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Success and proactivity in the professional career in the perceptions of young people

Sukces i proaktywność w karierze zawodowej z perspektywy młodzieży

Abstract

Introduction. Adopting a proactive approach to one's career is now becoming a necessary condition for the effective planning, monitoring, and managing of one's own professional future, and thus increasing the chances of success in the flexible labour market. These issues become especially cognitively interesting in the case of young people who are about to actively participate in their space.

Aim. The aim of the article is to answer the question: how do young people who are in the education system, and are preparing to enter the labour market, perceive their chances of success in their career and what factors determine it?

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Materials and methods. The text presents the results of two studies conducted among adolescents. The sample consisted of university students (N=354) and people studying in vocational schools (N=697). The relationship between proactivity (as measured by the scale of proactive behaviour in a career by Augustyn Bańka) and the characteristics of individuals was diagnosed using specific statistical analysis procedures (Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, V-Cramer coefficient, chi-square test, Student's t-test, one-way ANOVA).

Results. The collected empirical material indicates statistically significant relationships between individual features and socio-cultural and contextual factors that shape the professional behaviour of young people. Among other things, a correlation was found between proactivity and gender, educational achievement, self-esteem, sense of effectiveness, quality of interpersonal relations, identity style, and the assessment of the chances of success in a career, and it was shown that the perception of professional success in subjective terms prevails in the examined young people.

Conclusion. Proactive behaviour increases the entity's chances of success in a professional career, and recognizing the factors that determine it becomes crucial in the context of preparing young people to enter the labour market.

Keywords: success, career, proactivity, youth, young people.

Abstrakt

Wprowadzenie. Przyjęcie proaktywnego podejścia do własnej kariery staje się obecnie niezbędnym warunkiem skutecznego planowania, monitorowania i zarządzania własną przyszłością zawodową, a tym samym zwiększania szans na sukces w przestrzeni elastycznego rynku pracy. Problematyka ta staje się szczególnie frapująca poznawczo w przypadku młodzieży, która przymierza się do aktywnej partycypacji w jego przestrzeni.

Cel. Celem artykułu jest udzielenie odpowiedzi na pytanie: W jaki sposób młodzież, będąca w systemie edukacji i przygotowująca się do wejścia na rynek pracy, postrzega swoje szanse na sukces w karierze i jakie czynniki go determinują.

Materiały i metody. W tekście przedstawiono wyniki dwóch badań przeprowadzonych wśród młodzieży. Próba składała się ze studentów uczelni wyższych (N=354) oraz osób uczących się w szkołach zawodowych (N=697). Rozpoznano związek pomiędzy proaktywnością (mierzoną skalą zachowań proaktywnych w karierze autorstwa Augustyna Bańki) a cechami jednostek, stosując określone procedury analizy statystycznej (współczynnik korelacji rangowej Spearmana, współczynnik V-Cramera, test chi-kwadrat, test t-Studenta, jednoczynnikowa analiza wariancji ANOVA).

Wyniki. Zgromadzony materiał empiryczny wskazuje na istotne statystycznie powiązania między cechami jednostkowymi a czynnikami społeczno-kulturowymi i kontekstowymi, które kształtują zachowania zawodowe młodzieży. Stwierdzono między innymi zależność pomiędzy proaktywnością a płcią, osiągnięciami edukacyjnymi, samooceną, poczuciem skuteczności, jakością relacji interpersonalnych, stylem tożsamości i oceną szans na odniesienie sukcesu w karierze oraz wykazano, iż u badanej młodzieży przeważa postrzeganie sukcesu zawodowego w kategoriach subiektywnych.

Wnioski. Zachowania proaktywne zwiększają szanse podmiotu na odniesienie sukcesu w karierze zawodowej, zaś rozpoznanie czynników, które je determinują staje się kluczowe w kontekście przygotowywania młodzieży do wejścia na rynek pracy.

Słowa kluczowe: sukces, kariera zawodowa, proaktywność, młodzież.

Introduction

Contemporary approaches to professional careers emphasize the dominant role of an individual in the process of their formation (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Campbell, 2000). An individual is supposed to be responsible for planning, monitoring, and managing professional development (Cybal-Michalska, 2015). Therefore, there is a growing interest in the issue of proactive career behaviour (Bateman & Crant, 1993; De Vos, De Clippeleer, & Dewilde, 2009). People with a high level of proactivity focus exclusively on responding to specific events, but above all on improving their situation and living conditions by making appropriate changes in their environment. They set their own goals and consistently strive to achieve them (Green-glass, 2002). Such skills turn out to be desirable in the modern labour market and significantly increase the chances of achieving professional success.

There is a recognised need for research among young people preparing to enter the labour market (De Vos, De Clippeleer, & Dewilde 2009). Taking a closer look at the youth's activities related to professional development turns out to be extremely interesting in terms of cognitive value, due to the fact that in the near future these young people will become the creators of the labour market. Moreover, the analysis of a proactive construct in relation to a professional career allows broadening the perspective of this level of human activity to include various factors relevant to it before they are fully defined or materialized. In the theory of proactive approach, man is perceived as an entity capable of making decisions and acting in the face of predicted situations (Schwarzer & Tauber, 2002). The key criterion for identifying proactive behaviour is therefore whether an individual anticipates, plans, and tries to create a future outcome that affects him/her or the environment.

Most explorations of proactivity and professional success are devoted to adults; professionally active people, who operate within specific organizations (Parker, William, & Turner, 2006; Turban, Moake, Yu-Hsien, & Cheung, 2017). There are few studies analysing how proactive professional behaviours of young people finishing education influence their way of thinking about professional success (De Vos, De Clippeleer, & Dewilde 2009). This article presents the results of research into the level of proactivity manifested by youth and its analysis in relation to the evaluation of their own chances for success in a professional career. The obtained empirical material confirms the thesis that there is a correlation between the level of general proactivity displayed by the respondents and the assessment of their own abilities for professional success. The presented research results allowed us to recognize variables that have a positive effect on the level of proactivity manifested by young people. The collected data enriches the knowledge of vocational counsellors and schools preparing young people to enter the labour market.

Career and young adults in the context of contemporary reality

The construct of “career” has interdisciplinary value. The variety of intellectual conceptualizations of the issues of “career” results from the narratives constituting it, including transformations within theoretical discourses in various scientific disciplines. Additionally, the issue of “career” frequently lies directly within their field of interest (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 2004). The diverse ways of defining and interpreting the concept of “career” constantly reveal new questions, inspire people to search for answers to these questions, and because of them this term is variously operationalized in the empirical sense. The diverse optics of the theoretical and empirical overview of the phenomenon of “career” reveal its structural, processual, and functional complexity.

In the attempt to better define the conceptual category of “career”, it is difficult not to notice the lack of focus and the ambiguity of the semantic senses attributed to this term. Moreover, the distinctive feature of thinking about career is the variety of meanings in which this concept is used. The scope of the term “career” may include its subjective and objective semantic structures, the evaluative (also including negative evaluation, with categories such as “careerist”, “careerism”) and non-evaluative (which is also a determinant of thinking about career as an individual’s “property”) understanding, or the recognition of the issue from the perspective of an organization or a subject.

It is worth noting that the scientific approach to career backs away from the common subjective and evaluative interpretation and presents it in an objective and descriptive way. An analysis of the sources of this kind of narrative, indicates that it is rooted in the context of the selection of a profession as a one-time decision, which acquired a progressive nature by way of evolution, and is consequently associated with any experiences in the professional sphere (Wojtasik, 2003). Therefore, it is considered that a professional career is realized by every person remaining in connection with the labour market, and therefore not only persons performing a given occupation, but also those looking for employment (Arnold & Cohen, 2008) or working for charity. Consequently, we can draw the conclusion that the semantic range of “career” also covers the situation of regression and degradation (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom 2005). The result of this state of affairs is the gradual disappearance of the pejorative labelling of some people as careerists (Szalkowski, 2002). The adoption of the assumption that “career” is equivalent to achieving success and holding prestigious professional positions, would mean that many people would not be able to relate it to themselves due to its elitist nature. It becomes beneficial to accept the thesis of Marek Suchar (2003), who argued, that “it would probably be worth to extend the meaning of the word so that it can cover the entire professional life of a given person” (Suchar, 2003, p. 51).

The contemporary understanding of “career” still maintains its descriptive, but also evaluative nature. However, its perspective and range of meanings has broadened. The subjective dimension refers to the aspirations, and professional needs, of the individual and the feelings in relation to the various events, which they can perceive as a promotion or a demotion. It therefore covers changes in the sphere of self-concepts (Goffman, 1961), and because of that it constitutes a complex plane in the area of definitions, as it contains three complex aspects: the evaluative aspect - associated with the level of satisfaction with previous achievements, the professional aspect – expressed in the increase of competencies, and the self-identification aspect - which constitutes the core of an individual’s professional identity (Bohdziewicz, 2008). The objective dimension, in turn, is further specified by the current conditions in the labour market and is expressed in the form of behavioural identifiers. It is defined by measurable attributes of the position held by the subject, such as skills and competencies, scope of responsibilities, and the fulfilled roles. It is important, however, that both the subjective and objective factors undergo permanent evolution; “revitalization, renewal, and strengthening” (Bańka, 2006, p. 67). Such an approach to “career” stresses the need for the individual’s lifelong learning and improvement. It is worth noting that this process is not only connected with educational institutions, but mainly non-formal spaces to acquire knowledge and intrinsic activity of the entity.

Therefore, the undertaken discourse implies the recognition of the individual aspect in a career. In a world where “individualization means that the person’s biography, liberated from the existing relations, open and dependent on own decisions, is transferred to the individual as a task that they should pursue in their activities” (Beck, 2004, p. 202), an increased importance is ascribed to the subjective dimension of the career, in which it is considered from the perspective of the subject’s “property” (Myszka-Strychalska, 2016). The individuals themselves are responsible for the decisions relating to their professional development (this process is referred to as “externalisation of employment”, “externalisation of development”, or “externalisation of responsibility” (Lipiec-Tomaszewska, 2008, p. 223), and their final decisions determine the career stage that they reached and the degree of the subject’s maturity for a career and their experience (Czarnecki, 1983). The construction of a career by a person, is a “cognitive practice based on individual experimentation” (Cybal-Michalska, 2013, p. 163). That is why it is considered to be “a dynamic process consisting in the constant search for competencies which have a market value and for knowledge useful on the market” (Lanthaler & Zugmann, 2000, p. 201). Aspiring to obtain greater attractiveness to employers the subject is pursuing skills that will increase their chance of acquiring a good position in the labour market. They take on the role of the “entrepreneur” building their own capital of quali-

fications, primarily through continuous improvement (Weick, 1996, p. 45). This perspective fits perfectly into the conclusion proposed by Werner Lanthaler and Johanna Zugmann (2000), who use a metaphorical representation of such a situation, placing it in the context of a stock exchange. In this approach the individual is seen as a one-man micro-enterprise offering its services to contractors. The quality and the scope of these services becomes an important criterion for the classification of the workers (Lanthaler & Zugmann, 2000). A person is therefore obliged to manage their own career. They should also have a relatively specified vision of themselves, be aware of their resources, constantly invest in their own development and have the ability to predict the consequences of the undertaken decisions (Myszka, 2015). In order to fulfil such tasks they should have an adequate knowledge of the contemporary reality and adopt a strategy enabling them to smoothly function within that reality. The presented approach involves elements of innovation demanding a creative treatment, which becomes an additional advantage, improving the subject's competitiveness in the labour market.

Meanwhile, an important determinant of the new paradigm of professional career is the ability to manage one's own capital, manifested in the adoption of a proactive attitude (Cybal-Michalska, 2013, 2014, 2015). The broadly understood flexibility, expressed *i.a.* in the modification of the methods for the implementation of the plan, the ability to find items enabling the individual to meet their needs in any work environment, or the effective bypassing of obstacles, becomes a factor favourable for the individual's development (Bańka, 2000).

Proactivity "is a mode of people's behavior, which indirectly has an effect on the environment" (Bańka, 2000, p. 7). It characterizes individuals who seize the emerging opportunities created by reality. As a result, they easily adapt to that reality and increase their chances of achieving professional success. In addition, they gladly generate change themselves, exhibiting initiative regardless of other people. The possession of proactive competencies enables people to satisfy their needs and aspirations with the use of the resources of their subjective agency. The degree of development of both skills significantly affects the generation of meanings attributed to "career" by the individual and contributes to its increased self-learning competencies.

The reflection on the construct of proactivity in a career turns out to be particularly interesting in relation to young people, who are preparing for active participation in the space of the flexible labour market. The youth undergoing a period of double transition, from the education system to the world of professions and work, and from the stage of adolescence to adulthood, faces the tasks of planning, monitoring, and managing of their own professional future. In this context it is worth noting that the very concept of transition is often referred to as the "entry into adulthood" (Różnowski, 2009, pp. 9-10), which is determined by the individual's achievement of econo-

mic independence. In a situation of widespread insecurity and the emergence of new requirements for potential work candidates, it is primarily the young people who face the challenge of rapidly reacting to the changes occurring. Opportunities for youth to gain employment are increased by the knowledge and skills acquired informally as a result of their own activity. This aspect is particularly important from the perspective of adult education, in which it is recommended that various points of view are taken into account in order to ensure a better understanding of the process of adult learning (Falasca, 2011). Research on the topic of experiences of youth during the transition from education to the labour market, carried out over the last 60 years, has confirmed the thesis that:

young people cope better with the period of school-to-work transition, if they developed in themselves - while they were still students - the awareness of the choices that must be made and the information and plans that are associated with these choices. To put it bluntly, the students who are “looking forward” and “looking around” (Savickas, 1999, p. 327)

develop a greater willingness to look for work and more quickly adapt to the world of work. It should be noted that the observation of young people participating in conditions of uncertainty obliges us to take into account the complex and multidimensional context of their functioning. At this point, it is worth recalling the works of Andy Furlong, Dan Woodman and Johanna Wyn (2011), who draw attention to the interdependence between the “transition” and “cultural” perspectives in research on youth, or those of Johanna Wyn and Hernán Cuervo (2017), who analyse the links between identity, place, mobility, and performativity in determining the position of young people within the social structure. In turn, David Raffe (2011) and David Atchoarena (2000) indicate, that the moment of transition of young people from education to the labour market is conditioned not only by their own choices and skills, but is also related to complicated links with demographic, and political and social processes, which require specific reactions of a structural and an institutional nature (Banerji, Saksonovs, Lin, & Blavy, 2014).

One telling example pointing to the trend of an increasing diversity in the paths of transition from education to work are the prolonged periods of education, periods of unemployment, and employment taken up in conditions where the work contract does not provide stability. Entry into the labour market is considered to be an “unclear event”. It is especially difficult to identify it empirically, in light of the analytically well-defined facts which include events such as “completion of education” and “entry into the labor market” or “leaving school”, and “starting work” (Jacob & Weiss, 2010). In this sense, as stressed by Augustyn Bańka, the term “transition” implies a sequence of processes together making up the maturity for professional life and the development of a profes-

sional career, and covering the methods of transitioning from the status of a student to the status of a (full-time) employee, combining education and work and going through various levels of education, and links with the labour market, and experiences making up the subject's cultural capital (Bańka, 2007).

Methods

The method of a diagnostic survey was used in the research because of the exploratory possibilities involved, which made it possible to acquire a broad knowledge about the characteristics of the selected issue, to learn its dynamics, to recognize its structure, and directions of development. In addition, it contributes to the collection of data on the views and opinions on proactivity and success in the career of the surveyed adolescents. This method favours research carried out among a large number of people and proves to be effective in analysing phenomena that cannot be observed directly.

Scientific studies were conducted on two groups of adolescents preparing to take up employment – students from vocational school complexes¹ and university students. One of the studies was conducted in late May/June 2015 in eleven selected Vocational School Complexes located within the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship and the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship. The research sample consisted of 697 people. The students represented the first, second, and third grades and were aged from 16 to 22 years². Due to the wide exploratory capabilities of the selected research method allowing for the collection of broad knowledge on the characteristics of

¹ Vocational school complexes are understood as basic vocational schools and technical high schools. These types of educational institutions functioning in Poland are upper-secondary schools. The successful completion of such schools entitles their graduates to take a professional qualification exam. After successfully passing the examination, the graduates can take up work in their learned profession.

² At this point it should be mentioned, that the studied group of youth was very diverse in terms of independent variables, such as gender, age, place of residence, family environment (father's education, mother's education, number of children in the family, family's material situation), the school environment (average of school grades, the presence of a career counselor at the school, the school type), the importance of work for the given person, and the forms of spending free time. This article only discusses those in relation to which statistically significant differences were obtained. In this case the statistical analyses were conducted using the Single Factor Analysis of Variance procedure (ANOVA), due to the many comparative categories, and the appropriate test for the two means (Student's t-test or Cochran and Cox-Welch) depending on the result of Levene's test for the homogeneity of variances. The value of $p \leq 0.05$, which is widely recognized in the social sciences, was adopted as the threshold of statistical significance.

the given issues, learning about their dynamics, identification of the structure, and directions of development - the diagnostic survey method was used, which involved the survey technique and the questionnaire survey tool. In the organized research process a random-purposive sampling scheme was used. The layers of the sample were initially determined, including specially selected types of schools, such as the basic vocational schools and technical schools, as well as localities selected in terms of population size (urban agglomerations, large cities, towns, villages). Meanwhile in the next stage, the groups of students (class units) among which the study was conducted were randomly drawn.

The second study was conducted in 2012 among 354 students at selected universities in Poznań. In the presented study, the research sample was also drawn in accordance with the purposive-random sampling scheme. In the first phase the researchers determined the layers of the sample, which constituted purposefully selected fields of knowledge such as (1) humanities, (2) social sciences, (3) legal sciences, (4) technical sciences, (5) medical sciences. In the second stage of preparation of the research sample, specific fields of study were indicated within each of the determined layers. In this way the studied academic youth represented various study courses. These included: in the case of social sciences - the courses of Education, Special Education; in the case of humanities – the course of History, in the case of legal sciences – the course of Law, in the case of medical sciences – the course of Medicine, in the case of technical sciences – the courses of Automation and Robotics, Computer Science, Electrical Engineering. The two stages of sampling presented were conditioned on substantive requirements and resulted from the need to contrast the attitudes, beliefs, and opinions, of students enrolled at the study courses typical for the given field of knowledge. At the stage of the selection of the research sample it was also determined, that in the case of study courses divided into the first and second degree, the survey participants would include the students of the 1st and 2nd years of the 2nd degree master's studies - these were the students of the Faculty of Educational Studies, and the Faculty of History of the Adam Mickiewicz University and the students of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering of the Poznań University of Technology. In the case of study courses conducted exclusively in the uniform master's studies form these were mainly students of the final two years: at the Faculty of Law and Administration of the Adam Mickiewicz University (4th and 5th year) and at the Faculty of Medicine of the Medical University (3rd, 4th, 5th year). The students were aged from 21 to 24 years. For the research sample layers determined in such a way it was also determined that the class groups would be drawn (which was unequivocally associated with the decision on the utilization of the auditorium survey technique in the presented studies). The effective research sample size allows for statistical inference with a statistical margin of error not

exceeding $d = +5$ percentage points in the estimation of proportion in the population.

The research issues related to the aspects of proactivity and success in a career, which have been analysed as part of the undertaken explorations and were focused on the diagnosis of the personality characteristics determining the proactive attitude of the youth participating in the study and its attitude to professional success. In order to diagnose the level of proactivity represented by the studied youth, in the explorations the authors utilized the Scale of Proactive Behaviour in Career prepared by the aforementioned A. Bańka (2000), consisting of 26 statements relating to the above-mentioned dimensions of this construct. Due to the need for the further specification of the category of professional orientation of the students of vocational schools, the authors focused solely on the domain of general proactivity, which allows for the determination of their proactive behaviours, helpful at the time of transition from the plane of vocational education into the labour market, in terms of planning of goals and determining career paths.

A. Bańka also distinguished four factors (constructs) of proactivity which are the structural components of the subject's personality, conditioning the behaviours oriented for the implementation of the vision of one's own career (2000). Among them he included "general proactivity", which is identified with the most durable of the presented tendencies for active behaviours. It primarily indicates the method of constructing one's own "I" in relation to the professional future, based on socialization mechanisms. "Cognitive proactivity in the search for information" is an expression of individual initiative, the goal of which is obtaining knowledge about the social environment, and interpreting it from the perspective of utilizing it for the realization of one's own career. Another factor, *i.e.*, "proactivity in building a support network", is understood as the recognition of environmental determinants which, and identification of specific individuals who, may prove helpful in constructing one's career. The last factor – "proactivity in building mental comfort", indicates the subjective initiative in building relations with other people, whose support is extremely valuable in situations of crises and failures associated with one's own professional development.

In the domain of "general proactivity", describing the subject's construction of a "scheme of one's own self", focused around "positive careerism", openness to one's future self, flexibility towards changes in the surrounding reality, there are ten questions evaluating the attitude of the studied youth group to proactivity (Bańka, 2007), *i.e.*:

- wherever I am, I try to be a constructive force for changes beneficial for my career;
- every day I try through various contacts to strengthen my faith in the chance of developing my career;

- there is nothing more exciting than observing how my career ideas become a reality;
- I'm still looking for new ways to increase the chances for the development of my career;
- I'm trying to be the best in searching for opportunities that would help me start a career;
- I defend my own career ideas even if others oppose them;
- I always look for better ways to make a career;
- I'm trying to recognize opportunities long before others notice them;
- it doesn't matter what are the chances of success in my career, because if I believe in something, I achieve it;
- if I see something in my relations with the world that could harm my career, I try to change it.

Results

People with a high degree of proactivity exhibit resistance to environmental influences and take action as a result of which they lead to the creation of conditions favourable for themselves. In addition, they have the ability to notice and utilize the emerging opportunities, which constitute a chance for their development from the perspective of the current situation (Baňka, 2009). Being aware of their own agency, a subject participating in an environment remains active in relation to that environment, as a result of which they increase their chance to succeed and raise their effectiveness. In the sphere of professional life, a proactive person will exert influence on the amount of their salary, the course of their promotion, on the composition of the personnel, and, above all, will channel their energy on increasing the pace of work, the development of competencies and the implementation of their own professional development plan, which they will follow despite the emerging difficulties.

According to A. Baňka (2009), we are dealing with proactive behaviours exhibited by an individual only when they lead to changes in their environment, which allows for distinguishing the construct of a proactive orientation from a pro-developmental orientation. It is worth noting that while people's pro-developmental behaviours focus on reacting to the impulses of the environment, proactive behaviours attempt to anticipate the events that are about to occur, and are focused on the implementation of a particular objective, whose achievement requires the subject's vigilance. The individual, therefore, takes action with agency, leading to such transformations of reality, which create conditions conducive to the fulfilment of their own needs (Bandura, 2002). They operate independently of other people, independently inspiring themse-

lives to pursue the undertaken projects, while preserving “freedom” from any external pressures. It is worthwhile to emphasize, however, that the projects implemented by their originator do not have negative consequences for the other members of the society in which they exist. What’s more, they have the ability to more easily adapt to new situations, or groups to which they belong.

An analysis of the empirical material showed that the studied youth from the vocational school complexes manifests an above-average level of general proactivity in the largest percentage (34.3%), which means that their involvement “in behaviors aimed at changing their own self by building inner mental strength and harmony, getting them closer to the achievement of their own goals and objectives associated with establishing and starting a career” (Bańka, 2000, p. 47) is largely above-average. Almost every third surveyed person (31.3%) exhibits a high degree of involvement in constructing their own career, and almost every fifth (17.3%) exhibits a very high degree of proactivity in relation to their career. It is worth emphasizing, that every tenth respondent (10.0%) engages in the development of their own professional future to an extent described as “below average”. Similarly, 3.9% of the respondents declared lower than average involvement in the realization of their career objectives. It is therefore noteworthy, that 82.9% of the persons participating in the carried-out explorations see their professional future in categories giving hope for its successful implementation, which is a testament to their extraordinary awareness of the possessed resources and causative capabilities.

Proactive behaviour in varied situations, and flexible and open reactions to any changes can be attributed to the highest extent in the studied boys ($t=-3,828$; $p \leq 0,001$)³, respondents attributing high importance to work (ANOVA; $p \leq 0.001$)⁴ and students who are among the persons achieving excellent, or very good, educational results (ANOVA; $p=0.007$). This regularity also characterizes the representatives of technical high schools to a greater extent than the students at basic vocational schools ($t=-3.434$; $p=0,001$). In addition, the obtained empirical data showed, that people with high self-esteem, exhibited in the sense of own competencies in the cognitive

³ The significance test of differences between Levene’s means was used, examining the homogeneity of variances in the two comparative groups. The significance level of $p \leq 0.05$ was determined. In the case when the p-value was less than 0.05 according to the statistical guidelines, the null hypothesis was rejected and the equality test for means called the Cochran and Cox-Welch test, which is equivalent to the Student’s t-test (used when the variances are not homogeneous), if the p-value turned out to be higher than the assumed significance level, there were no grounds to reject the hypothesis of equality of means.

⁴ In this case, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used, which is used to verify the hypothesis of the equality of means in many comparative groups. The p-value is given in parentheses.

($S; \rho=0.366; p \leq 0.001$)⁵, physical ($S; \rho=0.264; p \leq 0.001$), socio-moral ($S; \rho=0.256; p \leq 0.001$), and characterological areas ($S; \rho=0.338; p \leq 0.001$) (Wysocka, 2011) have a higher tendency for proactive behaviours than subjects with a low self-esteem in these areas. A similar relationship is observed with regard to the sense of self-efficacy in action ($S; \rho=0.267; p \leq 0.001$), which means that the people convinced of the possession of causative powers in the pursuit of the adopted objective are distinguished by their ability to effectively influence their environment. It is also worth noting the existence of a relationship between the quality of interpersonal relationships and the satisfaction that the individual derives from them, and the level of general proactivity presented by that individual. The quality of interpersonal relationships established with other people is also not without significance for the shaping of predispositions for proactive activities in a career. It turns out, that people who feel loved exhibit this personality trait more strongly than young people without such experiences ($t=2.304; p=0,022$). This trait is not differentiated, however, taking into account the variable of the sense of solitude and the frequency of the perceived enjoyment of life.

In these considerations it is not possible to bypass the issue of professional success. While observing the changes of the modern world, we note that it was entered in the specificities of the subject's socio-cultural living conditions. The intensifying processes of individualization of the various spheres of their existence and the chance to become "anyone they want to" mean, that individuals begin to treat reality as a space of challenges "which they should meet, defying whims of fate with their optimism and activity, and seeing reality as a wealth of possibilities in which everyone freely shapes their foundations and their biography" (Świda-Ziemba, 1995, p. 293). By overcoming these challenges, individuals develop a conviction about their own uniqueness and causative potential, which may consequently contribute to the achievement of the adopted objectives, including professional objectives. These trends were confirmed by the results obtained in the studies, because the thoughts and the reflections of the youth participating in the diagnostic survey concerning the indicators of professional success⁶, relate primarily to its micro-structural component (92.6% of all replies), and therefore to the factors located in the individual,

⁵ In the calculations of this relationship, the non-parametric Spearman rank correlation was used, examining the relationship between the variables (the p-value indicates whether this relationship is statistically significant). The positive value of this coefficient shows that with the increase of one type of life orientation, the other one, which is statistically significantly related to it, increases. In turn, the negative value of this coefficient proves that with the increase of one of the orientation types, the other (statistically significantly related to it) decreases.

⁶ Respondents were asked to answer an open question: "Of what person in your opinion one could say that they achieved professional success?", which allowed for the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the obtained resulting material.

who not only is able to act independently to pursue their career, but most of all, takes full responsibility for it. The respondents much less frequently pointed to the meso-structural determinants of success (7.4%), indicating its dependency on the individual's broader surroundings, and did not refer at all to the macro-structural determinants (economic, political, demographic, global) (Firkowska-Mankiewicz, 1997). It is worth noting that this regularity is not an isolated fact. A. Firkowska-Mankiewicz (1997) also pointed out in her explorations that, in accordance with the common societal opinion, it is precisely that group of properties which is responsible for the individual's achievement of success in life. She identifies the reasons for this state of affairs in social conditions, according to which "in everyday language and in the collective consciousness of our civilizational circle there is a relatively universal model for success in life" (Firkowska-Mankiewicz, 1997, p. 304). The faith of the contemporary generations in their own causative potential was also recognized by Hanna Świda-Ziemia (2000), who noted, that success has become an important category of self-determination for youth, decisive for their psychological well-being (Świda-Ziemia, 2000). For the young people the world at the "macro" level becomes increasingly homogeneous and undifferentiated, and at the "micro" level they place more and more of their capabilities in the sphere of choices, because that allows them to preserve their own diversity (Mlinar, 1992).

The life success model proposed by Anna Firkowska-Mankiewicz (1997) also allowed for the examination of determinants of professional success listed by the studied youth from the perspective of its four dimensions: stratification and prestige aspect, material aspect, emotional and affiliation aspect, and self-actualization aspect. Responding to the question posed, the studied young people often pointed to a particular person, who, in their view, achieved professional success; however, the gathered empirical material also allows for analysis with respect to the areas indicated above. Due to its subjective nature and reference to personal life goals, the self-actualization dimension of professional success earned the sympathy of every fifth respondent (22.9%). Contemporary young people, obliged to lead a dual existence in the surrounding reality, are oriented both on the implementation of their own objectives and professional aspirations, and on the fulfilment of societal objectives, aimed at the common good (Wojciszke, 2010). Striving to achieve their own professional aspirations contributes to the person's orientation on the "individualism of self-realization", which according to Zbigniew Bokszański (2007) covers:

a wide variety of decisions and actions of the subject, taking place in a number of areas of their activity. They are justified, supported, and motivated, but also connected by the unquestioned value of "authenticity". It is an axis organizing the biographical strategies of individuals as well as an objective rewarding the undertaken efforts (Bokszański, 2007, p. 51).

The definition of the phenomenon of professional success through the prism of achievements which are a source of satisfaction and thus have subjective significance to the individual, turned out to be the closest to the young people, who are to a large extent oriented towards life-long learning and self-development. The emphasis put on this area of professional success by the respondents also fits perfectly in the modern paradigm of “career” - in which it assumes a subjective nature, which means that the importance is ascribed to is by the individual themselves - as well as in the profile of a person capable of proactive behaviours. In their statements concerning a person who achieved professional success the studied youth definitely less frequently referred to the stratification and prestige dimension (11.6%) and the material dimension (6.2%), while the emotional and affiliation aspect was mentioned least frequently (1.0%).

While the study results did not reveal a statistically significant relationship between the indicators of success identified by respondents and proactive behaviours in a career, the situation was quite different in the context of the evaluation of one’s own potential and chances for the achievement of one’s own professional goals. The subject’s professional satisfaction, and well-being resulting from it, may constitute an effect of the fulfilment of the individual’s needs, goals, and aspirations (Mądrzycki, 1996). It may then be assumed, that young people looking at their own future with hope will likely be more involved in taking action to further their own career, than persons with a pessimistic vision of the future state of things.

The young people studied evaluate their chances of success in a career very optimistically⁷, as evidenced by the fact that more than half of the respondents (59.7%) state that they have an above-average ability to achieve their professional goals. The resulting empirical material allows us to identify relationships between the exhibited level of general proactivity and the studied youth’s assessment of their own chances of professional success ($\chi^2=157.102$; $df=36$; $p \leq 0.001$)⁸. The higher their exhibited level of proactive behaviours in a career, they higher they evaluate their chances of professional success and vice versa – the lower the exhibited level of proactivity, the lower they evaluate their prospects for professional development.

The second of the studies relating to the group of academic youth subjected to scientific investigation indicates, that they are characterized by clearly above average (38.0%) tendency to proactively respond to reality and to take control of their own

⁷ The respondents were asked to answer the question: “What do you think are your chances to achieve professional success?”. They indicated their answers on a 7-point scale, where 0 was equivalent to the lack of any prospects of success in the implementation of professional plans and 6 meant very high chances. This question was inspired by A. Cybal-Michalska’s (2013) studies relating to academic youth.

⁸ The chi-square test was used to demonstrate this relationship between the variables, the level of statistical significance was determined with a value of $p \leq 0.05$.

destiny. This means a high involvement of academic youth in “behaviors aimed at changing their own self by building inner mental strength and harmony, getting them closer to the achievement of their own goals and objectives associated with establishing and starting a career” (Bańka, 2005, p. 47). The focus on increasing one’s own participation in the interference with the environment for the purpose of constructing one’s own career is high in the case of 32.7% of respondents, and even very high in the case of every sixth surveyed person, which indicates extremely high involvement in the development of one’s own career prospects.

The ability to proactively react to various situations, and flexibility and openness to changes are particularly typical for respondents who were among the excellent, very good, or average students in high school (ANOVA, $p=0,010$) as well as students and female students, whose family material conditions were assessed as very good or bad (ANOVA, $p=0,029$). Proactivity as a personality tendency characterized by lasting quality, is the most typical in respondents who perceive career in objective (promotion, power, prestige) or evaluative categories (the meaning of life – “tell me what career you’ve achieved, and I will tell you what’s your price” (Bauman, 1969, p. 7-8)) (ANOVA, $p=0,005$). A proactive behavioural orientation is typical for the respondents with a dominant informational identity style ($S; \rho=0,167; p=0,005$), normative identity style ($S; \rho=0,167; p=0,005$) and identity style representing commitment ($S; \rho=0,230 p < 0,0001$). The analysis of the data concerning the relationship between a proactive orientation and a normative orientation of individualism vs. collectivism revealed the existence of a relationship between proactivity and a subject’s individualistic tendencies ($S; \rho=0,132; p=0,027$).

In the opinion of the studied academic youth, the chances of achieving success in a career are definitely high (75.5%) (“high” - 35.9%, “very high” - 39.6%). And although it is difficult to talk of the development of identical careers, the belief in future career success is highest among young people living in large cities of over 100,000 inhabitants (ANOVA, $p=0,017$), those respondents whose mothers have a Bachelor’s degree or higher (ANOVA, $p=0,005$), and those who declare very good material conditions in their families (ANOVA; $p \leq 0,0001$).

The assessments concerning the chances of success are determined by the quality of the educational reality of the respondents. Respondents, who were among excellent or average students in high school (ANOVA, $p=0,002$) and students who represent the field of medical sciences, technical sciences, or legal sciences (ANOVA, $p < 0,0001$) assess their capabilities and chances of success in a career as significantly higher than in the other studied groups. It is worth pointing out, that the anticipation of success in a career, and additionally the definition of career success in the case of the studied group of youth group, does not necessarily have to coincide with its “objective” definition, which is typical for the functional and structural perspective

identifying career with prestige, power, and material prosperity. Especially since, as J. Pollegrin and C. J. Coates put it, success in the early stages of career development is not usually defined in terms of prestige, power, and income (Rokicka, 1992). In the 2008 study on the professional prospects of law students at the University of Warsaw Elżbieta Łojko emphasizes, that the foundations for the achievement of success in their future careers include: gaining recognition and respect in their professional community, professionalism, a position as a person recognized in the community of lawyers, and investing in social capital, articulated as a desire to “develop professional contacts”. Interestingly enough, the studies on law graduates who have been practicing as judges for 25 years, invoked by that author, provide an interesting comparative material, and allow for the anticipation of changes in the vision of professional success. For lawyers who have been practicing the profession of a judge for a quarter of a century, the work performed is mainly supposed to position them in the social structure. The desire for success is in fact the desire for high earnings, prestige in the professional community, personal satisfaction, professional advancement, and professionalism. It should be noted, that taking into account the temporal dynamics, the construction of the professional identity of lawyers is based on their “objective success” in a career (Łojko, 2011).

The respondents who have not changed their career plans since the beginning of their studies are the most convinced about the potential possibility of achieving career success (ANOVA, $p=0.001$). A linear perception of career prospects is conducive to the anticipation of career success. The optimistic perception of the future in a career is accompanied by an individualistic normative orientation ($S; \rho=0.154; p=0.007$). Young people with a dominant individualistic normative tendency formulate their career goals in terms of self-actualization, development of their own potential, subjective activity, and responsibility for causation, which undoubtedly allows for the anticipation of success in a career seen as the individual’s “property”. The faith in the success of future career events depends on subjective activity. The results of the research allow us to recognize the importance of assessments concerning the domain of life quality satisfaction for the prospects of career success. In the studied group of young persons, it was found that the more frequently the students felt the joy of life (ANOVA; $p \leq 0.0001$) and the more favourably they assessed their life up to that point (ANOVA; $p \leq 0.0001$), the more optimistic they were with regard to their chance of achieving career success. The feeling and the recognition of being loved (ANOVA, $p=0.012$) are not without significance for the evaluation of the chances of success in a career. The importance of the subject’s inner conviction concerning the positive balance of their life for their sense of success in a professional career was noted by Magdalena Piorunek (2009). This author’s research indicates that there is a relationship between the satisfactory

experience of one's own self and their autonomy in decision-making, productivity as defined by Erikson, subjective agency and being internally directed. In the case of the studied academic youth, both the different ways of defining a career, and the aspects of approaching career, do not differentiate the "planning attitudes" of the respondents to the achievement of career success. There is no doubt, however, that the ability to allocate the possessed competences and skills to the work environment will be of fundamental importance for the achievement of career success.

Summary and discussion

The research carried out enriches literature on young people and their relation to career and professional success, because it shows which beliefs they hold about themselves in this respect and which factors influence their way of thinking about themselves. The questionnaire designed by A. Bańka concerning the Scale of Proactive Behaviour in a Career can be successfully used in career counselling. The obtained results are also of practical value. The growing importance of proactive career behaviours indicates that active people can take control of their own development path and undertakings they are pursuing, which can increase their chances of professional success. Recognizing the factors determining proactive behaviours proves to be valuable from the perspective of schools and universities, which focus on preparing young people for active functioning in the labour market.

On the basis of the presented analyses, it can be concluded that the proactive orientation can be considered to be typical for the studied youth from vocational schools and university students, which will probably result in significant benefits for their careers, developed in the world of permanent changes at the stage of adulthood. In a situation where "a man's individualization is a fate, and not a choice" (Bauman, 2006, p. 53) the chance for his development lies in openness to new experiences combined with intentional transformation of the environment in order to create conditions conducive to success. An individual functioning in the space of the contemporary labour market should be aware that:

no job is guaranteed forever, no position is protected from the whims of fate, no profession is resistant to the passage of time, no skills are equipped with a guarantee of market value. The acquired experience can instantly transform from an advantage to a disadvantage (Bauman, 2000, p. 47).

In such a reality, each individual career has the value of uniqueness and individuality, and therefore requires the skilful management of its course.

Having a proactive personality translates into young people's real achievements in terms of professional activity. Compared to people with low proactivity, they find employment more quickly, are self-sufficient in job search and are more effective in manifesting behaviours aimed at obtaining employment (Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy, & Shalhoop 2006). Research carried out on young adults shows that proactive individuals are able to build a coherent educational and professional career by combining various episodes of employment, as they enrich the individual's reflective "project of the self" (Devadason, 2007). In practice, this means that proactive individuals are persistent in their career plans and are able to change their strategy in order to achieve their goals. There is a significant link between proactive career behaviour and a sense of effectiveness (Diehl, Semegon, & Schwarzer, 2006). This perception has valuable educational implications. Actually, it indicates that proactive youth will be able to cope more easily with failures and, basing on the conviction of their competence in the undertaken activities, will use a repertoire of less diverse, but more effective, in their opinion, ways of learning (Velki, Kristek, Vrdoljak, & Jakopec, 2013). This pattern proves that the success of the educational and professional path of young people is not dependent on their knowledge of various strategies of action or responding to changes, but above all, on their way of thinking about themselves and their belief in their own effectiveness and chances for success.

The obtained research results carry many implications for the practice of career counselling, as well as the education system in Poland. The political transformation in our country, which took place after 1989, contributed to a number of (not necessarily beneficial) transformations in the area of vocational education. It depreciated the value of the education obtained through that system, as a result of which young people were reluctant to pursue its offer and often directed their educational choices towards general education high schools. Finishing the latter institutions enables them to continue their education at university level. Today professional qualifications and competencies are becoming one of the main determinants of an individual's success, and are the subject of socio-economic competition of highly-developed countries (Borkowska, 1999). Vocational education turns out to be particularly valuable in this respect, because it provides the subject not only with a general knowledge about the world, but also prepares them to practice a given professional occupation. We are currently observing an increase in public awareness concerning the aforementioned values of vocational education, the sources of which can be found in the dynamic transformation of the labour market, as well as the government's activities aimed at the promotion of vocational education.

The situation of young people in the labour market in Poland has improved over the years. According to the results of the research conducted by the Central Statistical Office, the highest unemployment rate for Poles aged 15-24 was recorded in the first quarter of 2003 - it was then 46,5%, the lowest in history was the second

quarter of 2018 – 10,2%. Currently, it remains at a similar level. It should be noted, however, that young people are the group most at risk of unemployment, compared to other age groups, something which is reflected in the overall unemployment rate, which at the end of 2019 was 5,2%. The likelihood of finding employment increases not only having a higher education, but also specific competences, including proactivity, which may prove helpful in modifying a career plan in case of failure. The crystallization of a subject's professional plans is determined by a number of environmental and individual factors. The rationality of decisions taken by a young person is to a large extent determined by the degree of awareness of the existence of these conditions. Possessing professional knowledge and obtaining specific qualifications ceases to be sufficient in the contemporary labour market. An individual is obliged to permanently create their own professional future, which requires the ability to plan, manage, and simultaneously monitor, the course of one's own career. The volatility and unpredictability of the present reality obliges us to pursue lifelong learning and to adapt to the existing situation. Therefore, it turns out that what is important is not so much for the subject to recognize the current chances of success in the professional field, but to utilize them in the perspective of further development. It is worth noting that in analyses of a professional career one cannot ignore the importance of environmental factors affecting the course of an individual's professional development. In light of Elżbieta Turska's (2014) explorations, among the career determinants we may emphasize the importance of macro-social factors (which include the socio-political system, the social structure, the economic situation and the employment procedure), the environmental factors (family, school, other social environments), individual factors (attitudes, convictions, values, interests, aspirations, attitude towards education and work, the ability to plan one's educational and professional future) (Turska, 2014). Meanwhile according to John W. Santrock (2000), the factors conducive to the shaping of contemporary careers include socio-economic background of the parents, gender, and the ability to cope with emotional tasks during the period of adolescence (Santrock, 2000). It is also important to note the importance of structural barriers and economic recession that hinder the efforts made by an individual in the pursuit of their vision of their own career (Di Blasi, Tosto, Marfia, Cavani, & Giordano, 2016). The recognition of these barriers could provide inspiration for further research explorations.

One opportunity for the shaping of a proactive attitude among young people preparing for active participation in the world of work is certainly the dual system of education based on the idea of cooperation between the corporations responsible for the preparation of staff for the performance of the given profession, and the educational institutions, which jointly determine the content and the scope of education and the number of accepted applicants. The benefits of implementation of such a system

are visible both in the country's micro-economic and macro-economic spheres. Entrepreneurs acquire graduates of vocational schools properly prepared for the practice of their profession, who they can personally get to know during the recruitment process and the apprenticeships, because they often educate them according to their own standards. This means that they directly invest in the development of their own businesses. The student, in turn, has the ability to gain not only theoretical knowledge concerning the given profession, but above all the practical knowledge, which is particularly valued by the potential employers. In addition, he directly meets the likely future superior, shapes his attitude towards work, and acquires the necessary competencies, thereby increasing his chances of gaining employment immediately after graduation. From the economic perspective we can identify benefits including the reduction of unemployment among young people, the compatibility of the education system with the flexible labour market, and the involvement of employers in the process of preparation of their potential future staff, which is conducive to the growth of the country's competitiveness on the international stage.

As a result of appropriate activities in the form of coaching, tutoring, mentoring, or career counselling workshops, young people will be "entering into adulthood" with a conviction that they possess agency, that they are equipped with the ability to flexibly respond to any changes, resulting in increased chances of success in their careers. The construction of an exceptional and unique professional development path requires the individual to adopt a proactive orientation, which determines a proactive attitude.

The presented empirical material was collected as a result of a survey, so it refers to the opinions and beliefs of young people concerning their proactivity and chances of success in their careers. It is worth undertaking further analyses in this area, including longitudinal studies and qualitative interviews, which will allow verifying to what extent these beliefs translate into real actions and strategies for coping with the labour market situation of young people.

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