table 1).

The second career domain "Competences gained through experience" began by listing the past work and similar experiences. Seminar participants on average had between three and four work experiences before graduation. This information provided the basis on which participants made self-assessments of their own qualities that had emerged through work and similar experiences. The number of traits, abilities, and skills listed in the retest situation ($M = 7.69$) was more than two and a half traits than that the reported one in the test situation ($M = 5.13$). The result was statistically significant at the .001 level (see Table 1). In order to observe the qualitative change, we counted which traits listed in the test situation were repeated in the retest situation. We found that the number of repeated traits on average was 2.12 per participant.

Table 1. Self-assessment of competences in career domains

Career domains	test	retest	difference	F	Sig.
Informing	3.69	4.04	0.35	13.369	.001
Competences gained through experience	5.13	7.69	2.56	15.128	.001
Competences sought by employers	4.65	6.35	1.70	26.642	.001
Career goals	2.42	3.33	0.91	14.205	.001

The third career domain was "Competences sought by employers". The number of competences listed in the retest situation ($M = 6.35$) was more than one and a half traits than that reported in the test situation ($M = 4.65$). The result was statistically significant at the .001 level (see Table 1). We found that the number of repeated traits on average was 1.71 per participant.

The fourth career domain was "Career goals". The number of goals that were set when thinking about future employment also increased between the test ($M = 2.42$) and the retest ($M = 3.33$) situations for almost one goal more and the result was statistically significant at the .001 level (see Table 1). The number of the repeated goals on average was 1.15 per participant.

We did a qualitative analysis of the fifth and sixth domain related to the gains and expectations of the seminar "Knowing yourself and making a career decision". We grouped the answers into categories that showed directions of change in participants connected with the seminar:

1. a change in positioning of priorities;
2. a change in the way of formulating and explaining one's own traits;
3. changing the perspective of looking at oneself, making oneself aware;
4. increased security in oneself;
5. a change in direction of managing one's own career;
6. appreciating opinions of others about us;
7. a change in direction of evaluating one's traits;
8. a change in direction of making new career decisions;
9. a change in direction of concretization of one's career;
10. change in communication with people;
11. a change in direction of differentiation with respect to competitors;
12. corrective experience.

When asked to give feedback about the seminar, the participants showed great satisfaction. For example, one of the participants said, "I went to the seminar out of curiosity, so didn't have high expectations. I am pleasantly surprised, and it exceeded my expectations".

Discussion

The results of our research confirmed the hypothesis that the seminar participants would produce more self-concept information in self-assessment of their own competences after the completion of the seminar "Knowing yourself and making a career decision". We found effects in every career domain. Participants focused their attention on the employment issue during the seminar and, consequently, we have better assessment of job-opportunity information. Participants actively worked on production of self-concept information, and hence we had an increase in self-assessment of one's own traits. Besides that, participants used a significant number of new traits in describing themselves after the seminar was completed. Participants actively worked on processing of self-concept information and that process led to partial change in career goals, and many other changes. We have identified twelve changes based on participants' comments. Guided activities during the seminar developed self-knowledge and self-presentation skills, necessary for self-management of one's own career (prioritizing, formulating and explaining one's traits, self-awareness, career management, etc.), and other areas (self-safety, communication with others, corrective experience). Participants also better identified the important competencies necessary for competitiveness in the labour market and showed a change in the quality of competencies assessed as significant for employers.

We extracted the main skills for self-knowledge and self-presentation necessary for self-management of one's own career: the ability to identify one's own competences; adequate verbal formulation of competencies and relevant personality traits, reviewing relevant self-concept information in the context of career decision-making; preparing relevant self-concept information for presenting yourself in a résumé and an interview. These skills contribute to clear self-assessment and thinking about oneself and safer performance during self-presentation.

The evaluation of the seminar "Knowing yourself and making a career decision" was overall positive. Directly, it meant that the seminar was suitable for what it was created, namely for better processing of self-concept information in the service of career management. However, we wanted to show that the process of creating the seminar and a procedure of evaluation was very important. We suppose that our research indirectly confirms our method of a theoretically designed approach to practical problem solving in creating a seminar and a procedure of evaluation for that seminar. After reviewing the literature, we constructed a model of self-concept information management in the service of career management, as a main model for creating and evaluating seminar. We also used theories about oneself

and about learning to make decisions, about the form and content of the seminar. Nevertheless, we did not discuss a model of learning through experience, which was also important in deciding about the selection of activities and following the cognitive processes involved in those activities. What we could not control was the effect of the seminar leader on the seminar outcome. It could be done in the future research.

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ВОДЕЊЕ НА АКТИВНОСТИ ЗА РАЗВОЈ НА ВЕШТИНИ ЗА ЗАПОЗНАВАЊЕ И ПРЕТСТАВУВАЊЕ НА СЕБЕСИ

Борис Кордиќ

Кратка содржина

Беше опишан и оценет процесот на создавање семинар „Да се познаваш себе си и да донесеш одлука за кариера". Целта беше да се претстави значењето на теоретскиот пристап при дизајнирање на семинар, како од формален така и од аспект на содржината. Ние ја операционализираме самосознавањето како информации за само-концепт за да можеме да ги мериме ефектите од семинарот. Формалниот аспект на семинарот беше опфатен со избор на активности што ќе доведат до реализација на целите на семинарот. Користејќи го CIP моделот и моделот за кариерцво, го создадовме нашиот модел што води како избирање на активности поврзани со производство на информации за само-концепти и обработка на информации за само-концепт. Разгледувајќи ја литературата, решивме да се расправаат теми на семинар, т.е. аспект на содржината (идентитет, вредности, начин на живот, интереси, вештини и способности). За евалуација ние создаваме прашалник што ги мери компетенциите преку самоевалуација на информации за само-концепти пред и после семинарот меѓу различните области во кариерата. Примерок се состои од 53 учесници од пет семинари. Резултатите од истражувањето ја потврдуваат хипотезата дека учесниците во семинарот произведуваат повеќе информации за само-концепти при самопроценка на сопствените компетенции по натпреварот на семинарот. Ние, исто така, извлекуваме главни вештини за знаење и презентирање на себеси неопходни за самоуправување со сопствената кариера: можност за идентификување на сопствените компетенции; соодветна вербална формулација на компетенции и релевантни карактеристики на личност, прегледување на релевантни информации за само-концепт во контекст на одлучување во кариерата; подготовка на релевантни информации за само-концепт за презентирање во биографија и интервју.

Клучни зборови: *клучни компетенции, дополнително образование, професионализам, кариера*