

Career Choices and Young Adults: The Influence of the Autonomy Factor on the Choice of Employment in the IT Sector

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Summary

Various spheres of modern public life, such as politics, economics, law, and education, are increasingly implementing a model of society where the autonomy and freedom of the individual are recognized. The concept of an autonomous, independent individual is at the heart of modern society, and therefore should be the basis for the professional self-determination concept. The purpose of the paper is to study the influence of the autonomy factor on the choice of professional (career-related) strategy among young people (students). Based on theoretical analysis, the authors have demonstrated the essence of the phenomenon of personal autonomy as a complex feature of the individual, manifesting itself in the ability to determine one's position and behavior, make a conscious choice, and design one's future on one's own, independently from direct external influences, based on reflection of one's own needs, motives, and values. A comparison of the results of the diagnosis of personal autonomy and professional plans, per age intervals, indicates that the features of the professional prospects of students and their planned professional objectives at each age stage are determined by the nature of personal autonomy. Thus, the hypothesis of the study has been confirmed, stating that personal autonomy influences the formation of professional (career-related) plans of IT study program graduates.

Keywords:

autonomy, personal autonomy, professional plan, professional activities.

1. Introduction

One of the main characteristics of young adult age is the formation of professional plans with subsequent orientation to career prospects in the future [1]. The social situation at this stage of personality development is determined by the desire to start an independent life, choose a life path, and begin implementing the plans conceived [2]. At the same time, educational and professional activities are the main type of activities in young adults [2], and

professional self-determination becomes the most important component of personal self-determination [3]. In the global psychological and pedagogical literature [4-6], independence and autonomy are considered the determining vector of comprehensive personal development. Manifestations of personal autonomy are considered [7-9] indicators of a person's psychological maturity and mental health, and indicators of a positive direction of personality formation.

In general, in various approaches, the concept of autonomy denotes a complex feature of the individual, which manifests itself in the dominance of internal causal factors in the construction of activities (internal motivation), in the ability to make choices and make decisions based on one's views and beliefs, in the ability to self-regulation and self-control of actions, the reflection of one's needs, motives and values [10,11]. In relationships, behavior, and activities, autonomy manifests itself in three aspects: functional, behavioral, and emotional autonomy [12].

According to researchers [13,14], autonomy or independence is a complex integrative quality of personality associated with such structures as self-concept, identity, autonomy, motivational sphere, ability to choose, and the like. It is determined by the ability to consciously manage one's behavior, practical activities following one's views and beliefs, and the ability to overcome obstacles on the way to the implementation of the chosen program of life. Independence implies the presence of activity and initiative of the individual concerning oneself and others.

Personality autonomy appears in such personality characteristics as independent goal-setting; awareness of behavior; developed reflection; flexibility and creativity of thinking and actions. A high level of personal autonomy development is characterized by a predominance of genuine interest in one's actions, initiative, the flexibility of thinking and creative activities, and orientation to getting pleasure

from the activities as such. A low level is characterized by a predominance of orientation to avoiding failures and feelings of guilt, and receiving praise and social approval [15].

In the definition of autonomy, one can note such characteristics as competence, skill, the ability to initiative and goal-setting, arbitrary self-regulation, development, and awareness of one's individuality, independence in interpersonal relations, separation and emancipation as opposed to community and emotional connection, and the capacity of free choice and having one's interests [16].

According to K. Peters [17], autonomy does not refer to independence, but rather to acts of will, acts of choice in the sense that one's behavior depends on one's intentions and the behavior is approved by the individual. If the individual is autonomous, then their actions are characterized by a sense of freedom and the possibility of choice. Researchers claim that autonomy is the main motivational feature, thanks to which the individual strives to be the main cause or source of their behavior [18].

According to S. Bass [19], autonomy is achieved when the individual subjects the norms they face to a critical assessment, and then makes practical decisions based on independent and rational reflections. The personal autonomy ideal is the image of an individual who controls their fate to a certain extent, shaping it with the help of consistent decisions throughout their life. The autonomy of the individual is associated with the initiation or approval of one's behavior, it concerns actions, and is approved by the individual because actions are evaluated as those that come out of the inner self of the individual and are based on their real values and interests.

Studies [20-22] have shown the functional influence of the experience of autonomy, as opposed to heteronomy, in many important areas of life. Factors that undermine autonomy tend to distract attention from intrinsic motivation, creativity, self-motivation, confidence, interest, and vitality [23]. The lack of autonomy support is also associated with poorer self-esteem, weakening motivation, or inconsistency of motivation, as well as other results indicating psychological distress.

In various theories, the autonomy of young people and students is based on special abilities, such as a critical attitude towards the values and attitudes of childhood; the ability to adapt to circumstances without changing one's personality [24]. O.E. Dergacheva [25] sees the basis of autonomy at this age stage as the skills of introspection, volitional action, creativity, independence in setting complex goals, and the ability to subordinate one's actions and behavior to them. A.R. Batashev [26] considers autonomy in young adults as an orientation to one's own experience, stating that what is realized is very important, since people perceive external reality through their inner world and experience.

As for the choice of profession, it is considered one of the stages of professional self-determination, which is a process of self-knowledge and objective assessment of one's psychological characteristics, abilities, and capabilities by the individual and comparison of available professional qualities with the requirements that are necessary for mastering a certain profession, which covers the choice of profession, educational institution and job search [27]. At the same time, professional self-determination is understood not only as a specific choice of profession but also as a continuous process of searching for meaning in the acquired profession [1].

Professional self-determination is one of the core components of the concept of professionalism developed by A. Markova [28] and is considered a continuous dynamic process that characterizes the entire path of becoming a professional. The professional growth of the individual is associated with the constant acquisition of a higher level of self-assessment as a specialist. A. Markova [28] sees the dynamics of self-determination in changing attitudes towards oneself and in changing the criteria of self-esteem. M. Pryazhnikov [2] has developed a content-procedural model of professional self-determination. According to M. Pryazhnikov, professional and personal self-determination have a lot in common, and in their highest manifestations, they almost merge. In general, professional self-determination can be described as the individual's attitude to their (future or real) profession and oneself as a (potential or real) subject of professional activities [2].

In the scientific literature, subjective, objective, and social factors in choosing a profession are distinguished [1]. The subjective ones include cognitive and professional interests, inclinations, abilities, temperament, and character of the person. Objective factors include the level of training, health status, and awareness of the professional world. Social factors include the educational level of parents, their social status, social environment, living conditions, and the like. Important factors influencing the choice of profession are the motives of professional activities, the life values of the individual, their experience, and ideas about the future, which lead to the development of appropriate abilities and stimulate actions. In addition, several researchers emphasize the importance of general assertiveness, self-esteem, confidence in achieving success, and the level of formation of conscious mental self-regulation [2].

According to V.A. Bodrov [3], the necessary factor for professional self-determination of the individual is the adequacy of self-esteem, expressed strong will, work and life experience, a sufficient level of maturity, and the formation of appropriate psychological functions (such as the planning and goal-setting functions). At the same time, professional self-determination includes the individual's awareness of themselves as a subject of a specific professional activity and provides for 1) the individual's self-assessment of their individual psychological qualities

and comparison of their capabilities with the psychological requirements of the profession for a specialist; 2) awareness of their role in the system of social relations and their responsibility for the successful performance of activities and the realization of their abilities; 3) self-regulation of behavior aimed at achieving the goal [3].

Researchers [1,2] have determined that the leading motives for admission to the university are a passion for an academic subject and an interest in the profession. Since the overall ultimate goal of studying at the university is the professional training of specialists, the attitude of students to their future profession can be considered as a form and measure of acceptance of the final learning goals. The most generalized form of the individual's attitude to a profession is the professional orientation (formation), characterized as an interest in the profession and a tendency to engage in it. Our study is based on the hypothesis that personal autonomy influences the formation of professional (career-related) plans of IT study program graduates.

The purpose of the paper is to study the influence of the autonomy factor on the choice of a professional (career) plan.

To achieve the goal, the following objectives were set:

- 1) to carry out an analysis of professional plans in young adults;
- 2) to analyze the level of personal autonomy;
- 3) to compare the indicators of personal autonomy and professional plans and draw appropriate conclusions.

2. Methods

The study took place in February 2022 at the Rostov State University of Economics, Moscow Polytechnic University, Moscow State University of Technology and Management named after K.G. Razumovsky (First Cossack University), Don State Technical University, Financial University, and Russian State University of Tourism and Service.

The study involved 176 people, 3rd to 5th-year students of the aforementioned higher educational institutions studying in the IT field.

To achieve the goal set in the study, we had defined an indicative set of theoretical and empirical study methods: the theoretical methods (analysis, synthesis, comparison, and generalization) were used for the study of scientific literature on the problem of personal autonomy; the empirical methods (survey method, diagnostic methods) were used for the analysis of professional plans and the level of personal autonomy.

The work on the objectives of the study was carried out in three consecutive stages.

At the first stage of the study, an analysis of professional plans in young adults was carried out using a questionnaire with a fixed choice of answers. Previously,

four categories of professional (career) plans had been identified, namely, "getting a job of any kind", "professional development", "employment in an IT company based on one's degree", and "starting one's own business". Respondents were offered age intervals in the near term (10-15 years), according to which they were asked to determine their professional (career) plans, which they associated with those age periods.

In the second stage of the study, we performed an analysis of the personal autonomy level. Two parameters called "personal autonomy" were used in the study since such autonomy was measured by two methods: the self-determination scale by E.M. Osin [29], where autonomy was understood as the basis of self-determination of the individual, and the "Scale of psychological well-being" questionnaire by K. Ryff [30] where autonomy is considered as a component of the psychological well-being of the individual.

In the third stage, indicators of personal autonomy and professional plans were compared.

Statistical analysis of the relationship between the parameters of personal autonomy determined by different methods was carried out with the Pearson correlation coefficient using the SPSS Statistics data analysis software package.

3. Results

The results of the analysis of professional plans per age intervals in the near term (after graduation) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Professional (career) plans per age intervals in the near term, %

Category	22-26 years old	27-31 years old	32-36 years old
getting a job of any kind	42.4	27.4	4.3
professional development	13.3	7.9	5.2
employment in an IT company based on one's degree	39.4	52.3	65.3
starting one's own business	4.9	12.4	25.2

Based on the presented data, we can say that in the age of 22-26, 42.4% of young people plan to get any job, and 39.4% of the total number of respondents would like to work in their professional field. Thus, more people plan to get any job at all than those who are oriented to work in their chosen field. This may indicate that many young men and women are not confident in their immediate professional future and doubt that they will be able to find a well-paid job in an IT company without previous work experience. It may also indicate the desire of young people to acquire financial independence during professional training.

The category of "employment based on one's degree" is relevant and maintains an upward trend in the age ranges of

27-31 and 32-36 years. This suggests that young people choosing a professional path would like to be accomplished as specialists in the IT field chosen by them initially. At the same time, the relevance of work at any job available is significantly reduced at the age range of 27-31 years (27.4%), and by the age of 32-36 years, it completely loses its significance. This is since the majority of respondents by this age hope for a successful job in their field.

At the age of 27-31, 7.9% of respondents expect to improve their professional qualifications, taking into account, apparently, the competition that exists in the modern market of information services and technologies. 25.2% of respondents expect to start their own business at the age of 32 to 36 years. In our opinion, the results obtained indicate realistic views of young people on life. This is due to the realization that before this age one should accumulate professional skills, gain experience, and acquire additional knowledge.

Behind such different professional plans as "one's own business" or "employment in an IT company based on one's degree", one might see a different level of personal autonomy development.

In this connection, we carried out diagnostics of the level of personal autonomy of respondents, the results of which are presented in Table 2. First of all, it should be noted that the parameters of personal autonomy determined by different methods have a correlation with each other, but are not identical ($r=0.369$; $p<0.01$). It can be assumed that several different personality constructs are determined by the studied methods.

Table 2. Level distribution of personal autonomy indicators

	levels, %		
	low	average	high
Autonomy (according to the self-determination method)	15.2	62.6	22.2
Autonomy (according to the psychological well-being method)	18.4	63.8	17.8

4. Discussion

The theoretical analysis has shown that autonomy as a need that develops and becomes more complicated during the growth and development of the individual is an important factor in choosing a professional (career) plan. There are different approaches to the concept of autonomy, but they all agree that autonomy is the ability and need of a person to act and behave independently of external influences, based on internal motivation.

A comparison of the results of the diagnostics of personal autonomy and professional plans carried out in the study per age intervals indicates that at all time intervals the main difference between respondents planning to organize

their own business, on the one hand, and those who are going to be employed in an IT company or get any job available, on the other hand, is the indicator of autonomy according to the self-determination method. The results of the statistical analysis have shown that the indicator on the autonomy scale according to the self-determination method is higher among respondents who intend to have their own business after completing their training ($p<0.01$).

At the same time, at all time intervals, the main difference between respondents planning to be employed in an IT company based on their degree, on the one hand, and those who are going to get any job available, on the other hand, is the indicator of autonomy according to the psychological well-being method. The results of the statistical analysis showed that the indicator on the autonomy scale according to the psychological well-being method is higher among respondents who intend to be employed in an IT company based on their degree after completing their studies ($p<0.05$).

Besides, it should be noted that respondents who intend to get any job after completing their studies at a time interval after the age of 26 are characterized by very low indicators of autonomy for both diagnostic methods.

At the same time, respondents who intend to improve their qualifications after the age of 26 are characterized by high levels of autonomy according to the psychological well-being method, which indicates that they are aware of the importance of gaining additional knowledge and skills in terms of improving their well-being in the future, understanding that without advanced training, a modern IT specialist is uncompetitive.

Thus, the conducted study allowed us to establish that the features of the professional prospects of students and their planned professional objectives at each age stage are determined by the nature of personal autonomy.

Throughout life, autonomy can both progress and regress as new (or already existing) competencies, qualities, and personality skills develop, or if a change in living conditions requires a behavior change.

In young adults, personal autonomy is associated with the content of the actual needs of the individual, which, in turn, affect the construction of professional prospects, since they are determined by their orientation to the future [31]. Young people who have more expressive personal autonomy are characterized by the need and desire to be financially independent, to provide for themselves independently, to have their own business, as well as a desire for self-education.

Thus, the main psychological feature of the autonomous individual is the tendency to make decisions and build their life plans based on stable internal criteria, as opposed to the forces of the external environment and contrary to their momentary desires. Autonomy contributes to higher academic [24,32] and career achievements [22], the development of creativity [17], increased perseverance

in various activities [14], greater productivity and less professional burnout [21], as well as a healthier lifestyle [33] and better psychological well-being.

However, studies have shown that in young adults, plans for the future are not realistic enough and have little correlation with the real actions of young people. The key to building realistic and feasible plans for the future, taking into account possible ways to implement them, is a responsible and conscious, i. e. autonomous, position of the individual in choosing and determining the direction of their life.

5. Conclusion

Thus, the hypothesis of the study has been confirmed, stating that personal autonomy influences the formation of professional (career-related) plans of IT study program graduates. Personal autonomy appears as a factor in determining professional prospects in young adults.

The practical significance of the obtained study results is justified by the fact that the diagnostic techniques for the study of autonomy and life plans in young adults can be used in counseling on issues of professional self-determination of young people and become part of modern career guidance.

The contradiction between the influence of the factor of personal autonomy on the substantive characteristics of the professional perspective, on the one hand, and the dominance of the average level of autonomy development in the majority of respondents, on the other hand, makes it necessary to develop a system of measures aimed at psychological support for the development of personal autonomy in IT students, which may become a prospect for further research.

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