VARIA   C·E·P·S Journal | Vol.13 | N°3 | Year 2023   213

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1381

People with Special Needs and Career Development Based on Strength

Janez Drobnič[1]

∽   The present work deals with career counselling for people with special needs based on the paradigm of positive psychology, which is becoming increasingly relevant in counselling and therapeutic processes. It is an approach to counselling and working with clients based on the strengths of the individual and represents a paradigm shift – a departure from the approach based on deficits and weaknesses. The empirical study established the prevalence of this approach in Slovenian elementary and secondary school counsellors. The results show that this way of counselling is a new strategy for mobilising various internal sources of strength and a supportive environment, which improves the individual's ability to achieve the best possible self-sufficient education and integration into professional and social life. However, in the case of counselling for persons with special needs, a balance needs to be achieved between a strength approach and others that focus on personal problems and weaknesses.

Keywords: positive psychology, career counselling, people with special needs, strengths

---

1   Faculty of Education, University of Primorska, Slovenia; janez.drobnic@upr.si.

Osebe s posebnimi potrebami in karierni razvoj na podlagi močnih področij

Janez Drobnič

∿   Prispevek se ukvarja z vprašanjem poklicnega/kariernega svetovanja oseb s posebnimi potrebami, ki temelji na paradigmi pozitivne psihologije; ta v svetovalnih in terapevtskih pristopih postaja vse aktualnejša. Gre za pristop k svetovanju in delu s strankami, ki se opira predvsem na močna področja posameznika in predstavlja premik paradigme – odmik od pristopa, ki temelji na pomanjkljivostih in nezmožnosti. Z empirično študijo smo ugotavljali uporabnost tega pristopa pri slovenskih osnovnošolskih in srednješolskih svetovalnih delavcih v poklicnem svetovanju. Rezultati kažejo, da bi bil tovrstni način svetovanja nova strategija mobilizacije različnih notranjih virov moči in podpornega okolja, ki izboljšuje sposobnosti posameznika za čim boljšo samozadostno izobraževanje in vključevanje v poklicno in družbeno življenje. Ob svetovanju za kariero pri osebah s posebnimi potrebami je treba doseči ravnovesje med pristopom, ki temelji na njihovih prednostih, ter pristopom, ki se osredinja na njihove težave in slabosti.

Ključne besede: pozitivna psihologija, karierno svetovanje, osebe s posebnimi potrebami, močna področja

Introduction

One of the key dilemmas in counselling approaches is whether to focus on the disorder, problems, or defects of the individual or to direct the counselling process to the strengths of the individual and his abilities and (in this way) more easily to achieve counselling results and goals (Kosine et al., 2008). Anderson and Schreiner (2004) state that counselling based on the strengths of individual clients is one of the best ways to influence them to develop their abilities and a good way to use their potential to succeed and achieve goals. Focusing on areas where clients have problems or dealing with 'risk factors' could make it harder for them to succeed.

A foundation can be found in positive psychology for the 'strengths' approach. Csikszentmihalyi (2000) argues that positive psychology should be understood as a movement to change the nature of psychology and not as its subdiscipline or specialisation. It aims to rebalance classical psychological discipline by preventing over-orientation to the pathology and dysfunction of the individual and neglecting his strengths and abilities. Positive psychology builds on the pursuit of healthy functioning, positive experiences, and well-being; Linley et al. (2010) call for a move away from the deficit and dysfunction approach to problem-solving in a way that emphasises human potential. Seligman (2019, p. 1) asserts, 'Psychology is not just a study of weakness, illness and injury, but a study of strength and virtue. Healing is not just correcting the broken, it is also nurturing the best in ourselves to solve problems and issues'.

Peterson (2009) says that positive psychology complements traditional areas of psychology without wanting to replace or ignore them. By focusing on the positive aspects of human development, this approach helps to balance other approaches that focus on individual disorders, which can be an obstacle to a holistic understanding of the client. Positive psychology also deals with the issue of positive self-esteem. Mruk (2008) points out that positive psychology has placed great emphasis on promoting positive self-esteem, which is built primarily on what a person knows best, can do, and accomplish. He then sceptically adds that psychologists with less humanistic orientations are less likely to focus on such aspects in their counselling or therapeutic approach.

Some, such as McCash (2006), however, argue that a positive approach has its dominance, particularly in social work as a practical approach based on the use of internal power, so it could be called 'work practice theory' or a model that builds on autonomy and self-determination and relies primarily on individual strength. Such an orientation could also be found in the word of Whemeyer et al. (2017), who emphasises the importance of individual

autonomy, power, and self-determination when working with people with special needs or disabilities.

An increase in interest in the use of positive psychology can be seen at the end of the last century if we focus on the dynamics of bibliographic editions and studies on this topic, which have increased significantly during this time. Peng (2015) states that the increase in interest in positive psychology has grown mainly because this domain of psychology became a central theme of the American Psychological Association in 1998, which popularised a new approach. However, we can assume that this is a response or shift to past problematic practices that have focused exclusively on disease or disorder and highlighted maladaptive behaviour and negative thinking in problem-solving and counselling. The basis for focusing on the abilities and positive qualities of the individual would also be found in other scientific and professional fields and disciplines that put humanism and positive evaluation of the human personality at the forefront.

Positive psychological orientations in counselling were also followed by studies on human well-being and optimal functioning (Littman-Ovadia et al., 2021). Peterson and Seligman (2004) often emerge as authors who have laid some sort of foundation for research on the question of what is and what enables and promotes the character of power and well-being of the individual. The strong influence of positive psychology has quickly spread to various practices and research areas, namely work and organisation (Althouse et al., 2017; Miglianico et al., 2020), employee power profiles (Gander et al., 2012) and career counselling based on benefits (Drobnič, 2018; Littman-Ovadia et al., 2014; Malouff, 2019; Peng, 2015; Sanderson, 2017; Shutte & Whemeyer et al. 2017). In positive clinical psychology, scientists have also revised and reshaped psychopathology and clinical symptoms (Freidlin et al., 2017; McGrath, 2019). Significant shifts have also occurred in school counselling, where the counsellor's focus has become on strengths (Musek, 2021; Norwich, 2013; Soria & Stubblefield, 2014). Similar shifts are also found in counselling and therapeutic interventions for children and adolescents (Quinlan et al., 2012). The field where various forms of research and practices based on positive psychology appear is becoming increasingly more widespread (Littman Ovadia et al., 2021). The narrative is also changing in some areas, such as in inclusive pedagogy, where people with disabilities are people with special needs, and the disabled become disadvantaged people in the labour market.

Theoretical background

Counselling on the principle of power – the impact of positive psychology

Counselling based on strengths offers counselling psychologists new professional opportunities that are often unrecognised and unnamed in therapeutic settings (Smith, 2006). We are certainly talking about an approach to counselling and working with clients based on the strengths of the individual, which represents a paradigm shift – a shift from focus to deficit, known as what is 'wrong' with individual learning, development, career, or other elements.

From the summaries of researchers (Dobrow, 2013; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), it could be stated that benefits are what a person is capable of being. Benefits can be defined as 'positive qualities or skills that promote optimal performance' (Owens et al., 2019, p. 266). To identify the strengths of the individual, various instruments for measuring individual capabilities have been developed for this purpose. Mention is made here of two tests: the VIA-Inventory of Strengths and the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), developed by Peterson & Seligman (2004), which are the most frequently cited tools for identifying strengths and virtues and measuring tools (Ghielen, 2019). They identified and classified the positive psychological characteristics of people, providing a theoretical framework to help understand the strengths and virtues and to develop practical applications for positive psychology. They identified six classes of virtues (i.e., 'core virtues') that underlie 24 measurable character traits (Peterson & Seligman (2004). This model divides character traits into six main groups: wisdom and knowledge; courage; humanity; justice; moderation; and transcendence. Each of these is further divided into three to five character traits. For example, it divides justice into equal treatment, leadership, and teamwork.

However, some researchers are critical of their classifications of strengths and virtues. Consequently, they have been revised or new classification variants have appeared or given other additional categories of advantages, such as spirituality by Schuurmans-Stekhoven, (2011) or Peng (2015).

We must certainly add that there are also sceptics about these new shifts and paradigms in counselling and therapies, as well as opinions that only partially support this new orientation. Some authors (Seligman et al., 2006; Seligman, 2019) state that the effectiveness of such interventions remains to be studied, despite the increase in their use in therapies and counselling. Obviously, merely classifying and defining what is a strength in order to design new ways of counselling and therapy is not enough. Therefore, Linley (2008) sought to

develop and empirically test one method: Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC). Based on the questionnaires, several methods of counselling and psychotherapeutic interventions were developed. Advantage-based counselling (SBCC) for adolescents is an example of an approach based on the inclusion of constructs, including building a therapeutic alliance, strengthening resilience to achieve goals, assessing progress, empowerment, solutions through strategies, and other constructs.

In addition to the above, the importance of the individual's inner psychic energy and strength is also highlighted (Peng, 2015). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2014) emphasise that positive psychology wants to help an individual find his inner psychological energy to serve as a safeguard to combat failures and disasters, as well as to prevent hardships and problems in life so that the individual does not fall victim to depressed mood when facing problems. Not only a positive attitude and technology but also a spiritual dimension is becoming an element in positive counselling approaches. Counsellors are supposed to understand that a person's spiritual dimension can play a role in their life and health.

As part of a positive approach in power-based counselling, other external factors and elements should be highlighted in addition to internal ones, especially the individual's narrower and wider environment (McCash, 2006). The power-based approach should also identify limitations and barriers that could inhibit individual growth and be located in the environment, which is a central starting point of the social model in education and counselling for people with disabilities (Norwich, 2013). These barriers should also be eliminated with the help of counsellors and other support mechanisms and ensure better social integration into the environment (Drobnič, 2018).

We presented the positive effects of the approach in counselling, which is based on the client's strengths. However, criticisms of approaches based on positive psychology should also be mentioned. The first set of critiques focuses on abandoning people's negative experiences and avoiding the problems people face in life (Held, 2004; Power, 2016) and concentrates only on client strengths and positivity or inadequately considering characteristics or constructs of morality and moral behaviour (Fowers, 2008). In their defence, counsellors based on positive psychology state that they do not shy away from real problems and clients' problems and not only explain positive qualities and experiences but are mainly interested in how to use these internal factors of power to solve problems. This provides a better alternative to the model of focusing on human functioning diseases that has recently prevailed in the broader field of psychology (Seligman, 2019; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

Therefore Lopez et al. (2003) suggest that a balance needs to be struck between a strength-and-power-based approach and another that focuses on human problems and weaknesses. They point out that both strengths and weaknesses are real, although the former received less attention until recently. However, counselling and therapy are supposed to be dominated by strengths, which thus become a support and a means by which the individual, with the help of a counsellor, comes to a cure or solution to the problem. Therefore, the sources of power in the individual should be given priority and should be used more frequently in counselling and rehabilitation psychology. Lopez et al. (2003), however, go a step further in emphasising the benefits of power and advantage, arguing that the act of naming and labelling a positive trait and then measuring it, in itself, sends a strong message to the service user that focusing on strengths and benefits is important to him and is a powerful tool for positive assessment, which raises the motivation of the individual to take active action.

Strength and positivity in career counselling

Recognising personal strengths in counselling clients in career planning/career management has long been at the heart of career counselling. Robitschek and Woodson (2006) point out that career counselling could be more developed and implemented knowledge and tools in the field of positive psychology rather than limited to assessing interests, work values and skills as such.

Career counselling is largely based on psychology (Savickas, 2017), although the influence of other disciplines is present, especially sociology and economics, in the history of career counselling and theories (Drobnič, 2018). Littman et al. (2021) state that this paradigm of power or strengths of the individual is drawn from psychology itself, specifically positive psychology, for the purpose of optimal human functioning in the whole set of life areas through the daily use of character traits. Burck et al. (2014) believe that the career counsellor and school counsellor in career counselling rely more on the concept of strengths than in the field of therapeutic work, in particular mental health, which depends more on a medical model focusing on individual illness and deficiency. Similarly, Seligman (2019) states that in managing a career, we need to identify the strengths of the individual, as opposed to the practice of a physician diagnosing a client to determine what is wrong.

Of course, questions arise as to which personal characteristics, strengths, and resources can be used in the context of career counselling, meaning what can help an individual in his/her career decision and further his/her career management. Here we have different approaches and useful models based on positive psychology. We can mention the general models of Peterson and Seligman

(2004) and Holland (1985) and his six-type model of career decision-making, for which the Self-directed search (SDS) test is used or 'Strengths Quest' (Lopez et al., 2009), which focuses on identifying and upgrading students' talents and abilities.

In school career counselling, there is no greater focus on the model of strengths, at least not in the practical field, although specific counselling models such as the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success (2014) have been developed, especially in American schools to promote the growth and development of each student. Although some argue that there is extensive literature to apply these approaches in terms of individual development in the career field (Burck et al., 2014), there are criticisms that these models lack practical methods for implementation in counselling practice (Aulthouse et al., 2017; Mellin et al., 2011). School counsellors point out that psychology and social work are more focused on pathology and the medical model (Mellin et al., 2011) rather than on the power and benefits model (Symeonidis, 2018). The shift in thinking towards strengths, at least on a theoretical level in student counselling, is the emphasis of the Positive Psychology Movement on Strengths and Advantages model, which enables good practice (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Kosine et al. (2008) argue that a purpose-oriented approach to career development is highly consistent with the US National Model ASCA (2014) emphasis on identity development, self-research, effectiveness, and support for student pursuit of personal and vocational development.

Dick et al. (2014) believe that school counsellors could make more use of the foundations of positive psychology in counselling. Positive psychology encompasses relatively extensive literature on which school counsellors could rely in designing career-oriented interventions (Carey et al., 2008). However, they acknowledge that the theoretical basis does not find a place in the practice of consultants because more direct practical guidance on the use of these methods is lacking. Despite empirical studies of considerable empirical basis, the impact of positive psychology methods and positive psychotherapeutic interventions on the school counselling profession has been relatively small (Bolier et al., 2013). Reiner et al. (2013) propose to develop a specific professional identity of a school career counsellor that would be different from the vocation of a psychologist. Several studies are available on the effectiveness of a positive approach in career counselling. One of these is the Littman-Ovadia et al. (2014) study, which demonstrated the success of integrating strengths into career counselling, by which participants, with the help of counsellors, were able to identify and use their strengths to achieve career goals.

Since 2020, the constructivist counselling approach has been gaining ground in career counselling. This approach does not highlight, at least in the narrative sense, the individual's strengths but other aspects of counselling, such as how the client and counsellor work together. This should be primarily partner, unconditional, positive, understanding, with empathy (Amundson, 2009), which does not highlight the authority of the counsellor, his decisive power and directive action but, in contrast, the client becomes the author of his own future story (McIlveen, 2016), from his own experience and relies on his own strengths. Therefore, it is primarily the client who is the decision-maker and constructor of future career episodes, which a counsellor helps him build with a non-directive approach and strengthens the client's autonomy (Savickas, 2017). Undoubtedly, the integration of several branches of psychology could be recognised in these new approaches, specifically the findings of differential psychology in terms of exposing personality traits set by classics of career development theories such as Parsons, Brown, and others, developmental psychology in terms of career stages and role self-concept, according to Super,[2] and finally also cognitive psychology in the careers of the authors Peterson, Lent, and Savickas (Drobnič, 2018, p. 52).

People with special needs/disabilities – their career on the strength's principle

Current approaches to career counselling for people with disabilities based on inability and disorder have proved to be less appropriate, as they do not provide good answers for lifelong careers to successfully meet the challenges of everyday change and integrate them into normal life and work (Drobnič, 2018). The predominant counselling is usually provided as a one-time preparation of a person with special needs for inclusion in working life (Power, 2006) based on the medical paradigm of treatment, which means that vocational decisions revolve around disability. Therefore, we ask ourselves whether we would shift the focus of counselling from the medical paradigm to another related to positive psychology, which would be based on the strengths of this category of persons.

In the education of people with special needs, the focus is no longer on disability or handicap but on positive attitudes and decision-making (Wehmeyer, 2017), as it provides better learning and social integration effects. In

---

2   According to Super (1992), self-image is the culmination of the interaction between the person and the environment. It is a process of the concept of oneself, which is formed through the processes of a) exploration, in which the individual examines himself as such, b) differentiation, in which he recognises the differences between himself and others, and c) identification, which means identification with others, who play the role of a model or an ideal.

the vocational decisions and careers of people with special needs, the medical approach based on vocational rehabilitation is still predominant, which is problematic because:

> He no longer sees man as a whole but above all his disability. This is confirmed by the naming of persons after these defects, such as: paraplegics, dystrophic, mentally ill, which may also be the reason for labelling in a derogatory sense. In the end, the mental pattern of thinking based on what an individual is "unable to do" is adopted by the persons themselves who, in a situation of helplessness and non-competition with the "healthy", identify with this label, adopt it and live with it (ibid., page 180).

A strength-based approach to career decision-making and counselling yields much better results than those based on the medical paradigm of disability and engaging in the context of vocational rehabilitation as a prerequisite for employment (Murugami & Nel, 2012). We have developed a theoretical model for vocational decision-making, career management, and the employment of people with special needs on the principle of strength and advantage (Drobnič, 2014).

If we build a person's profile on strengths rather than on illness or disorder, there will be a shift in focus from weaknesses to strengths, which is associated with optimism that becomes a mobiliser for solutions. (Elder et al., 2018). Therefore, insisting on the medical paradigm and classical approaches in vocational rehabilitation is counterproductive (Novak, 2015), as individuals maintain a negative self-concept, which cripples them and undermines their self-esteem (Drobnič, 2018). People who present themselves as ill, incapacitated, and disabled are also accepted by the environment in the same or similar way (Brejc, 1987). Therefore, it is better to help the individual shift the focus to what he or she can do (Novak, 2015), what he or she is good at or at which he or she excels.

In addition, people with disabilities even show certain advantages (Armstrong, 2012). Thus, individuals with autism have performed better on tests that require focusing on small details within more complex patterns (Huygelier et al., 2018). This means they are better systematisers than empathisers: they are enthusiastic about logical structures and better at sophisticated computer language. Interestingly, students with autism also score statistically significantly better than others on an intelligence test in which subjects use analytical skills to complete a visual pattern, detect visual structures, and mentally manipulate complex three-dimensional shapes (Mottron, 2011).

In another study, people with dyslexia showed the ability to recognise complex three-dimensional objects faster and with greater efficiency than a group of individuals in the normal population (Von Karolyi et al., 2003). Students with learning difficulties also often show higher entrepreneurial skills than average. For example, a survey of American entrepreneurs found that one-third of entrepreneurs reported dyslexia, compared with only one per cent of middle managers in large corporations belonging to the 'average' population (Warren, 2008).

Other categories of disability also show some advantages. Many children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have above-average abilities to search for novelty, which is an important prerequisite for creative behaviour (Boot et al., 2017). Children with bipolar disorder scored higher than other children on a popular test of creative thinking (Simeonova et al. 2005). People with Williams Syndrome often show well-developed musical abilities and interests; children with intellectual disabilities often have emotional and personality-related benefits. Down Syndrome, for example, has been described as 'Prince Charming Syndrome' because of the friendly attitude and smiles of these individuals, with this genetic difference that completely 'disarms' many (Dykens, 2006).

Student autonomy is an important factor in the context of learning (Mohammadi & Mahdivand, 2019)). According to Wehemeyer (2017), raising the individual's own power, strengthening autonomy, and the ability for greater self-determination are important for the successful education, independent living, and employment of people with special needs. He describes empowerment as a psychological increase in the power of an individual or group, which often involves developing self-confidence in one's own sources of power. Empowerment in the field of the raising and education of people with special needs is when a person acquires a feeling that he is increasingly able to make decisions about his life and put these decisions into practice.

Given the above findings on the use of positive psychology in counselling and therapy, which means a departure from the prevailing medical paradigm of impotence to the power and strength of the individual, we were interested in whether career counselling practice for people with special needs in Slovenian primary and secondary schools' principles of strength, advantage and ability, or a rehabilitation medical approach that focuses on disability and incapacity prevails.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether experts in career decision-making of children and adolescents with special needs in Slovenia base vocational and career decisions on the strength of the individual or are more

focused on their problems that could hinder their vocational and career development. Given that career decisions based on strengths correlate with better self-concept, successful career development and less stigmatisation (Drobnič, 2018), it is important to know how these changes are in Slovenia in order to improve the practice of personal and career counselling.

Method

We used a quantitative research approach in the study. The research is based on a descriptive and causal-non-experimental empirical method of pedagogical research.

The research aims to determine whether counsellors in primary and secondary schools base career decisions on people with special needs on their own strengths. For analysis, we have prepared one research question: 'On what should the vocational decision of people with special needs be based?'

For the purpose of the research, we used raw data from a questionnaire developed for the study 'Analysis of vocational orientation and accompanying factors for people with special needs in the Slovenian education system' by the Ministry of Education and Sport and the Pedagogical Institute in Ljubljana. The questionnaire consists of four sets: (i) demographic issues, (ii) education of students with special needs, (iii) vocational education and vocational guidance, and (iv) vocational rehabilitation and employment of people with special needs and disabilities. For this study, we used data from the third set of questions.

We checked the following measurement characteristics of the instrument: substantive and constructive validity, reliability, and objectivity. The measurement characteristics of the instrument (substantive and constructive validity) were verified with the Kaiser-Myer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Reliability was checked using the internal consistency method (Cronbach's coefficient α) and by factor analysis.

Based on a random selection, 60 primary schools were invited to the survey, representing 13.4% of all primary schools in Slovenia, 50 secondary schools (25.6%) and 34 schools with special programmes (100%). The questionnaire was addressed to the counselling service at schools, namely to those workers who are in charge of career guidance. The questions were answered by 42 primary schools or their counselling services, 30 schools with a special programme, and 29 secondary schools.

For further analyses, we used inferential and bivariate statistical methods to test hypotheses to study the relationship and differences between variables: $\chi 2$ - test to test the relationship between variables, such as career decision

factors by type of school, environment and additional education of counsellors, variance homogeneity tests, and t-tests.

Results

We examined the key factors of vocational decision-making, both internal and external (Drobnič, 2018), which, in the opinion of consultants, are important in the vocational/career decision-making of people with special needs. The key question was 'On what should the vocational decision of the PSN be based?' Counsellors had the opportunity to rank the following factors/elements[3] of vocational decision in order of importance:

- disorders/disabilities
- strengths
- what is he/she interested in doing
- abilities
- learning success/knowledge
- where person will find a job.

The above-mentioned factors are most often mentioned in the history of vocational guidance (Drobnič, 2018), with specific factors at the forefront in a certain period.

Table 1

Which factor of vocational decision-making is more important for people with special needs – positions of vocational decision-making counsellors in Slovenian schools

Vocational decisions should be based on:	N	Ar. mean	St. dev.	95% confidence interval for the ar. mean		Rang
				Lower limit	Upper limit	
Disorders/disabilities	100	3.14	1.518	2.84	3.44	3
Strengths	100	1.76	1.138	1.53	1.99	1
What is he/she interested in doing	100	3.19	1.361	2.92	3.46	4
Abilities and skills	100	2.98	1.223	2.74	3.22	2
Learning success/knowledge	100	5.00	1.073	4.79	5.21	6
Where a person will find a job	100	4.78	1.440	4.49	5.07	5

....

3   We have classified factors into external, i.e., those that operate from the environment and are, for example, school, parents, employment, or internal, such as interests, motives, abilities, knowledge, and personality traits.

Counselling services put 'strengths of the individual' in the first place ($M = 1.76$), 'abilities and skills' in the second place ($M = 2.98$), and 'person's disorders and disabilities' ($M = 3.14$) in the third place. Interestingly, the factor 'where a person will find a job' was placed only in fifth place ($M = 4.78$); in the last sixth place, they put 'learning success/knowledge' ($M = 5.00$).

We also determined whether there are differences between counsellors depending on which schools they come from (urban or village schools). To determine statistically significant differences between groups in attitudes, we first performed Levene's test to analyse variance, in order to further determine the statistical significance of differences between groups based on a comparison of arithmetic means. With the test of arithmetic means, we checked statistically significant differences in the attitudes of a group of village and city schools regarding decision-making factors in the vocational decisions of people with special needs.

Table 2

Test for identifying statistically significant differences in the attitudes of counsellors towards career guidance factors according to the type of school they come from (urban/rural)

Vocational decision should be based on:		Sum of squares	df	Ar. mean of squares	F	Sig.
	Between groups	9.327	1	9.327	4.179	.044
Disorders/disabilities	Within groups	218.713	98	2.232		
	Total	228.040	99			
	Between groups	1.201	1	1.201	.927	.338
Strengths	Within groups	127.039	98	1.296		
	Total	128.240	99			
	Between groups	.005	1	.005	.003	.958
What is he/she interested in doing	Within groups	183.385	98	1.871		
	Total	183.390	99			
	Between groups	.337	1	.337	.223	.637
Abilities	Within groups	147.623	98	1.506		
	Total	147.960	99			
	Between groups	.162	1	.162	.140	.709
Learning success/ knowledge	Within groups	113.838	98	1.162		
	Total	114.000	99			
	Between groups	12.686	1	12.686	6.459	.013
Where will the person find a job	Within groups	192.474	98	1.964		
	Total	205.160	99			

Statistically significant differences in attitudes were found in the statement 'where will the person find a job' and in 'person's disorders'. The factor of vocational decision 'where will the person will find a job' is more important for village school counsellors than for city school counsellors and also the factor 'disorders/disabilities' is more important for village school counsellors (M = 2.80) than for counsellors from urban schools because they rank them higher in importance.

We also checked whether additional training of counsellors influences their positions in determining the importance of individual factors of vocational decision-making, but we did not find statistically significant differences between the group of counsellors who did additional training and those who did not.

We checked whether there are differences between the groups of counsellors depending on what type of school they are from, which can be a primary school, a school for persons with special needs, or a secondary school. We found that there are statistically significant differences between counsellors regarding the statement of the importance of 'disorders/disabilities' for a vocational decision. These differences were between all three groups of counsellors, with primary school counsellors assessing the importance of this factor with a level (M = 3.49), meaning between 3rd and 4th place, a secondary school with M = 2.90, the highest place was found by counsellors from schools for persons with special needs (M = 2.37). Statistically significant differences between groups were determined using the arithmetic mean test.

In claiming that the fact 'where a person will find a job' is important for a professional decision, we also found statistically significant differences, but only between the group of counsellors from secondary schools (M = 4.45) and schools with a special programme (M = 5.27).

Discussion and conclusion

Disability and handicaps are no longer a factor that should be taken into account primarily in the vocational and career decision-making of people with special needs. Nor is the possibility of employment, which can be explained by the fact that the labour market has become very changeable and dynamic. In addition, the current generation of children and young people considers the period from the first career decision at the end of primary school to entering the labour market to be longer and lasting, on average, seven years, during which time major market changes can occur (Pust, 2020). Learning success as a former predictor and key career decision-making factor is no longer as important.

This, of course, does not in itself reduce the weight of the decision for young people, especially people with special needs.

The principle of vocational decision-making on 'weaknesses' recedes into the background in counselling in Slovenian schools, and the strengths/abilities of individuals come to the fore, which are key principles of positive psychology. This provides people with special needs better self-esteem and autonomy, as well as better career opportunities (Drobnič, 2018, p. 210). Therefore, we can say that the practice of career counselling for people with special needs has moved away from the rehabilitation (medical) paradigm, which emphasises the orientation to individual problems and disabilities, into a new paradigm of ability and strengths, which has its origins in positive psychology and, as we see, is spreading to other areas, including the careers of people with special needs, Learning success and finding an appropriate job later as predictors and key decision-making factors are no longer predominant. This, of course, does not in itself reduce the difficulty of the decision for young people, especially people with special needs.

Based on the empirical results of this study, it can be concluded that career guidance and counselling for people with disabilities should be designed to enable individuals to maximise impact by mobilising different internal sources of power, a supportive environment, and developing strategies to help build an individual's ability to be as self-sufficient as possible and to have a professional and integrated life. With this concept, we are close to the approaches recommended by Lopez et al. (2003) that a balance needs to be found between a strength-and-power approach and another that focuses on human problems and weaknesses. They point out that both strengths and weaknesses are real, although until recently the former received less attention.

The growth in the number of vocations opens up new opportunities for people with disabilities and the declining demands on physical strength in most vocations, puts some categories of people in a better career position, specifically those with locomotor problems, but poorer opportunities are for people with intellectual disabilities and the visually impaired and hard of hearing (Drobnič, 2018). Therefore, career support measures for individual groups of people with special needs should be more selective and targeted, and career counselling should not be based just on vocational rehabilitation.

According to the aforementioned findings from the research, in the career guidance and education of children with special needs in Slovenia, individual strengths and not weaknesses should be emphasised. In this way, we would achieve better learning effects in education and better vocational decisions, including the career development of this population.

References

Althouse, M., Kolbert, J. B., Bundick, M. J., & Crothers, L. M. (2017). Positive psychology and career development. *Journal of School Counselling*, *15*(15), 15.

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (2014). *Mindsets & behaviors for student success: K-12 college- and career-readiness standards for every student*. Author.

Amundson, N. E. (2009). Active engagement: The being and doing of career counselling (3rd ed.). Ergon Communications.

Armstrong, T. (2012). *Their strengths*. Educational Leadership.

Bolier, L., Haverman, M., Westerhof, G. J., Riper, H., Smit, F., & Bohlmeijer, E. (2013). Positive psychology interventions: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled studies. *BMC Public Health*, *13*(1), 1–20.

Boot, N., Nevicka, B., & Baas, M. (2017). Subclinical symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are associated with specific creative processes. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *114*, 73–81. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.03.050

Brejc, T. (1987). *Rehabilitation work with hard-to-employ persons: Handbook on training and employment of people with disabilities*. Zveza skupnosti za zaposlovanje SR Slovenije.

Burck, A. M., Bruneau, L., Baker, L., & Ellison, L. (2014). Emerging counselors' perception of wellness: Implications for counselor development. *Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation*, *5*(1), 39–51.

Carey, J., Dimmitt, C., Hatch, T., Lapan, R., & Whiston, S. (2008). Report of the national panel for evidence-based school counseling: Outcome research coding protocol and evaluation of student success skills and second step. *Professional School Counseling*, *11*(3), 197–206. https://doi.org/10.5330/psc.n.2010-11.197

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). The contribution of flow to positive psychology. In J. E. Gillham (Ed.), The science of optimism and hope: Research essays in honor of Martin E. P. Seligman (pp. 387–395). Templeton Foundation Press.

Dobrow, S. R. (2013). Dynamics of calling: A longitudinal study of musicians. *Journal of organizational behavior*, *34*(4), 431–452.

Drobnič, J. (2014). *Development of a career guidance model for people with special needs*. [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Primorska, Pedagogical Faculty Koper.

Drobnič, J. (2018). *Careers and people with special needs*. University of Primorska Publishing House, Ludus Library.

Dykens, E. M. (2006). Toward a positive psychology of mental retardation. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *76*(2), 185–193.

Elder, B. C., Rood, C. E., & Damiani, M. L. (2018). Writing strength-based IEPs for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, *14*(1), 116–155.

Fowers, B. J. (2008). From continence to virtue: Recovering goodness, character unity, and character types for positive psychology. *Theory & Psychology*, *18*(5), 629–653.

Freidlin, P., Littman-Ovadia, H., & Niemiec, R. M. (2017). Positive psychopathology: Social anxiety via character strengths underuse and overuse. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *108*, 50–54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.12.003

Gander, F., Proyer, R. T., Ruch, W., & Wyss, T. (2012). The good character at work: An initial study on the contribution of character strengths in identifying healthy and unhealthy work-related behavior and experience patterns. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*, *85*(8), 895–904.

Ghielen, S. T. S., van Woerkom, M., & Christina Meyers, M. (2018). Promoting positive outcomes through strengths interventions: A literature review. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *13*(6), 573–585.

Held, B. S. (2004). The negative side of positive psychology. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *44*(1), 9–46.

Holland, J. L. (1985). *Making vocational choices: A theory of vocational personalities and work environments*. Psychological Assessment Resources.

Huygelier, H., Van der Hallen, R., Wagemans, J., de-Wit, L., & Chamberlain, R. (2018). The Leuven embedded figures test (L-EFT): Measuring perception, intelligence or executive function? *PeerJ*, *6*. https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.4524

Kosine, N. R., Steger, M. F., & Duncan, S. (2008). Purpose-centered career development: A strengths-based approach to finding meaning and purpose in careers. *Professional School Counseling*, *12*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X0801200

Linley, P. A., Harrington, S., Garcea, N., & Page, N. (Eds.). (2010). *Oxford handbook of positive psychology and work*. Oxford University Press.

Littman-Ovadia, H., Dubreuil, P., Meyers, M. C., & Freidlin, P. (2021). Editorial: VIA character strengths: Theory, research and practice. Frontiers in psychology, *12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.653941

Littman-Ovadia, H., Lazar-Butbul, V., & Benjamin, B. A. (2014). Strengths-based career counseling: Overview and initial evaluation. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *22*(3), 403–419.

Lopez, S. J., Snyder, C. R., & Rasmussen, H. N. (2003). Striking a vital balance: Developing a complementary focus on human weakness and strength through positive psychological assessment. In S. J. Lopez & C. R. Snyder (Eds.), *Positive psychological assessment: A handbook of models and measures* (pp. 3–20). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/10612-001

Lopez, S. J., & Louis, M. C. (2009). The principles of strengths-based education. *Journal of College and Character*, *10*(4), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.2202/1940-1639.1041

McCash, P. (2006). We're all career researchers now: Breaking open career education and DOTS. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, *34*(4), 429–449.

McGrath, R. E. (2019). *The VIA assessment suite for adults: Development and initial evaluation, revised edition.* VIA Institute on Character.

McIlveen, P. (2017). Dialogical self: Co-investigator in career self-research. In M. McMahon (Ed.), Career counselling: Constructivist approaches (pp. 153–163). Routledge.

Mellin, E. A., Hunt, B., & Nichols, L. M. (2011). Counselor professional identity: Findings and implications for counseling and interprofessional collaboration. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *89*(2), 140–147.

Miglianico, M., Dubreuil, P., Miquelon, P., Bakker, A. B., & Martin-Krumm, C. (2020). Strength use in the workplace: A literature review. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *21*(2), 737–764.

Mohammadi, M., & Mahdivand, Z. (2019). Is willingness to communicate a reliable predictor of learner autonomy in an EFL context? *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, *9*(1), 9–26.

Mottron, L. (2011). The power of autism. *Nature*, *479*(7371), 33–35.

Mruk, C. J. (2008). The psychology of self-esteem: A potential common ground for humanistic positive psychology and positivistic positive psychology. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, *36*(2), 143.

Murugami, M. W., & Nel, N. M. (2012). A developmental career guidance and Counselling process for learners with disabilities: Preparation for employment. *Educational Research*, *3*(4), 362–370.

Musek Lešnik, K. (2021). *Positive psychology for kindergartens, schools and parents*. Mladinska knjiga.

Norwich, B. (2013). *Addressing tensions and dilemmas in inclusive education: Living with uncertainty.* Routledge.

Novak, J. (2015). Raising expectations for US youth with disabilities: Federal disability policy advances integrated employment. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, *5*(1), 91–110.

Owens, R. L., Allan, B. A., & Flores, L. Y. (2019). The strengths-based inclusive theory of work. *The Counseling Psychologist, 47*(2), 222–265. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000019859538

Peng, H. (2015). Infusing positive psychology with spirituality in a strength-based group career counseling to evaluate college students' state anxiety. *International Journal of Psychological Studies*, *7*(1), 75.

Peterson, C. (2009). Reclaiming children and youth; *Bloomington*, *18*(2), 3–7.

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification* (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press.

Power, P. W. (2006). *Guide to vocational assessment* (4th ed). Pro-ed.

Power, M. (2016). *Understanding happiness: a critical review of positive psychology*. Routledge.

Pust, S. (October 3, 2020). Generacije in zaposlitev. Žurnal. https://www.zurnal24.si/slovenija/za-delodajalce-vse-bolj-pomembne-te-lastnosti-344228

Quinlan, D., Swain, N., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2012). Character strengths interventions: Building on what we know for improved outcomes. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *13*(6), 1145–1163.

Reiner, S. M., Dobmeier, R. A., & Hernández, T. J. (2013). Perceived impact of professional counselor identity: An exploratory study. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *91*(2), 174–183.

Robitschek, C., & Woodson, S. J. (2006). Vocational psychology: Using one of counseling psychology's strengths to foster human strength. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *34*(2), 260–275.

Sanderson, K. (2017). *Scholarly commons career matters: Leveraging positive psychology to guide us to good and right work*. University of Pennsylvania.

Savickas, M. L. (2017). *Career counseling* (2nd ed.). American Psychological Association.

Schreiner, L. A., & Anderson E. C. (2005). Strengths-based advising: A new lens for higher education. NACADA Journal, *25*(2), 20–27. https://doi.org/10.12930/0271-9517-25.2.20

Schutte, N. S., & Malouff, J. M. (2019). The impact of signature character strengths interventions: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *20*(4), 1179–1196.

Schuurmans-Stekhoven, J. B. (2011). Is it God or just the data that moves in mysterious ways? How well-being research may be mistaking faith for virtue. *Social Indicators Research*, *100*(2), 313–330.

Seligman, M. E., Rashid, T., & Parks, A. C. (2006). Positive psychotherapy. *American psychologist*, *61*(8), 774.

Seligman, M. E., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). Positive psychology: An introduction. In *Flow and the foundations of positive psychology* (pp. 279–298). Springer.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2019). Positive psychology: A personal history. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, *15*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-050718-095653

Simeonova, D. I., Chang, K. D., Strong, C., & Ketter, T. A. (2005). Creativity in familial bipolar disorder. *Journal of psychiatric research*, *39*(6), 623–631.

Smith, E. J. (2006). The strength-based counseling model. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *34*(1), 13–79.

Soria, K. M., & Stubblefield, R. (2014). First-year college students' strengths awareness: Building a foundation for student engagement and academic excellence. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, *26*(2), 69–88.

Super, D. E. (1992). Toward a comprehensive theory of career development. In D. H. Montross & C. J. Shinkman (Eds.), *Career development: Theory and practice* (pp. 35–64). Charles C. Thomas Publisher.

Symeonidis, V. (2018). Revisiting the European Teacher Education Area: The transformation of teacher education policies and practices in Europe. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, *8*(3), 13–34.

Von Karolyi, C., Winner, E., Gray, W., & Sherman, G. F. (2003). Dyslexia linked to talent: Global visual-spatial ability. *Brain and language*, *85*(3), 427–431.

Warren, C. (2008). *Could this be the secret to success? American Way*. http://dyslexia.yale.edu/DYS_secretsuccess.html

Wehmeyer, M. L., Shogren, K. A., Little, T. D., & Lopez, S. J. (Eds.). (2017). *Development of self-determination through the life-course*. Springer.

Biographical note

Janez Drobnič, PhD is an established expert in the field of inclusive education, vocational and career guidance and vocational rehabilitation. In his career path he has linked the theoretical knowledge with his practice while counselling, or has developed operational models, forms and approaches in education and employment. As associate professor at the University of Primorska, Faculty of Education, he offers students theoretical and practical experience that relates to the development theories of career guidance or social integration of people with special needs within the inclusive educational paradigm.