

## The Impact of Some External Factors on the Career of the Management Lecturer in Slovenia

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### THE BEGINNING AND THE SLOVENIAN SETTING

The content of the paper elaborates about the impact of some external factors that are steering the career of the management lecturer towards better quality of work in connection with the role of an 'Open and distance learning' tutor and 'normal' tutor.

The notion of open and distance learning and the changing notion of career in general and specifically in education on the whole (and tutoring skills) are introduced in the paper as one of the consequences of globalisation, regionalisation and the enlargement processes of the last 5 to 10 years in general in Slovenia. Although my work at the National Leadership School and the Faculty of Management in Koper is not based on ODL principles, a major part of my work is becoming what we call 'on-line tutor' for our students. So in a sense, a new or at least a different way of communication with students is introduced in our work more and more frequently. Also the support created to underpin and enhance the learning process has become the vital component in the planning and provision of any learning course. So the question I am addressing in the paper is related to three issues:

- a different way of work as a result of the above, and also the processes mentioned in the title,
- the identification of the some external factors and the way these factors in one way or another are affecting our careers and are connected to the internal and external environment of the organizations, and to changes that are happening in Slovenia,
- the impact of those issues on my career.

In Slovenia, in the span of the last 12 years, there have been many changes coming from the external and internal environment of organizations and schools. Many changes were imposed by the central gov-

ernment and other institutions on the ways in which schools and other school organizations work, and consequently all this also has a great short and long-term impact on the careers of Slovenian lecturers in general. These changes have catapulted school organisations into many diverse activities to cope with these changes.

The idea of a learning organisation, which is also very important for the process of developing a career in a certain way, became actual in the last decade and it opens many debates about how the learning organisations should work and how to establish them (Jelenc Krašovec 2003). In today's world we will have to overcome many of tensions: between global and local, general and individual, tradition and contemporariness (Delors 1996), and all of this has an impact on the issue of the career.

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Like the world economy as a whole, the field of education in today's information society has been subjected to the globalisation process. The competition, at both the local and the worldwide levels, is getting tougher. Study programmes are widely marketed. At the moment Slovenia is successfully keeping pace with mainstream DE developments in the European context. However, for the continuity of this development and its application, the appropriate institutional, technological and financial conditions at a micro and macro level should be assured (Bregar and Zigmajster 1996). All that has to be done if we want to gain in the field of quality in education and that concept in ODL.

The activities of introducing distance education in Slovenia were started in the period 1991–1993. In 1994 Slovenia was involved in the Phare Programme for Multi-Country Co-operation in Distance Education as one of 11 Central and East European beneficiary countries taking part in the realization of trans-regional components of the project, as well as running national the sub-project of Slovenia (Bregar and Zigmajster 1996).

Those were the beginnings. The National Leadership School participated at the same time in the project of producing a CD-ROM with the title 'Approaching Europe' as part of one of the Phare long-distance learning projects. Those were the first steps in the direction of ODL in the National Leadership School. During the years, we also developed the system of tutoring our students on their assignments and exams through various tutorial skills, some of them also ODL skills. Although the staff of the National Leadership School has not been trained or prepared for that role, we have nevertheless been tutors for more than 4 years. I have to clarify here that the rest of the programme is campus based, and that we have

students from all over Slovenia and also from abroad with the Faculty of Management in Koper.

Over this span of time I have been asking myself some very personal questions regarding the whole issue of ODL: to devote or not to devote, more of my research and learning time 'to the ways of ODL'. And since I am here today, probably my choice was made. But when and how and the most important question – what persuaded me to decide, and how has this influenced my career?

In the first place is my commitment to education. If I look back, I have been learning, and also teaching others, ever since I was a little girl. I always wanted more. Not to have – to learn. But on the other hand I am not a person who is always in for new ideas; I am not easily persuaded to join in – to follow. So what was it in ODL that attracted me, that decided me to follow, to join in (according to theory) relatively late into my career?

In this paper I will try to answer some of the questions above. I am realistic enough to know that to answer all of them would be impossible. At least for me. So I decided to ignore all possible other influential facts and to concentrate on the relations between tutor – career factors.

#### SOME THEORY AND PRACTICE ON THE TOPIC OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

It is recognised that students participating in open learning need support. That is why tutor support is required to manage and to help students, to give experience, to encourage, to explain in more detail and to motivate, which is sometime the most important element in our practice beside steering the students in the right direction. The support that is given may be general, and concern the administration of the course, or it may be specific and related to course content. These different types of support can be provided through structures which anticipate requirements for support, and structures which respond flexibly to specific requirements. Different models of support may also be implemented to support different learner groups' requirements.

As is mentioned in material from Heriot-Watt University (1999), the support can come from several different sources. The key sources are: the course materials and guides, the tutors, other learners and support structures.

Part of the work of the National Leadership School lecturers is also

tutorial work for our participants. That support is given and related to the course content, and responds flexibly to specific requirements of students regarding their preparation of assignments, which counts as an exam. The tutor support is given in the following ways: tutorials via e-mail, face-to-face tutorials, telephone tutorials, fax machines, and various other modes of feedback on their assignments.

At the National Leadership School of Slovenia we provide, as is mentioned in theory, two types of support (Heriot-Watt University 1999). This support may be provided in a responsive way to a request from a student, or else it is provided in advance in an attempt to be pre-emptive of a specific question. In addition to facilitating delivery of learning material, computers can be used to underpin support mechanisms for open courses.

For the purpose of this paper, I have to clarify the definition of what open learning is. Open learning has no restrictions on access, pace or timing of the course (Heriot-Watt University 1999). In practice there are a range of different courses from completely self study books, through tutor supported distance learning, to campus based (as is ours) students supported by packs of material. The support that students get can come from the structure of the material, from tutors, from other learners, and from supporting structures around the materials. In the National Leadership School we combine all of them, but in this paper I will concentrate on the support given by the tutor and the impact of that act on tutor's career development.

The vital component in the planning and provision of any learning course is the framework of support created to underpin and enhance the learning process (*ibid*). Why tutors? As Rowntree (1992) says, open learners usually work with packages of materials and books. But the package is rarely enough. Most open learners will need support from human beings – people who can help them with their learning and respond to them as individuals. Whatever the connection with learners is, we are likely to have an interest in how our learners might need support. The second reason, which Rowntree also mentioned in his book, is that learners without support are most liable to delay their completion of a programme or to drop out altogether. What I, at the National Leadership School am finding out is that learners without tutors support are often like ships without the steering wheel and compass. They miss the direction or sometimes they even miss the whole continent, metaphorically speaking. But sometimes the reassurance is often enough to keep them going.

THE CAREER IN EDUCATION AND FACTORS THAT ARE  
AFFECTING THE CAREER

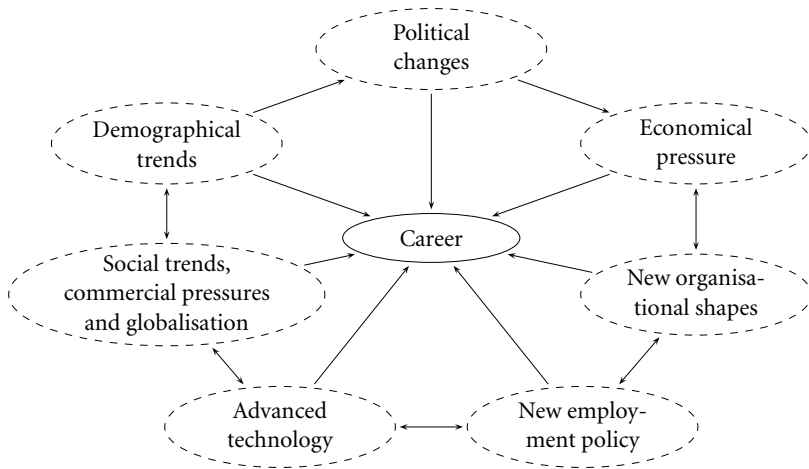
In this section, I will present one of the aspects of the notion as to what a career in education is, with special emphasis on the Slovenian aspect, which is specific. These aspects are some of the factors that are in one way or another affecting the educational career and are connected to the internal and external environment of schools and to changes that are happening in Slovenia.

In the last 10 years, much has been done in the field of INSET for Slovenian teachers, head teachers and others working in the field of education. Little time and effort – if any at all – has been spent on clarifying, debating and reasoning about what a career is in the field of education, and which factors are affecting the career. It seems that in the Slovene setting this is yet another ‘not to be touched’ theme.

In Slovenia, during the span of the years 1990 till 2001, there were many changes coming from the external and internal environment of schools. Many were imposed by the central government and other institutions on the ways in which schools work and, consequently, all this also has a great short – and long-term impact on the careers of Slovenes working in education; one should also not forget the issue of globalisation mentioned above.

Macro changes in the external environment (Clark 1991) of many organisations are causing them to refocus their perceived roles and strategies. These various external changes, as well as having a direct effect on organisations, have also had an impact on each other. They reinforce a climate of continuing change and raise questions about what actions organisations need to take in order to survive and develop. The answer of the National Leadership School was also to implement the role of the tutor. There was a strong need from our participants for the ‘as soon as possible’ feedback. And a quality – one feedback, of course. These changes also have implications for the management of human resources and are affecting the attitudes and perceptions of employers and employees about careers. There are seven major factors identified by Clark (1991): political changes, commercial pressures and globalisation, new organisational forms, new trends in employment, advanced technology, social trends, and demographical trends.

These factors are broad, and multi – faceted. Consideration of the impact on career development has remained fragmented and is therefore



worth highlighting. Also Lipičnik (1998) is emphasising the importance of external factors, when talking about the career and the influence on the career. These factors are almost the same as Clark's (1991): political changes, economical pressure, new organisational trends, new employment scheme, advanced technology, social trends, and demographical trends.

Lipičnik also says that, when speaking about careers, we have to take into account some of the elements which are strongly interwoven. They are, e.g.: environment, organisation, vocation and individual career.

The top manager in education (such as a head teacher) has often been cited (Fullan 1992; Hill 1994) as a key figure in blocking and promoting changes and in determining the effectiveness of the school and as such a very important person in the school. Hill (1994) says in his book that until recently the idea of managing a career was somehow indecent and unseemly. It was the same in Slovenia and only recently, in the last couple of years, has the attitude begun to change. The notion of a career was more or less connected with the expression 'careerist' in the negative sense. There are no studies in Slovenia concerning the career either of the head teacher, or of the teachers at any level from any career aspect.

### *Political Changes*

The agreed removal to trade barriers to create a single European market of 1992 has also intensified commercial pressures for acquisition and joint ventures, requiring organisations to rethink the type of manager that will be required and the career and other initiatives that need to be

offered. The government of Slovenia also reacted to those changes and they sent a group of 14 people involved in education abroad on post-graduate study. I was one of the people in that group and that study led me away from the Board of Education and Ministry of the Republic of Slovenia to the National Leadership School and our paper on tutors in ODL.

### *Commercial Pressures and Globalisation*

I have already mentioned it previously, but I have to add that commercial pressures have in turn resulted in a search for new organisation structures that are leaner, decentralised, responsive and flexible. A career for life has come to be seen as neither the only nor the desired option, for organisations and managers alike. As a tutor I have to steer my career in a totally new way and, and in ways unknown to me. The commercial pressures, fuelled by international competition and the single European market, could generate much uncertainty about organizational career paths. Managers will need to be aware what niches exists and what skills are valued, both for their own careers and for those of their subordinates or students for that matter. General managers will need to anticipate possible changes sufficiently in advance to be able to prepare their team for alternative careers, possibly within a new form of organisation.

### *New Organizational Forms*

The existence of a fast-acting, changing environment requires responsiveness and flexibility. And that is just what we offered by introducing tutorials. New organizational forms are dependent on enabling technology, which has led to a re-examination of the nature of managerial work, global IT systems and telecommuting.

Atkinson (Clark 1991) has argued that organisations such as the National Leadership School and Faculty of Management in Koper will need to achieve flexibility in at least three areas relating to employees, which contrasts with notions of the traditional hierarchical bureaucracy. These areas are: functional, numerical, and financial.

### *New Trends in Employment*

At the National Leadership School, part of the work is done from home (home-based offices) via computer, fax and cellular phones, as we are travelling around Slovenia a lot. This has required from the staff considerable adaptation, gaining new communicating skills and – given the

fact, that we had all been employed in large educational institutions – adapting to a relatively isolated job at times, or at least to different communication through different communicating channels than we had previously had.

### *Advanced Technology*

Enabling technology has itself influenced expectations about the relationship between the extent and legitimacy of career demands and the quality of life. Robots can do dirty or dangerous work, and cellular radio and related technology can make the executive accessible 24 hours a day, by land, sea and air. All the above mentioned technology enables us to conduct the tutorials in the way we do it, but it also requires many new skills and a lot of (mostly) self-training.

### *Demographical Trends*

Social aspirations and the desired lifestyle have had their impact on demographic trends. Smaller or no families, increased divorce rate, single parenthood and an ageing population are all part of the social fabric. We were facing the strong shrinking pool of young workers towards the end of the 1990's and an increasing number of older workers. Married women are a source of workers in Europe. Skills shortages will become more severe, especially among professional, scientific and technical staff. More specifically, skills shortages are predicted in IT, financial work, mechanical engineering, and chemistry, and specific in employment sectors such as construction, the civil and public service sectors and the utilities.

### THE PRESENT – THE CROSSROADS?

In recent years have been doing my research mostly on the career development and career factors that are affecting the careers in education. In the research done in the years 1999 till 2003, I have identified several more factors that are relevant in the Slovenian setting. These factors are: education and training, politics, communication with the external environment, staffing, organisation of work in the organisation, economy, new technology, personal qualities, climate and culture, personal status, international activities, economical recession, and changes.

Some of the factors are interlinking with Clark's and Lipičnik's factors, and some of them are new. If I look now into the career of the management lecturer as a tutor, I can analyse my job also from the point of view of these new factors which are:



- *Education and training*: a lot of new skills were required to do the job of the tutor and most of the skills were gained so to say 'on-the-job' and with self studying.
- *Communication with the external environment*: there are numerous skills to be gained also from the field of communication with the external environment. There are also new target groups to be mentioned.
- *Staffing*: in my job description there is no mention of the skills required to be a tutor or a mentor, probably a good question to consider in the future when advertising for the job.
- *Organisation of work in the organisation*: organisation of the work has emerged so to speak from the needs of our clients and because of the changing demands of the micro and macro environment.
- *Personal quality*: I can not answer that one! Being a tutor, does that contribute to your personal quality? I have never done any research in that field. I am fairly sure that some of the personal qualities add something to better tutorials.
- *Climate and culture*: surely a factor worthy of every consideration. There are organisations where it is fairly easy to develop a pleasant surrounding for 'learning on the job'. In my organisation good tutorial skills are highly valued.
- *Personal status and international activities* are two factors with which I am sure that a tutor can contribute to the better quality of work. I am sure that a good tutor is gaining in personal status among his or her students. From my own experience, I can add that I have learned many skills which come in very useful when tutoring, working on international projects.

I can say that, of all the factors that have 'touched' my career, least of all have been social external factors-so far! The role of a tutor is something I have been performing for several years, but it is never the same. I do hope that with all the elements displayed in this paper I am contributing to *the quality dialogue* in the whole educational process, and especially in open and long distance learning and in personal development of the teaching and supporting staff through acquiring new knowledge and skills.

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