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Introduction

This book is for university administrators, professors, and career specialists, and it provides them with a comprehensive introduction to the BE(A)ST (BE Aware STudent) approach. The BE(A)ST approach aims at enhancing students' awareness of personalized career development, fostering a connection between their identity, beliefs, and actions to support career awareness. Career awareness is the process of being aware of several career pathways or professional alternatives accessible based on the interests of an individual (Wise et al. 1976). The main objective of the BE(A)ST approach is to provide a structured process consisting of a series of tools that leads university students to find what best fits their aspirations and possibilities before entering the job market. At the same time, since students are taking the BE(A)ST course or seminar while they are enrolled at the university, they can still change and modify their study plans.

The complexity of our fast-changing work environment requires more than merely informing students about career possibilities and matching the job market's demand. Career services are moving towards *career construction counseling* (Savickas 2005), where each individual is conceived of as unique and needs to design his own unique career path. Some universities are thus moving forward from the classical career orientation tools – such as career fairs and career coaching – to specific courses that support students in their career design process. Stanford University, for example, has a two-unit course where students inquire about career-related questions through the lens of design thinking, with a *Designing Your Life* (Burnett et al. 2016) approach. Nova University in Lisbon has a two-credit course where students develop career management skills with *Business Model You* techniques. Since we are now talking about career preparedness, adaptability, and coping, and recognize that proactive career behavior (e.g., career exploration) is

an antecedent (and not only a consequence!) of one's future work self (Guan et al. 2017), a validated course that supports the identification of one's passion and encourages career exploration and experimentation is a needed addition to the assets a university can provide to its students. BE(A)ST represents to date the most innovative methodology to support career design, as it integrates the business and design perspectives while supporting individualized career development by recognizing the specific needs of each student.

The BE(A)ST approach proposed here incorporates cutting-edge tools and practices from career literature, including some of today's most popular career design textbooks like *Business Model You* (Clark et al. 2012) and *Designing Your Life* (Burnett et al. 2016). The authors have performed several iterations of the approach through courses and seminars provided in different countries and learned many lessons and best practices concerning which tools are most suitable for different students and situations. The course allows students to understand their attitude toward the job market and personalize their career design experience with a selection of tailored tools.

The BE(A)ST approach, carried out as a course or seminar, expands universities' range of services in supporting students to take the next step in their professional lives, and can be a valuable asset for career counselors and higher education institutions. If you feel your university will support its students in a career design process, this book might be for you. Contact the authors for further support in integrating this approach in your school or university.

Personalized Career Development course at a glance

Origins and approach to the course design

The Personalized Career Development (PCD) course design is the result of three research programs: two Erasmus+ programs (BEAST and OMNI-BEAST) focused on the development of the method and one program funded by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (Adaptation and Evolution D.Y.L. Methodology to Individualized Career Planning in Higher Education Institutions – DYLMIC), focused on its adaptation, scientific validation, and dissemination. The research programs involved six European partners from Poland, Italy, France, Greece, Spain, and Portugal. The approach design team ran six pilot programs from 2019 to 2022. Professors and researchers from those universities designed the BE(A)ST approach over four years of collaboration and iterations. This book will refer to them as 'approach design team' or 'design team.'

The BE(A)ST approach was developed with a human-centered focus on the needs of students, university administrators, and professors. The design team employed an action research method by intertwining academic research and

problem-solving. The methods included ethnographic research on students as well as prototyping efforts of multiple course options during six Personalized Career Development course pilots. The design team produced several versions of a course implementing the BE(A)ST approach in order to test which would be the best way to introduce it to a university context. To learn more about the methodology design of the course, refer to Chapter 3: Methodology.

Personalized Career Development course general guidelines

The Personalized Career Development course has been defined as a flexible format between 1 to 3 ECTS (25 to 75 hours), however, we suggest implementing the 3 ECTS version with 30 hours of lectures in workshop format and 45 hours of homework and project activities spread out over one semester. The course should be integrated into the university curriculum and taken by university students from different disciplines. We are suggesting this format after testing various ones, including a weekend course and a week sprint, as students need time for their self-awareness to grow. Reflection activities to learn about themselves and reflexivity activities – as suggested in the exercises – to experiment with themselves (Savickas 2016) require time.

The course is beneficial for university students, especially for those who are starting to think about how their careers will develop once out of the university, and for this reason, we suggest using the Personalized Career Development program for Master's or second-year and above Bachelor's students.

We suggest allowing students from different disciplines to enroll in the course. The course has been tested with students from the same field (e.g., only IT students) and students from a mix of disciplines (e.g., management, marketing, engineering, and communication). Students appreciated multi-disciplinarity, especially for shared reflection activities with peers in the self-understanding phases. For this reason, we suggest – if possible – to ensure a mix of multiple disciplines, with a small cluster of students from similar disciplines (e.g., mechanical together with automation engineering students, arts together with humanities students). A PCD course can operate well for up to 30 students at a time.

The course can mix in-person and virtual classes, with the in-person portion consisting in the students interacting with peers and PCD teacher(s) to develop individual and group activities (in pairs or teams, up to five students per team). Different combinations of in-person versus virtual activities have been tested, and the PCD course designers have also tried a fully virtual PCD course version to prove that an entirely virtual course is possible. However, qualitative feedback from students has showed a higher course satisfaction when some reflection activities were held in person. For this reason, we suggest delivering some activities in person, especially those requiring shared reflection. In case you want to opt for

virtual classes, do consider that you need a teaching platform that supports you in creating sub-teams among the classes. Chapter 5 presents an in-depth course structure with the syllabus and learning outcomes.

Personalized Career Development course structure and tools

The PCD course starts by acknowledging that a ‘generic’ student is too broad a concept to be effective for career design. In our universities, we have many different types of students who have different needs in terms of fostering their awareness for career development. For example, suppose a student has clear ideas about her future career. In that case, it is more important that she tests them out (to protect the student from the idealization of a professional career) before she dedicates much energy to self-understanding, which is where a student who is confused about her future career might begin. This is a relevant contribution to the theory of career design: while scholars study how different career behaviors and attitudes affect career paths, to our knowledge, no university has designed ad-hoc career design courses for different students’ attitudes toward their careers.

The book describes four student profiles (also called student types) that have emerged from our ethnographic research and have been validated during the course design. The four profiles are ‘The Restless Who Takes the Risk,’ ‘Few Ideas, But Clear,’ ‘Diligent Performer But Confused,’ and ‘The Entrepreneurial.’ Students’ profiles are organized into the personalized BE(A)ST matrix across two variables: the student career proactivity (reflective versus active vis-à-vis job experiences) and student career clarity (confused versus determined about a future career). The profiles and matrix are presented in Chapter 4 (Table 4.2).

The design team has developed a survey instrument (or “scale”) that students can take at the beginning of the course to assess their students’ profiles. The scale has been statistically validated, and students reported identifying themselves in the resulting profile. With the identified student profile, the student can tailor her own path in the PCD course. In the PCD course, each student profile can benefit from a unique subset of 21 tools (and their potential designed variation). The different paths are presented in Chapter 4.

The PCD course comprises four stages: Self-Reflection, Professional Identity Definition, Career Scenarios Exploration, Career Prototyping and Testing. In each stage, a selection of activities and related tools will accompany students in their career design process. Stages and tools are presented separately and later connected: each BE(A)ST stage has specific activities to implement during the course (Table 2.3 and Figure 2.2). Modules and tools are offered to support educators who want to replicate the PCD course in their universities.

The stages come from the double diamond design process outlined in *Designing Your Life* (Burnett, Evans 2016), as the PCD course considers career awareness

development a *wicked problem*. The Self-Reflection stage offers the students a chance to gain a deep understanding of their personal resources, needs, and expectations (passion, interests, values, and abilities). The Professional Identity Definition stage asks the participant to work toward defining his/her professional values and identity. The Career Scenarios Exploration stage provides students with tools to envision the future and create valuable career options. The Career Prototyping and Testing stage tests possible professional solutions with activities such as interviews with professionals embodying those professions, and forms of experimentation of the professional solutions, with direct (e.g., internships and shadowing) or indirect (e.g., reading or podcast listening) forms. To understand the phases, please refer to Chapter 2 for the description of BE(A)ST and Chapter 4 for insight into its usage in a university context.

BE(A)ST tools were selected and filtered from career design literature and practice to present only tools that an educator can easily apply in short activities with students. Out of the 21 selected tools, nine come from the book *Designing Your Life* by Burnett and Evans (2016), two from *Business Model You* by Clark et al. (2012), three from *ISMA 360°* by Dominique Vian (2013), and three from *Inteligência Emocional* by Moreira (2019). Other tools are adapted from other disciplines, like management (e.g., *Career Mind Mapping* and *Personal SWOT Matrix*) or decision science (e.g., *Decision Trees*). An educator willing to replicate the PCD course can find in Chapter 6 everything she needs to use each tool: instructions given to the student, examples, lessons learned, and pitfalls to avoid.

The course alternates classes and individual homework and projects. Classes present the rationale of the stages and introduce the tools, and individual or group activities (in pairs or small teams) follow. Homework consists of activities in which the students further experiment, reflect, or develop the activities. This structure minimizes interaction among PCD teachers and students and limits shared reflection in class to specific moments. This choice has been made because central university offices usually have a mere handful of experts compared to a large number of students.

What you'll find in the following chapters

The book is organized as follows. In Chapter 1, we provide an overview of the complex, changing future job market. We list the possible threats that volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity bring to the career development process. To face this changing world, university offices, career professionals, and professors need to support students with both hard and soft skills.

Chapter 2 conceptualizes career awareness as a *wicked problem*, in the context of defining career development as “the interactive progression of internal career

identity formation and the growth of external career significance” (Hoekstra 2011, p. 159) but also referring to a series of changes that occur in an individual’s career (Brown 2002). This conceptualization requires a shift from career planning to career design. This chapter offers an overview of traditional approaches to career planning and introduces the motivation and aims of the BE(A)ST approach.

Chapter 3 describes how we designed the PCD course, following our three-phase methodology that intertwines academic research and problem-solving. The three phases are i) BE(A)ST approach design (identification of tools, course structure, and course format); ii) identification of students’ profiles and development of a validated self-assessment questionnaire for students’ profile identification; iii) PCD course design, matching tools and profiles, and the following test in pilot courses.

Chapter 4 presents the possible applications of the BE(A)ST approach. We first present the PCD format, phases, and tools. We then show students’ profiles, the student profiles assessment scale, and the different paths a student can take while involved in a PCD course.

Chapter 5 illustrates a detailed syllabus and course material to be used while introducing the course at a university. One can also find here the different scenarios of the Personalized Career Development course.

Chapter 6 introduces the BE(A)ST toolbox, addressing educators that want to replicate Personalized Career Development course in their universities. The chapter seeks to deliver practical information for BE(A)ST tools usage. The tools are presented by BE(A)ST stages, and alphabetically ordered.

In conclusion, we identify challenges that universities are facing in supporting the path of career design as a lifelong journey. With the BE(A)ST approach, we provide a solution to improve the alignment between the career and the life of our students in the framework of a VUCA world. We underline the potential of incorporating the BE(A)ST approach for universities and for the future of our students. This is only the starting point of our journey in supporting career counseling as future research avenues are presented.

References

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