

## CAREER SUCCESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE YOUTH

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the numerous transformations taking place in the contemporary reality, including the world of work, which influence people's professional career and the success achieved through it. This article presents the results of own research concerning career success as perceived from the perspective of young people. The studies were conducted among academic students and students of vocational school complexes using the diagnostic survey method, which involved the survey technique and the questionnaire survey tool. Within them, particular attention was paid to two aspects of this issue: its objective and subjective nature, as well as the assessment of own chances for achieving it within one's career path. The results of the studies prove that the surveyed youth perceives success in a career to a large extent in a subjective manner and that the vast majority take a positive attitude towards their own professional future. The resulting empirical material may carry important implications for the educational practice. It shows, what skills and knowledge should be taught to young people preparing them to enter the labour market.

## SUKCES W KARIERZE W OPINIACH MŁODZIEŻY

**Słowa kluczowe:** sukces, kariera, młodzież, opinie młodzieży na temat sukcesu, młodzież akademicka, młodzież ze szkół zawodowych

**Streszczenie:** Celem artykułu jest zwrócenie uwagi na liczne przeobrażenia mające miejsce we współczesnej rzeczywistości, w tym również w świecie pracy, które nie pozostają obojętne dla kariery zawodowej człowieka oraz przypisywanego jej znaczenia i odnoszonych za jej pośrednictwem sukcesów. W tekście przedstawiono wyniki badań własnych dotyczących sukcesu w karierze postrzeganego z perspektywy młodzieży akademickiej oraz uczniów z zespołów szkół zawodowych przeprowadzonych metodą sondażu diagnostycznego. Zwrócono w nich szczególną uwagę na dwa aspekty tego zagadnienia: jego obiektywne oraz subiektywne wycieniowanie, a także szacowanie własnych szans na jego odniesienie na ścieżce kariery. Wyniki badań dowodzą, że sukces w karierze nabiera subiektywnego wycieniowania dla młodzieży poddanej badaniu, jednak jego obiektywny wymiar również posiada dla niej znaczenie oraz że zdecydowana większość przyjmuje pozytywne ustosunkowanie wobec własnej przyszłości zawodowej. Uzyskany materiał empiryczny może nieść ze sobą istotne implikacje dla praktyki edukacyjnej. Ukazuje on bowiem, w jakie umiejętności oraz wiedzę warto wyposażać młodzież przygotowującą się do wejścia na rynek pracy.

## Introduction

In the 21st century a professional career is becoming more and more flexible<sup>1</sup>. Such a turn of events might be caused by the changes occurring in the contemporary labour market as well as by transformations of work environment and working conditions which are entailed by the former. Uncertainty of an occupational situation makes an individual increasingly responsible for shaping their professional career. And individuals are more and more frequently directed towards self-development and pursuing their personal goals instead of focusing

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<sup>1</sup> J. Tomlinson, *Perceptions and negotiations of the "business case" for flexible careers and the integration of part time work*, "Women in Management Review" 2004, vol. 19 (8), pp. 413–420; W.R. Heinz, *From work trajectories to negotiated careers. The contingent work life course*, [in:] J.T. Mortimer, and M.J. Shanahan (eds.), *Handbook of the life course*. Kluwer/Plenum, New York 2003, pp. 185–204; K. Aumann, E. Galinsky, *The real "opt-out revolution" and a new model of flexible careers*, [in:] B.D. Jones (eds.), *Women who opt out. The debate over working mothers and work – family balance*. University Press, New York 2012, pp. 57–69.

on the well being of an organization<sup>2</sup>. This situation actually makes the issues related to the career importance for a human being, as well as the meaning of professional success, still topical.

The matter of success in career being quite important is addressed by many theoretical approaches<sup>3</sup>, which attempt at defining its conditioning and determinants of satisfaction derived from work. It also becomes the subject of research leading to distinguishing individual features which facilitate achieving successes<sup>4</sup>, evaluating the work conducted by a person<sup>5</sup>, or distinguishing inner determinants and indicators of success<sup>6</sup>.

This article analyses the issue of “success in career” perceived from the perspective of young people. This problem can turn out cognitively interesting, both for employers devising motivational schemes as well as educational institutions which prepare young people to enter the labour market. The article presents the results of studies conducted among young people from vocational schools and from universities. This group of subjects was decided upon because they are young people who in the nearest future will become creators of the labour market. It is worth examining their opinions regarding career due to their prognostic value.

The inspiration for the adopted approach is based on developmental career concepts which draw attention to the subject oriented dimension of career planning, including particularly the constructivist career theory proposed by Mark

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<sup>2</sup> W.H. Turnley, D.C. Feldman, *Re-examining the effects of psychological contract violations: unmet expectations and job dissatisfaction as mediators*, “Journal of Organizational Behavior” 2000, vol. 21, pp. 25–42; J. A-M. Coyle-Shapiro, I. Kessler, *Consequences of the psychological contract for the employment relationship: a large scale survey*, „Journal of Management Studies” 2005, vol. 37 (7), pp. 903–930.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. F. Parsons, *Choosing a vocation*. MA Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1909; E. C. Hughes, *Men and their work*, Free Press, Glencoe 1958; J D. Krumboltz, *Improving career development theory from a social learning perspective*, [in:] Savikas, M.L. and Lent, R. W. (eds.), *Convergence in career development theories: Implications for science and practice*. CA: CPP Books, Palo Alto 1994, pp. 9–31; D.E. Super, *Career and life development*, [in:] Brown, W.D. and Brooks, L. (eds.), *Career choice and development*. Washington – London, San Francisco 1984, pp. 192–234; J.L. Holland, *Making vocational choices: A theory of vocational personalities and work environments*. Psychological Assessment Resources, Odessa 1997; D.T. Hall, *Careers in organizations*. IL: Scott, Foresman, Glenview 1976; Idem, *Careers in and out of organizations*. CA: Sage, Thousand Oaks 2002.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. S.E. Seibert, M.L. Kraimer, *The five-factor model of personality and career success*, “Journal of Vocational Behavior” 2001, vol. 58, pp. 1–21.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. E. I. Meir, S. Melamed, C. Dinur, *The benefits of congruence*, “The Career Development Quarterly” 1995, vol. 43(3), pp. 257–266.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. J.H. Greenhaus, *Career dynamics*, [in:] Borman, W.C., Ilgen, D.R. and Klimoski, R.J. (eds.), *Comprehensive handbook of psychology. Industrial and organizational psychology*, Wiley, New York 2003, vol. 12, pp. 519–540; S.E. Sullivan, *The changing nature of careers: a review and research agenda*, “Journal of Management” 1999, vol. 25, pp. 457–484.

L. Savickas<sup>7</sup>. The proposal of this researcher constitutes not only a complementary approach to professional development, but it is also an approach which excellently writes into the dynamics of contemporary reality. It presents a new insight into the career issue, showing it as a permanent process undergoing constant transformations and redefinitions which occur as a result of changes taking place in the environment (contextual ones) and in the perception and behaviour of a subject. Thereby, it draws attention to the fact that creating one career theory is impossible as the dynamics of this phenomenon makes it prone to constant evaluation. Also an assumption about the subjective character of career is of crucial importance for the approach adopted by M.L. Savickas, who not only places emphasis on his own experiences, but also acts on the basis of current professional aspirations which are a constructive factor for his *life theme*. It is “biographical mindfulness” and abilities for self-creation that allow an individual to create a personal narration regarding professional future<sup>8</sup>. A consequence of such a state of affairs are individual career patterns that constitute an integral part of human life, which is significant for an own “I” moulded by everyone.

M.L. Savickas assumes that an ability to adapt and design one’s own career, in reference to changes in the circumstances which occur over time, becomes an indispensable element of planning the professional future by young people<sup>9</sup>. In the opinion of the researcher, they should be prepared not only for particular events in which they will certainly participate, such as choosing a school, or a place of internship, but most of all, they should be ready for unexpected, accidental situations, which could become a chance to pursue the goals established earlier or contribute to changing own plans. The awareness of the significance of professional experiences for a subject gives him or her a feeling of continuity in reference to their own career, which is quite important for establishing goals and making decisions connected with occupational future. The researcher mentioned the following variables which may be detrimental for achieving career success: parents’ socio-economic status, education, abilities, personal features, quality of self-image and adaptive skills regarding the current job market

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<sup>7</sup> M.L. Savickas, *Career construction: A developmental theory of vocational behavior*, [in:] D. Brown, and L. Brooks, (eds.), *Career choice and development*, San Francisco 2002, pp. 149–205.

<sup>8</sup> Idem, *Constructing Careers: Actor, Agent, and Author*, “Journal of Employment Counselling” 2011, vol. 48, pp. 179–181.

<sup>9</sup> Idem, *Career adaptability. An integrative construct for life-span, life-space theory*, “Career Development Quarterly” 1997, vol. 45(3), p. 247.

situation<sup>10</sup>. Currently the uncertain situation in the job market makes an individual responsible for managing the capital of his or her own career, which is significant for perceiving success in career by him or her. This means that criteria of success, and thereby those that indicate it has been achieved, are also individualized.

## Success in a professional career

In the problematization of success in a career, researchers highlight the need to withdraw from the selective approach to the ways of thinking about success. The depth of the construction of success in a career will be clear when viewed from two perspectives. The reflection on success is dominated by the relativistic approach, which highlights that an objective career success affects the subjective dimension of success in a career<sup>11</sup>, and that the subjective and objective sides of career success are mutually dependent on each other<sup>12</sup>, or – if we adopt an evaluating perspective – it is stressed that subjective career success takes primacy over objective success<sup>13</sup>.

The presented observations on the sense of success in a career highlight its subjective nature. In this sense, success or rather the sense of success, can „be determined primarily on the basis of the subject’s reports of its subjective state”<sup>14</sup>. Van Maanen defined „subjective career success” as „a person’s internal apprehension and evaluation of his or her career, across any dimensions that are important to that individual”<sup>15</sup>. In the trajectory of a career, the sense of satisfaction, contentment and self-realization in professional work and the sense of success on the professional level, reinforce and determine each other. Success can cause a range of experiences that together make up the professional potential of everyday life. It is prototypically derived from a recognized and

<sup>10</sup> Idem, *Career construction...*, p. 154.

<sup>11</sup> M.E. Poole, J. Langan-Fox, M. Omodei, *Contrasting subjective and objective criteria as determinants of perceived career success: A longitudinal study*, “Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology” 1993, vol. 66(1), pp. 39–54.

<sup>12</sup> S.E. Seibert, M.I. Kramer, R.C. Linden, *A social capital theory of carter success*, “Academy of Management Journal” 2001, no. 2.

<sup>13</sup> M.B. Arthur, S. N. Khapova, C.P. Wilderom, *Career success in a boundaryless career World*, “Journal of Organizational Behavior” 2005, vol. 26, pp. 177–202.

<sup>14</sup> M. Majczyna, *Podmiotowość a tożsamość*, [w:] A. Gałdowa, (red.), *Tożsamość człowieka*, UJ, Kraków 2003.

<sup>15</sup> M.B. Arthur, S.N. Khapova, C.P. Wilderom, op. cit., p. 179.

perceived general success in the career domain. As emphasized by Augustyn Bańka, the subjective character of success, where each person is heading towards career success along their own path, consequently means that it is difficult to talk about the development of identical careers. Due to the possibility of individuals responding to similar events differently and perceiving similar events differently, people may experience, feel and speak about success or failure while performing the same sequence of works, in the same time and place<sup>16</sup>. The subjective understanding of career refers to concepts expressing different subjective career aspirations. Subjective careers of people in similar social or employment circumstances may overlap, but, as emphasized by Bailyn, „it would be a mistake to assume that all members in a particular social category would share the same subjective career orientations”<sup>17</sup>. It seems that it is no accident, that in the proposed theory of career construction Savickas clearly emphasizes the fact that individuals differ from each other in their character traits, among which the author includes: personality traits, concepts of self and abilities. It is the degree to which the subject is able to demonstrate the possessed features that determines the quality of the defined success in a career<sup>18</sup>.

It is difficult to point to simple and direct correlations between personal variables, environmental variables and the sense of satisfaction or success in a career. What is more, it is difficult to indicate the existence of a high correlation between satisfaction with a career and success in a career. In this context, it is worth pointing out the originality of the classic studies on the mutual relationship between career satisfaction and career success carried out by William Gellman (1953); Alistair Heron (1954); Arthur H. Brayfield and Walter H. Crockett (1955), John O. Crites (1961), Helen S. Astin (1968); Lloyd H. Lofquist and René V. Dawis, (1968)<sup>19</sup>. The relationship between a career in the objective sense and a career in a subjective sense evokes questions concerning other variables, which undoubtedly include success in a career (its variability and differentiation) and the relations between its objective and subjective nature.

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<sup>16</sup> A. Bańka, *Proaktywność a tryby samoregulacji*. Print-B, Poznań-Warszawa 2005, s. 25.

<sup>17</sup> L. Bailyn, *Understanding individual experience at work: comments on the theory and practice of careers* [in:] M. B. Arthur, D. T. Hall, B. S. Lawrence (eds.), *Handbook of career theory*, Cambridge 2004.

<sup>18</sup> W. Patton, M. McMahon, *Career Development and Systems Theory. Connecting Theory and Practice*, Sense Publishers, Rotterdam 2006, p. 63.

<sup>19</sup> S. Cytrynbaum and J.O. Crites, *Generating new directions in career theory: the case for a trans-disciplinary approach*, [in:] M.B. Arthur, D.T. Hall, B.S. Lawrence (eds.), *Handbook of career theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 7–25.

## **Objectives**

The main objective of the conducted studies focused on the identification of the personality and social variables influencing the type and quality of the exhibited professional orientations of the youth and their approach towards career. The presented results constitute just a small section of the accumulated empirical material. In the undertaken explorations particular focus was also set on the aspect of success in a career, and in particular, two aspects of this issue: its objective and subjective character, as well as the youth's assessment of their own chances of achieving it within their own career path.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Scientific studies were conducted on two groups of adolescent preparing to take up employment – students from vocational school complexes and university students. Vocational school complexes are understood as basic vocational schools and technical high schools. The successful completion of such schools entitles their graduates to take a professional qualification exam. After successfully passing the examination, the graduates can take up work in their learned profession. One of the studies was conducted in late May/June 2015 in eleven selected Vocational School Complexes located within the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship and the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship. The research sample consisted of 697 people. The second study was conducted in 2012 among 354 students of selected universities in Poznań.

### **Procedure**

Due to the wide exploratory capabilities of the selected research method, allowing for the collection of broad knowledge on the characteristics of the given issues, learning about their dynamics, identification of the structure and directions of development – the diagnostic survey method was used, which involved the survey technique and the questionnaire survey tool. In the organized research process a random-purposive sampling scheme was used. The layers of the sample were initially determined, including deliberately selected types of schools, such as the basic vocational schools and technical schools, as well as localities selected in terms of population size (urban agglomerations, large

cities, towns, villages). Meanwhile in the next stage, the groups of students (class units) among which the study was conducted were randomly drawn.

The second study, the research sample was also drawn in accordance with the purposive-random sampling scheme. In the first phase the researchers determined the layers of the sample, which constituted purposefully selected fields of knowledge such as: (1) humanities, (2) social sciences, (3) legal sciences, (4) technical sciences, (5) medical sciences. In the second stage of preparation of the research sample, specific fields of study were indicated within each of the determined layers. In this way the studied academic youth represented various study courses. These included: in the case of social sciences – the courses of Education, Special Education; in the case of humanities – the course of History, in the case of legal sciences – the course of Law, in the case of medical sciences – the course of Medicine, in the case of technical sciences – the courses of Automation and Robotics, Computer Science, Electrical Engineering.

### Instruments

The survey questionnaire which was used to study young people from vocational schools included 47 questions. The questions were closed (which required the respondents to take a specified approach towards given categories), half open and open (which allowed young people to speak freely and openly, and the researchers to re-examine the previous knowledge after analyzing the collected data). This article presents an analysis of two questions referring to the opinions held by young people as regards the notion of career success.

The first question was as follows: “Of what person in your opinion one could say that they achieved professional success?”. Classification of factors conditioning success, given by the studied group, was conducted on the basis of the division proposed by Anna Firkowska-Mankiewicz<sup>20</sup>.

Another question presented in the article, which was answered by respondents, was as follows: “What do you think are your chances to achieve professional success?”. They indicated their answers on a 7 point scale, where 0 was equivalent to the lack of any prospects of success in the implementation of professional plans and 6 meant very high chances. This question was inspired by A. Cybal-Michalska’s studies relating to academic youth<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> A. Firkowska-Mankiewicz, *Czym jest sukces życiowy dla współczesnego Polaka? Kontekst socjodemograficzny i psychospołeczny*, [w:] H. Domański, A. Rychard (red.), *Elementy nowego ładu*, IFiS PAN, Warszawa 1997, s. 303–330.

<sup>21</sup> A. Cybal-Michalska, *Młódzież akademicka a kariera zawodowa*, Impuls, Kraków 2013.

The questionnaire used in the study involving academic youth consisted of 58 questions. The article, as in the case of the previous survey, presents results obtained for two questions, which were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed. Qualitative analysis of the answers to the questions made it possible to capture explicit and implicit opinions of the studied group of students. The content analysis was conducted when drawing conclusions and examining the views on perceiving oneself and perceiving a career from a point of view of a person who pursues it. As far as the first question is concerned, i.e.: “What do you think are your chances to achieve professional success?” university students gave the same answers as vocational school students, as the question was the same in both questionnaires. The other question: “What does it mean to You to achieve a career success”? “When will you consider yourself as professionally successful?” was an open one, and its content was qualitatively analyzed.

In quantitative studies, certain specific statistical procedures were selected and applied in order to recognize and capture connections between variables. Three various measures of correlation were used, depending on the level of the analyzed variable. For bivalent nominal variables it was Yule’s coefficient, for multivalent nominal variables it was Cramer’s coefficient  $V$ , whereas for ordinal variables (including all variables measured on Likert scale) it was Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient.

Another important point in the data description was examining the statistical significance of the values in the analyzed measurement scales as regards basic social and demographic variables. The choice of appropriate statistical tests was determined by the level of the analyzed dependent variables. The chi-squared test was used for all variables, whereas for measurement scales (division variables) parametric tests of significance of differences in intergroup means were applied. The applied procedure of one-way variance analysis (ANOVA) was supposed to assess the statistical significance of differences in means in many compared sample groups. Statistical significance of the result means the extent to which it reflects the truth, i.e. how well it represents the situation in the studied population. The value of  $p \leq 0.05$ , which is widely recognized in social sciences, was adopted as the threshold of statistical significance.

## Results

### Success in a career in the opinions of youth from vocational school complexes.

*“Of what person in your opinion one could say that they achieved professional success?”*

The reflections of the youth participating in the diagnostic survey, concerning the indicators of professional success, relate primarily to its micro-structural component (92.6% of all replies), and therefore to the factors located within the individual, who not only is able to act independently to pursue their career, but most of all, takes full responsibility for it. The respondents much less frequently pointed to the meso-structural determinants of success (7.4%), indicating its dependency on the individual's broader surroundings, and did not refer at all to the macro-structural determinants (economic, political, demographic, global).<sup>22</sup> The perception of the determinants of success through the prism of the biological, psychological, personality and social properties of an individual particularly characterizes respondents living in cities with a population between 51 and 99 thousand people (97.3%) and rural youth (95.4%) ( $\chi^2 = 8,062$ ;  $df = 3$ ;  $p = 0,045$ ).

The life success model proposed by A. Firkowska-Mankiewicz<sup>23</sup> also allowed for the examination of determinants of professional success listed by the studied youth from the perspective of its four dimensions: stratification and prestige aspect, material aspect, emotional and affiliation aspect, and self-actualization aspect. Due to the fact that in response to the posed question a large group of adolescents pointed to particular persons who, in their view, have been successful in this area, the categories relating to those descriptions have also been highlighted.

It turns out that the largest number of indications related to persons known to the respondents from the public sphere (39.3%). Respondents characterized them by providing their first and last names, and often also the field of their professional activity. Among the people most often appearing in the survey questionnaires there was a large representation of people known to the respondents primarily from the media space and public figures present in the immediate environment of the students. It is worth noting, that the area of success of the above figures often allows us to place them within the field of the professional interests

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<sup>22</sup> A. Firkowska-Mankiewicz, *Czym jest sukces...*, s. 303–330.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

of the surveyed students, which means that they have specific roles models in their industries, who they would like to match up to in the future. The tendency to create a profile of a person about whom it could be said that they achieved professional success through a reference to actually existing people, is typical mainly for young people: living in small towns (51.4%), having fathers with primary education (54.8%) and mothers with tertiary education (54.3%), exhibiting excellent school performance (61.1%) and attending basic vocational schools (43.2%).

The second largest group of surveyed students (in terms of the number of indications) who responded to the question of the indicators of success in the field of professional life by providing an example of a particular person successful in this area, were respondents finding these examples in their immediate surroundings (13.3%). Adolescents identified them in the figures of their parents, siblings, members of the extended family, as well as neighbours, colleagues and acquaintances. A very common determinant, deciding that a given person was indicated, was the fact of having an own company or a satisfying job. The identification of the hallmarks of professional success in the biography of the family members and the closest friends, is characteristic especially of the surveyed girls (18.6%), students assessing their financial situation as bad (17.2%), the youth attributing average importance to work (16.4%) and respondents achieving very good educational results (21.1%).

The surveyed youth far less frequently expressed their appreciation for the careers of specific people by referencing historical figures or deceased people (2.2%), identifying themselves as an example of such persons (1.0%), or denying that they have ever met a person distinguished by their professional success.

Due to its subjective nature and reference to personal life goals, the self-actualization dimension of professional success earned the sympathy of every fifth respondent (22.9%). The definition of the phenomenon of professional success through the prism of achievements which are a source of satisfaction and thus have subjective significance to the individual, turned out to be the closest to the young people, who are to a large extent oriented towards life-long learning and self-development. The respondents also repeatedly referred to individual characteristics which in their opinion increase the chances of professional success and which include having a passion, talent, finding joy, happiness and satisfaction in professional work, resourcefulness, being smart, persistent, intelligent, hardworking, ambitious and systematic. The emphasis put on this area of professional success by the respondents also fits perfectly in the modern

paradigm of career – in which it assumes a subjective nature, which means that the importance is ascribed to is by the individual themselves. The determinants of success in the dimension of self-actualization were the most frequently identified by the surveyed girls (27.1%), respondents living in cities with a population between 51 and 99 thousand people (31.3%) and those living in rural areas (27.2%).

In their statements concerning a person who achieved professional success the studied youth definitely less frequently referred to the stratification and prestige dimension (11.6%) and the material dimension (6.2%), while the emotional and affiliation aspect was mentioned least frequently (1.0%). As it turns out, it persists among the surveyed young people from the vocational school complexes who are about to continue their education at a higher level. It is also worth noting, that some statements of the respondents concerning this area, pointed to the minimalist expectations regarding one's own future career, which may be interpreted as a result of the uncertainty accompanying young people who are entering the labour market and focusing on finding any work at all.<sup>24</sup> This aspect of success was most often referenced by the surveyed boys (13.9%), persons aged 16 (17.2%), that is, those beginning education at an upper-secondary school, persons living in large urban agglomerations (15.6%), respondents whose fathers have a higher education (17.8%) and adolescents who are an only-child (16.4%). We can also notice a regularity according to which the tendency exhibited by 30-year-olds from Warsaw to define success through the prism of its material indicators – which was heavily emphasized by A. Firkowska-Mankiewicz in her study<sup>25</sup> – has been shifted to the area of self-actualization by the students from vocational schools involved in the diagnostic survey. The young people convinced that a person's professional success is expressed by high earnings and a satisfying material situation, also frequently refer to the role of satisfaction with the performed work. The material dimension of success was particularly popular among the surveyed boys (7.6%), persons who are an only-child (12.3%) and representatives of technical high schools (7.4%). The studied youth surprisingly rarely associated professional success with a satisfying family life,

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<sup>24</sup> E. Giermanowska, *Między karierą a bezrobociem*, [w:] B. Fatyga, A. Tyszkiewicz (red.), *Normalność i normalka. Próba zastosowania pojęcia normalności do badań młodzieży*, ISNS UW, Warszawa 2001, s. 229.

<sup>25</sup> A. Firkowska-Mankiewicz, *Zdolnym być... Kariery i sukces życiowy warszawskich trzydziestolatków*, IFiS PAN, Warszawa 1999.

and successful interpersonal relationships with other people, which constitute the essence of the emotional and affiliation dimension.

The construct of career success among the studied youth appears to be a phenomenon that is subjective rather than objective, which reveals its personal nature. The subject's professional satisfaction and well-being resulting from it, may constitute an effect of the fulfilment of the individual's needs, goals, aspirations<sup>26</sup>. It may then be assumed, that young people looking at their own future with hope will likely be more involved in taking action to further their own career, than persons with a pessimistic vision of the future state of things.

*“What do you think are your chances to achieve professional success?”*

The studied young people evaluate their chances of success in a career very optimistically, as evidenced by the fact that more than half of the respondents (59.7%) state, that they have an above-average chance to achieve their professional goals. A large group of adolescents also assesses their perspectives in this regard as average (24.9%), while 14.8% believe that their chance of success is lower than average. The greatest conviction about their own professional success in the future is exhibited by young people with fathers (35,2%) ( $\chi^2 = 74,485$ ;  $df = 36$ ;  $p \leq 0,001$ ) or mothers (28,1%) ( $\chi^2 = 52,565$ ;  $df = 36$ ;  $p = 0,037$ ) who have higher education, respondents coming from large families (4 or more children in the family – 23,0%) ( $\chi^2 = 29,542$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p = 0,042$ ), respondents assessing their financial situation as very good (25,0%) ( $\chi^2 = 42,359$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p = 0,001$ ). This means that the individual's family environment has a significant effect on the individual's assessment of their chances of achieving professional success. The variable of the „importance of work for a given person” is also not without significance for the youth's approach to this aspect ( $\chi^2 = 34,121$ ;  $df = 12$ ;  $p = 0,001$ ). Young people who assign high importance to work within their value system are the most confident about the possibility of success in their career (21.9%). Additionally, a determinant of the assessment of chances of success in the professional sphere of life is the quality of educational achievements of the respondents ( $\chi^2 = 40,230$ ;  $df = 24$ ;  $p = 0,020$ ). The variable of the school grade average allows us to observe a tendency according to which the higher the student's educational results, in terms of the arithmetic mean, the higher they estimate their chances in a career. This regularity is particularly clear in the case of persons with excellent school grades (39.3%) compared with persons with

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<sup>26</sup> T. Mądrzycki, *Osobowość jako system tworzący plany*, GWP, Gdańsk 1996, s. 207–211.

a grade average below 3.0 (11.5%). The variable of „school type” also relates to the characteristics of the respondents’ school reality ( $\chi^2 = 24,440$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p \leq 0,001$ ). It shows that the representatives of basic vocational schools assess their chances of professional success particularly highly (19.2%).

A statistical analysis of the studies shows that self-perception has a significant effect on the respondents’ assessment of their chances of success in the implementation of professional plans. It turns out that a high level of general self-esteem ( $\chi^2 = 146,999$ ;  $df = 54$ ;  $p \leq 0,001$ ) and self-esteem in all the other spheres, i.e. cognitive and intellectual sphere ( $\chi^2 = 111,202$ ;  $df = 54$ ;  $p \leq 0,001$ ), physical sphere ( $\chi^2 = 67,676$ ;  $df = 48$ ;  $p = 0,032$ ), social and moral sphere ( $\chi^2 = 105,051$ ;  $df = 54$ ;  $p \leq 0,001$ ), characterological sphere ( $\chi^2 = 124,901$ ;  $df = 54$ ;  $p \leq 0,001$ ) and global sphere ( $\chi^2 = 147,537$ ;  $df = 54$ ;  $p \leq 0,001$ ), generates in the surveyed adolescents a significantly higher conviction about the possibility of career success, compared with persons exhibiting a low level of self-esteem in each of its listed dimensions. A similar relationship can be observed in the case of general proactivity ( $\chi^2 = 157,102$ ;  $df = 36$ ;  $p \leq 0,001$ ) and a sense of self-efficacy in action ( $\chi^2 = 83,029$ ;  $df = 24$ ;  $p \leq 0,001$ ). The higher the level of proactive behaviours in a career, or sense of agency in the undertaken ventures manifested by the respondent, the better they assess their chances of professional success and vice versa – the lower the level of general proactivity and sense of self-efficacy in action manifested by the respondents, the greater the proportion of answers indicating „none” with regard to the prospects for professional development.

### **Success in a career in the opinions of academic youth.**

*“What do you think are your chances to achieve professional success?”*

In response to the question of success in a career, the surveyed youth, which is still at the “pre-career” stage, exhibits high optimism. In this way it confirms the predictions made by E. Giermanowska, who indicated that the youth was adopting a strategy of “making a career”, which was associated with seeing value in education, prestige and material prosperity<sup>27</sup>. This is of course of great importance for the attempt to capture the semantic meaning attributed to the career domain by young people. The youth’s notions of career place their views and opinions in the structural-functional orientation as an external system, an objective phenomenon, reflecting the publicly visible position, status, power, prestige and money. This means that the young people characterize career in terms

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<sup>27</sup> E. Giermanowska, op. cit., s. 229.

of social and professional mobility, identified by them with the vertical mobility of individuals.

In the opinion of the studied academic youth the chances of achieving success in a career are definitely high (75.5%) (“high” – 35.9%, “very high” – 39.6%). And although it is difficult to talk of the development of identical careers, the belief in future career success is the highest among young people living in large cities over 100 000 inhabitants (ANOVA,  $p = 0.017$ ), the respondents whose mothers have a Bachelor’s degree or higher (ANOVA,  $p = 0.005$ ), and those who declare very good material conditions in their families (ANOVA;  $p <= 0,0001$ ).

The assessments concerning the chances of success are determined by the quality of the educational reality of the respondents. Respondents, who were among excellent or average students in high school (ANOVA,  $p = 0.002$ ) and students who represent the field of medical sciences, technical sciences or legal sciences (ANOVA,  $p <= 0.0001$ ) assess their capabilities and chances of success in a career as significantly higher than in the other studied groups. It is worth pointing out, that the anticipation of success in a career, and additionally the definition of career success in the case of the studied group of youths, does not necessarily have to coincide with its “objective” definition, which is typical for the functional and structural perspective identifying career with prestige, power, and material prosperity. Especially since, as J. Pollegrin and C.J. Coates put it, success in the early stages of career development is not usually defined in terms of prestige, power and income<sup>28</sup>.

The respondents who have not changed their career plans since the beginning of their studies are the most convinced about the potential possibility of achieving career success (ANOVA,  $p = 0.001$ ). A linear perception of career prospects is conducive to the anticipation of career success. The optimistic perception of the future in a career is accompanied by an individualistic normative orientation ( $S$ ;  $\rho = 0.154$ ;  $p = 0.007$ ). Young people with a dominant individualistic normative tendency formulate their career goals in terms of self-actualization, development of their own potential, subjective activity and responsibility for causation, which undoubtedly allows for the anticipation of success in a career seen as the individual’s “property”<sup>29</sup>. The faith in the success of future career events depends on subjective activity. The results of the research allow us to recognize the importance of assessments concerning the domain of life-quality

<sup>28</sup> E. Rokicka, *Pojęcie „kariery”. Perspektywa strukturalno-funkcjonalna i interakcjonistyczna*, „Przegląd Socjologiczny” 1992, XLI, s. 24–25.

<sup>29</sup> L. Myszka, *Planowanie i zarządzanie karierą jako podmiotowa „własność” jednostki*, „Ogrody Nauk i Sztuk” 2015, nr 5, s. 345–352.

satisfaction for the prospects of career success. In the studied group of youths it was found, that the more frequently the students felt the joy of life (ANOVA;  $p \leq 0.0001$ ) and the more favourably they assessed their life up to that point (ANOVA;  $p \leq 0.0001$ ), the more optimistic they were with regards to their chance of achieving career success. The feeling and the recognition of being loved (ANOVA,  $p = 0.012$ ) are not without significance for the evaluation of the chances of success in a career. The importance of the subject's inner conviction concerning the positive balance of their life for their sense of success in a professional career was noted by M. Piorunek. The author's research indicates that there is a relationship between the satisfactory experience of one's own self and their autonomy in decision-making, productivity as defined by Erikson, subjective agency, and being internally directed. In the case of the studied academic youth, both the different ways of defining a career and the aspects of approaching career do not differentiate the „planning attitudes” of the respondents to the achievement of career success. There is no doubt, however, that the ability to allocate the possessed competences and skills to the work environment will be of fundamental importance for the achievement of career success.

*“What does it mean for you „to achieve success in a career”?*

The surveyed academic youth shared their thoughts on the ways of *interpreting career success* by answering the following open question: “What does it mean for you “to achieve success in a career”? When will you determine that you achieved success in your career?” The reflections of the academic youth were varied. In their attempts to define the concept of “achieving success” the respondents revealed the three levels at which it is considered, namely: the subjective career success, the objective career success and a reference to the duality of success in a career by way of emphasizing its objective and subjective dimension and the relational approach between its subjective and objective meaning. The following statements of the surveyed academic youth reveal the image of “success in a career” functioning in the minds of the respondents.

The focus on the external (objective) perspective, which outlines the perception of career success in structural categories, is illustrated in the following statements: “success is working at a key position within the company, having a large number of subordinates, a high salary” (A/168/K/T), “success means high social status, having multiple qualifications, being an authority, a specialist in the given field” (A/7/K/S), “success means good earnings, extensive knowledge in one's

field of work, social respect" (A/52/K/S), "success is prestige, money, power" (A/138/M/M).

The subjective meaning attributed by the young people to career success, along with a simultaneous reference to the aspects that are important to them, is revealed by the following statements: "It will be a success when I'm proud of myself and I'm certain that I used my potential well" (A/218/M/P), "success is the feeling of satisfaction from what you do" (A/11/K/S), "It will be a success when I find fulfilment in what I do" (A/6/K/S), "success is the achievement of happiness, satisfaction with life, finding a job in which I feel good" (A/100/K/S).

In the statements of the respondents we were often able to capture the subjective-objective duality of career, and thus also the duality and the interdependence of the subjective and the objective success in a career. This was exemplified in the following statements: "I will feel success, when I obtain a satisfying position, when I will be able to afford a decent living, and when I won't have to worry about tomorrow" (A/13/K/S), "success is a high salary, the recognition of others, self-satisfaction and sense of self-worth" (A/55/K/S)", "success is self-satisfaction, financial stability, social respect, the possibility of development not only in the field of one's profession" (A/162/K/H), "success is a position on the labour market, professional satisfaction, high financial income" (A/127/M/P).

The above statements of the surveyed academic youth, focused on the objective and subjective indicators of professional success, refer to the achievement of the desired objectives associated with work. The objective success consists of properties typical for the functional and structural perspective of a career, and namely: position, prestige, power, and high income. The subjective career success refers to feelings of satisfaction, contentment, fulfilment and achievements, defined by the respondents as important in the subjective sense. Both the objective and the subjective results are important indicators of professional success from the perspective of the studied group of youth.

## Conclusions

In a world dominated by orientation on individualism, young people perceive the category of success in a career through the prism of their own satisfaction felt as a result of the undertaken professional activity (or rather its image). It is worth noting, that the vast majority of the surveyed youths exhibit a positive attitude towards their own future professional; however, for a significant part of this

group, this is equivalent with the experience of satisfaction with the performed work and self-actualization in that work, which is possible to achieve in many professions, not always enjoying societal prestige. The appreciation of the objective determinants of success such as financial gratifications, or power – becomes characteristic for academic youth in the phase of late adolescence. We can therefore conclude, that the level of education (number of years and amount of work dedicated to studying) determines the expectations regarding one's own career.

The obtained results have crucial implications both for educational activities as well as for the field of human resources management. Although young people perceive objective indicators of success, they place much more importance on its subjective dimension. This means that educational institutions preparing young people for entering a job market should develop in them some skills which will facilitate a pro-active approach to their own career. Pro-active people have a skill to perceive chances for self-development in the surrounding reality. This skill can be useful when pursuing goals and ambitions, which consequently turns an individual into a creator of his or her own reality rather than a forecaster. Pro-active behaviour revealed when graduating, according to the research conducted by Kate Mackenzie Devey and John Arnold<sup>30</sup>, is continued when entering the career world and facilitates achieving professional success, quite frequently already in the first years. In turn, the research conducted by Scott E. Seibert, Michael J. Crant and M.L. Kraimer<sup>31</sup> indicates that pro-active people are more open to noticing both objective and subjective indicators of success in their career. It is vital that organisations which aim at enhancing a sense of success in their employees concentrate not only on creating an external motivation system, such as bonuses or other forms of remuneration, but also take care for such issues as work satisfaction, possibilities for development and self-esteem.

As emphasized by M.L. Savickas, the transition from the educational environment to the professional environment, involves active coping not only with professional tasks, but also with developmental tasks. This is accompanied by the need to “provide people with *direction* in their career development tasks, teach *the skills of* planning and exploration, *train* them in the techniques

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<sup>30</sup> D.K. Mackenzie, J. Arnold, *A multi-method study of accounts of personal change by graduates starting work: Self – ratings, categories and women's discourses*, “Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology” 2000, vol. 73, pp. 461–486.

<sup>31</sup> S.E. Seibert, J.M. Crant, M.L. Kraimer, *Proactive personality and career success*, „Journal of Applied Psychology” 1999, vol. 84 (3), pp. 416–427.

of career management, and *carry out* problem-solving exercises<sup>32</sup>. The focus on understanding career, described by the researchers as *anticipation*<sup>33</sup>, *awareness* (Warren, 1979), *involvement*<sup>34</sup>, *planning*<sup>35</sup>, or *the time perspective*<sup>36</sup>, is conducive to the expansion of the subject's awareness concerning the quality of the developmental tasks that are associated with decision-making regarding a career in accordance with the maxim "prior planning prevents poor execution"<sup>37</sup>. Undoubtedly, the process of setting a direction supports the development of a positive attitude for the future, the ability of planning and exploration and the development of cognitive and behavioural skills<sup>38</sup>. Meanwhile, career management techniques enable the worker to better and more consciously identify the social expectations of the employer and the preferred methods of their fulfilment, and to recognize the formal requirements of adapting to a new work place. One method intended to help adolescents in the transition from education to the labour market is the so-called "role playing", which is supposed to prepare them for solving problems that may appear in the workplace by undertaking part-time work or by learning methods focused on role-playing (psychodrama), projection techniques, such as *Professional Apperception Technique*<sup>39</sup>. The highlighted examples of the activities illustrate the multiplicity of techniques – used particularly intensively in the 1990s – from the field of career development, which aimed to facilitate the transition of young people from the educational environment to the work environment. Right now it is also recommended to undertake appropriate activities in the form of coaching, tutoring, mentoring, or career counselling workshops, as a result of which young people will be "entering into adulthood" with a conviction that they possess agency, that they are equipped

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<sup>32</sup> M.L. Savickas, *The Transition from School to Work: A Developmental Perspective*, "The Career Development Quarterly" 1999, vol. 47, p. 331.

<sup>33</sup> D.V. Tiedeman, R.P. O'Hara, *Career development: Choice and adjustment*, "College Entrance Examination Board" 1963.

<sup>34</sup> J.O. Crites, *The Career Maturity Inventory* (2nd ed.), Monterey, CA: CTB/McGraw-Hill 1978.

<sup>35</sup> D.E. Super, P. L. Overstreet, *Vocational maturity of ninth grade boys*, Teachers College Press, New York 1960.

<sup>36</sup> E. Ginzberg, S.W. Ginsburg, S. Axelrad, J.L. Herma, *Occupational choice: an approach to a general theory*, Columbia Univer. Press, New York 1951.

<sup>37</sup> M.L. Savickas, *Career construction...*, pp. 149–205.

<sup>38</sup> One example could be the education and career guide written by M.L. Savickas and entitled "*Career Decision Making: Teaching the Process*" which is a course addressed to higher education institutions. It consists of 20 plans of lessons, which are aimed at reducing the anxiety that may accompany young people during their entry to the world of work (Savickas, *The Transition from School...*, p. 332).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 331–334.

with the ability to flexibly respond to any changes, resulting in increased chance of success in their career.

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