Professional career guidance for women in management
positions in the field of digital competence

Decision-making as a social learning process

The application of social learning theory to career choice processes by John D. Krumboltz is an extension of the general behavioural theory of social learning as formulated essentially by Bandura. It is postulated that preferences regarding education and occupation are the expression of generalised self-observations regarding interests, values and problem-solving abilities based on different learning experiences. Four groups of factors influence decision-making behaviour with regard to career choice and career path:

1. **Genetics** and special talents are determinants that open up or limit the scope for action in education and work. These include ethnic origin, gender, and physical characteristics. Special abilities such as musicality, artistic performance skills, and sporting talent are the result of the interaction of aptitude and environmental experience.

2. **Environmental conditions and events** include the availability of education and training opportunities, jobs, allocation mechanisms, wage systems in different occupations, labour laws, technological developments, socio-political upheavals and influences from the immediate environment, especially educational experiences in the family and peer group.

3. It is postulated that **individual learning experiences** lead to the choice of a specific career path. These learning experiences can be divided into two main categories (cf. Mitchell, Krumboltz, 1994, p. 159; 1996, p. 234): One speaks of 'instrumental learning experiences' when the person is positively reinforced for a certain behaviour and thus tends to repeat this behaviour. After multiple successful repetitions, the behaviour acquires an intrinsic value, so that the external reinforcement is no longer necessary to show it permanently. Associative learning experiences occur when a person experiences an originally affect-neutral event associated with an emotionally charged event. For example, preferences or rejections towards certain professions can be shaped by the direct experience of reinforcing or punishing events in connection with these professions. However, learning also occurs through 'indirect or vicarious experiences', for example through observation or information intake via media. The exercise of observed behaviour depends on the assessment of the expected reward by the environment that is important for the person.

4. **Problem-solving and task-solving skills** are formed through the interaction of learning experiences, genetic makeup, special talents and environmental influences. They include work habits, subjective work standards, and decision rules. They are generally cognitive and practical skills and emotional prerequisites for coping with environmental events.

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The interaction of these four influencing factors leads to generalised beliefs about oneself (self-image) and about the professional and working world (environmental image). These in turn affect how learning new skills, setting goals and acting happen. Generalised self-observations arise from comparing one's own behaviour and its results with the personal values or/and attitudes or abilities of others. Based on the conclusions from this comparison (learning experiences), the person makes generalisations about his/her ability to solve tasks and problems (task efficacy), his/her interests (e.g. "I like to do this …") and his/her values (e.g. "helping others is more important to me than earning a lot of money …"). Generalisations about the living environment are the results of learning experiences that people have made with regard to very specific sections of the environment. For example, such a generalisation regarding the possibility of entering a certain profession could be: "You just have to have the right connections or belong to a certain group to get in there!

Learning experiences in the area of decision-making and problem-solving skills are of central importance for professional competence. These include

- recognising the importance of a decision-making situation,
- the appropriate definition of the task,
- the critical analysis of the generalisations of the self and the environmental segment,
- the consideration of a wide range of alternatives,
- the collection of the necessary information for this,
- determining which of the sources of information are reliable, representative and important for this purpose, and
- the ability to plan and implement the problem-solving process according to these stages.

A person's professional actions are determined throughout life by his or her learning experiences, generalisations and the skills developed from them (cf. Bußhoff, 1989, p. 29).

The social learning theory of career decision making (SLTCDM) also emphasises that career decision-making is influenced by complex environmental factors, e.g. the labour market, which are beyond the control of the individual.

According to Krumboltz (cf. Niles, Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005, p. 75), people choose a particular occupation when …

- ... they are successful in tasks thought to be similar to those faced by those in the profession,
- ... they perceive that professional representatives they value have been positively reinforced for their activities,
- ... a good friend or relative highlights the advantages and good image of the job.

On the other hand, those professions are rejected for which the conditions mentioned turn into their opposite.

In 1996, Krumboltz developed a learning theory of career counselling (LTCC) to support counselling practice in addressing four current trends in the world of work (cf. Mitchell and Krumboltz, 1996, p. 250):

- Those seeking advice need to explore new career opportunities, develop interests and constantly expand their skills. They cannot rely on routine behaviours.

- The counsellor must provide the counselee with stress management skills and development strategies for an ever-changing world of work.

- Guidance seekers are to be guided to active action; it is not enough to make a diagnosis. Many guidance seekers need follow-up support from the counsellor, even after they have entered a profession or job.

- Career counsellors must play a central role in all career challenges and problems, not only in first career choices but also in burnout syndrome, underemployment, cooperation in the workplace, family attitudes to work and lack of self-efficacy in relation to work.

References

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