

Ph.D. Thesis Summary

Work has a significant role in one's life; it fulfils several psychological and social needs besides the material ones. That is, the individual doesn't only need a job, but also those manifested and latent experiences, which are inherent to it. (Bánfalvy, 2003). The different theories regarding the role that work has in one's life emphasize different aspects, but they mostly agree that work contributes to the healthy functioning of the individual to a great extent. On the other hand, starting off from the lack of it, that is, from the point of the effects unemployment has on the individual, we find that permanent unemployment is a situation which has an impact on the biopsychosocial state of those concerned. Several studies support the negative social, psychological, physical, emotional effects of unemployment and its negative effects on lifestyle, identity and economical status, as well as the increase of the frequency of mortality, addiction and deviations. The literature does list a few positive effects, but it can be even more important to focus on the *protective factors*: what can provide protection against the above negative effects.

Our theoretical approach is that of the social learning theory, as we are convinced that the attitudes and cognitive structures penetrating the individual's personality and the functioning that is realized based on these are results of a learning process, so another learning process can modify, correct them (unlearn-relearn). Studying the phenomenon in this theoretical framework, counseling can be conceptualized as a learning process, and the cognitive style, general self-efficacy, the flexibility and open-closed nature of the thinking of the individual, as well as his ability to change perspectives and to restructure have a special significance.

The European Association for Counseling *defines counseling as an interactive learning process*, which is realized in between the contracting counselor(s) and client(s). According to our hypothesis counseling (in this case group counseling or training) can help the individual to modify (*unlearn*) the fixated maladaptive attitudes and behavior and learn (*relearn*) new, adaptive forms. The groups of interest work as learning groups with a psychoeducational emphasis, with two main columns to support them: the *psychological component* aiming at the attitude level, with the emphasis on the psychological development of the individual via increasing self-knowledge and awareness, but we can also list here the support and the improvement of self-esteem, as well as the development of constructive attitudes; the *educational component* includes developing the relevant skills and increasing the possessed information: this is the skill and knowledge level development. The two components are just seemingly independent: the psychological component helps the whole learning process to a great extent and is its inevitable component (Amundson et al, 2013).

In our research we were looking for the answer to whether the unemployment training affects the participating unemployed, and if yes, how; whether there are measurable differences among the indicator variables right after finishing the counseling and 5-8 months later; and finally, how much these trainings are helpful for the participants in finding a job or to what extent are they incentives for beginning some kind of further education. We examined whether there are input variables, that is, client attributes that predict or precondition the success of the training. We were curious to see whether there are distinctive client types, whose input and output variables show a characteristic pattern; furthermore, we attempted to explain some of the major phenomena with the help of the path analysis.

In the research the questionnaire package was filled in by participants of the job search techniques training organized by unemployment offices. The participants are all unemployed. The number of the subjects worked out the following way:

	first round	second round	third round
all subjects	344	284	55

The interpretation of our research results will be presented along the line of our hypotheses.

In our **first hypothesis** we assumed that there will be differences between the input attributes of the "Y" generation and those who were born before 1982 due to the different socialization background. The two subsamples were similar in terms of education and the drop-out rate didn't differentiate the two groups either. The subjective experience of unemployment – that is, how pleasant or unpleasant the individual experiences unemployment as a whole – was affected by both age and education, without an interaction between the two. The higher educated someone is, the less unpleasant he experiences this state. This can be traced back to a better socio-economic status, that is, a better financial situation; the financial deficiency that goes together with unemployment is less pressing on them. The job values turned out similarly for both of the groups: a stable workplace was of utmost importance, while finding a job that matches their education was at the end of the priority list. We got a significant difference on the asking for help dimension of the coping questionnaire: younger people are more inclined to ask for help in a difficult situation. This could be the result of a higher culture of mental hygiene, or that among younger people it does not fall under such a negative judgment if they ask for help as with older people as culturally it is not seen as a "sign of weakness." The professional literature cites data regarding that asking for help is more common among women than men (eg. Margitics, Pauwlik, 2006). Kopp (2003) also recites this gender difference and that it is used to partially explain the significant difference in the health status and mortality rate of men and women, as the latter turn to a doctor in case of an illness or any kind of symptoms sooner. However, the underlying cause is probably the same as in the case of the generational difference: the cultural judgement regarding seeking support is traditionally negative and is considered to be a sign of weakness or effeminacy.

Although our result, which indicates the higher demand of the under 25 group for emotional support and self-knowledge cannot be related to the generational difference based on the different socialization, but it can still be related to generational attributes and age, or the corresponding developmental stage and normative crisis: at the counseling levels the demand for psychological counseling was significantly higher for the under 25 group than for the other two levels. The task of the Eriksonian early adulthood stage could be the forming of the identity (especially considering that independence and the "real adult life" are starting at a later age nowadays), or in terms of the career-developmental theories, the exploration stage of Super. Both theories attribute a *searching* type of activity, exploration and trial-error to this stage, in which emotional support and the development of self-knowledge could play an especially important role.

We didn't find a difference in terms of resilience and self-efficacy between the two groups. It is possible that the reason for this is that the younger generation was mostly raised after the change of regime in Hungary, but their social learning still happened among the members of the previous generation both in the restricted circle of the primary socialization (parents and family) and the institutional framework (kindergarten, school). That is, they internalized those values and attitudes, into which the adults around them "grew into" in the previous regime, so the approaches having become counterproductive by then ingrained in them in a kind of transgenerational way. There is also another possible explanation at hand: as figure 39 shows, the members of the Y generation are mostly new entrants of the job market. Thus, their characteristic relatively low level of average self-efficacy (not significantly different from that of the older generation) could be attributed to the fact that as they don't have any work experience yet, which is an important ground for individual efficiency; they haven't really had the chance to experience their own competence (while Bandura calls personal efficacy the experiencing of competence, Kopp, 2001)) so the scaling yields a relatively lower level of self-efficacy than expected.

To sum it up, our first hypothesis is partly confirmed: the assumptions retracing the generational difference to the socialization background were not justified, but the age-based generational differences, which have their roots in developmental psychology, were nicely delineated.

Our **second hypothesis** referred to that those who take part in the training out of their own initiative will show a bigger change than those who were obliged to take part. Our assumption was that for learning, and especially for empirical learning, it is necessary to have an inner motivation and some kind of openness for taking the information in, as well as trust for being able to open up. We compared the self-esteem, self-efficacy, depression, resilience and subjective well-being scales filled out before and right after the training, and although the pre- and post-training values showed significant differences (except for one of them) – that is, there was a perceivable development among each of the variables – there was no significant difference between the two sub-samples. It is possible that those who were obligated to take part in the training were there because of an external motivation, but the involvement, the new situation, or the recognition that they can profit from the training reframed the situation for them, and created that open state of mind that was necessary for the change.

So the second hypothesis could not be confirmed.

Related to the **third hypothesis** we assumed that at the end of the training the psychological state (self-esteem, subjective well-being, general self-efficacy, resilience, depression) will improve as compared to the values resulting from the measurement at the beginning of the training. We also assumed that in the follow-up period this value will fall back to some extent and will stabilize at a somewhat higher level than the original in the case of self-esteem, self-efficacy and depression. The expected pattern could be seen clearly, and in many cases the differences proved to be statistically significant. We also compared the results of the counseling impact questionnaire scale filled out in the 2nd and 3rd rounds, and we could confirm the drop for the follow-up period regarding six cognitive or emotional dimensions; there was an increase regarding one of the dimensions, behavior, where a significant growth was experienced as the long term change. It is unnecessary to emphasize the importance of this: although it is true that the effects of the training, making an imminent difference in planning or being more energized, wear off with time, but behavior, which is a real, hard indicator, as it includes realized actions, shows a significant increase in the long run as well.

Thus, we could confirm our third hypothesis: the expected pattern was clearly delineated. In terms of subjective well-being, self-esteem, depression, self-efficacy and resilience there was a strong improvement at the closing of the training as compared to the entrance values; most of the values fell back to some extent during the follow-up and stabilized (on a higher level than the first measurement showed). On one hand we got significant differences via comparative statistical tests on the variables of interest deemed to be relevant, on the other hand, the frequency distribution characteristic to the variables of our sample delineated a positive shift. We would like to emphasize the behavior dimension as a significant, positive, long term effect, which constitutes realized labor market actions, as the only hard indicator of the counseling impact questionnaire. So all in all it seems that the training actually has a very remarkable imminent impact on important psychological indicators of the participants; however, these cognitive and emotional effects tone down, while the change in the realized, successful action dimension shows a significant increase in the long run.

We based our **fourth hypothesis** on that resilience can be considered a cognitive and ego flexibility, so we assumed that the subjects who had higher resilience values will show a higher level of change on the counseling impact questionnaire scales due to that they are more susceptible to change, and to cognitive and attitude level resilience and accommodation.

Our fourth hypothesis was confirmed; the individuals characterized by high resilience reported a significantly higher level of changes both in the cognitive and on the emotional dimensions at the end of the training, than the subjects with a lower resilience.

In our **fifth hypothesis** we made the assumption that the different trainers facilitate different types of changes in the participants with different characteristic patterns; in order to confirm this we compared the imminent effects (at the end of the training) broken down as per trainers.

The result of the two sample t-test showed the general tendency that while before the training the averages were usually significantly different, in the second round of measurements (after the training) the averages "aligned" to each other, and the differences between the groups led by the same trainer disappeared.

When we compared the first and second round results of the clients belonging to the same trainer, that is, we examined the individual changes in time, we found differences in which variables changed significantly in case of a given trainer. Depression changed for all participants of each trainer, while subjective well-being and self-esteem also changed for all but one trainer.

So according to our results there is a difference between the trainers in what the characteristic processes happening in the members of their groups are, and along which dimension their clients develop as compared to themselves. This is the individual level. On the other hand, the intergroup comparisons show that while the input values of the groups are very different, these differences disappear by the end of the training, and the differences between the groups level off.

The **sixth hypothesis** was related to the relationships concerning the length of the unemployed period: we assumed that among those who had been unemployed for a longer time hopelessness and depression are more frequent, and they judge finding a new job to be less likely as well as reporting that more areas of their lives are affected negatively by their unemployment.

Regarding depression our finding was that the ratio of those belonging to the normal zone decreases with the increase of the unemployment period, while the ratio of those struggling with mild to moderate depression was approximately constant in all groups. Severe depression is perceivably more frequent among the permanently unemployed. Interestingly, the average of the depression score is the highest in the entrant and the permanently unemployed group at the first measurement.

All in all, our hypotheses were confirmed: those who have been unemployed for a longer time are in a worse mental condition (depression and hopelessness) in several ways than those who have been unemployed for a shorter period. However, there were two unexpected results as well: the more remarkable is that entrants in many ways have the same bad indicators than the permanently unemployed: their depression and hopelessness averages at the start of the training are basically the same. The other is that the freshly unemployed are also in a relatively bad mental hygienic state. So as opposed to the linear correlation we assumed we got a U shaped correlation, which can be explained well with the help of the stage theories.

Our assumption was that the probability estimation of re-employment is related to the psychological well-being of the individual, as stated in our **seventh hypothesis**. We found that those who saw a bigger chance for finding a job were characterized by a significantly higher subjective well-being, optimism and resilience, as opposed to those, who saw only a slight chance: their depression score was significantly higher.

To sum it up, those who feel more comfortable even as being unemployed are more certain that they will be re-employed. We find this important because in our opinion this probability estimation can be considered to be a kind of cognitive evaluation, which is of central importance in the coping processes of the individual: his decision regarding what his next step will be, how he will cope with the situation, what kind of coping method he will choose, and how much energy he will put into it will be based on this. This evaluation is decisive in how controllable they judge the situation, how they perceive their influence and control over their employment status. It is easy to see that if someone believes that his employment is unlikely, this will be mirrored in his striving and activity as well.

Hypothesis 8: concerning education our preconception was that those with a lower level of education expect to receive more concrete information from counseling. We could confirm the hypothesis: with the level of education the demand for a more informative counseling decreased and the interest in a deeper, psychological counseling increased. Those with a lower level of education had less knowledge about what to

expect from a training, and based on their schooling experience they primarily expected information and frontal education. On the other hand it is possible that they have the largest information deficit, as they are at a relative disadvantage concerning self-informing.

Regarding the length of the unemployment we found a tendency according to which entrants and the freshly unemployed have the highest demand for emotional support and self-knowledge, that is, a deeper type of counseling; and as the period of unemployment lengthens, this expectation decreases and gradually gives space to a demand for an information-focus, rather cognitive, knowledge level counseling. In the case of the permanently unemployed this tendency is modified a little: although their demand for an informative counseling further increases, but they also have a little higher expectation for a psychology type counseling as opposed to a consultation (Figure 66). In the case of entrants the demand for psychological counseling could be related partly to their age: we could see that the entrants all belong to generation Y (Figure 39), and we also know that the under 25 age group demands psychological counseling in a significantly larger ratio (Figure 37). We traced back this latter fact via the larger demand for self-knowledge to the identity search in the Eriksonian psychosocial development theory and to the exploration stage described by Super. The higher demand for psychological counseling of the permanently and the recently (for 0-2 months) unemployed is well supported and explained by the result we got in point 6, where the length of the unemployment and hopelessness show a U shaped relationship: considering the length of the unemployment the two extreme categories (and the entrants) reached the highest points on the hopelessness scale.

We checked the distribution of the different demands for counseling along the dimension of coping strategies, and it was rather clearly delineated that those seeking psychological counseling reached the highest values on all dimensions (except for one, goal-oriented action, because there the ones marking the second level got the first placement). This could point to that they don't want emotional support and larger self-knowledge in order to compensate a deficit, as they already have highly functioning coping strategies.

The **9th hypothesis** deals with an especially important question: we examined the characteristics of those who reported finding a job at the follow-up meeting, and how they differed from the other sub-sample (the ones about whom we don't know if they have found a job).

We found that those who we know have found a job are all under 35; they have a higher level of education, and this relationship between the level of education and the number of those who found a job is approximately linear: the most who reported employment had a university degree, a little less had a degree from a higher technical school or college degree, and significantly fewer of them had vocational training or GCE. Those with a higher education are significantly overrepresented among those who managed to find a job. We also examined the question of voluntariness, that is, whether there was a difference between those who initiated taking part in the training themselves and those who were obliged to take part. We got a significant result, according to which a higher proportion of those who took part in the training voluntarily found a job.

We checked how long ago those had lost their job who we know for sure have found employment since. The ratio of those who found a job decreases with the increasing of the length of the unemployment period: the entrants have the highest ratio of employment, then comes the group of unemployed for maximum 2 months, then those for 3-6 months, and finally the group of those unemployed for a maximum of 12 months. Amongst the permanently unemployed no one reported having found a job.

Turning to the psychological variables, we got a significant difference between the two groups regarding their probability estimation concerning how likely they think it is they will find employment within 2 months: those who eventually managed to find a job believed in it much more. We'd like to refer to our assumption in the 7th hypothesis, that is, that the probability estimation has a significant importance because of the cognitive evaluation, and that it seems to be confirmed here. The ones finding a job are characterized by significantly better emotion- and problem-focus coping strategies. There are some interesting differences on the

unemployment burden index as well: those who have found a job had felt the negative effects of their unemployment on their financial situation less (moreover, reported a mild improvement), as opposed to the other group, who reported a somewhat stronger and negative effect. This can also indicate that those people managed to find re-employment who were not dramatically shattered financially by losing their previous job.

After comparing the two groups we also examined how much the participants developed as a result of the training; that is, we compared the input variables via a one sample t-test with the measurements taken after the training. Interestingly, those who found a job improved in a little fewer areas than the other group, and we can't even say that they already started from a higher level to begin with, as they had very similar input values.

All in all we didn't get surprising results here: we know about the people in a better sociodemographic situation (young, higher education, relatively short period of unemployment or entrants) that they managed to find employment eventually. They, as they were in a higher status, were less affected financially by the unemployment. They also have better results in the field of coping and they estimated the likelihood of their finding a job significantly higher.

In relation to the **10th hypothesis** we identified client types with the help of cluster analysis. We used five variables for creating the clusters: depression, resilience, self-efficacy, subjective well-being and self-esteem. Four of our clusters covered the samples explicitly proportionally, and we got very well separated groups. For the following characterizations we emphasized prominent attributes of the individual clusters, generally using the upper or lower pronounced values for the comparing of the clusters with each other, and we highlighted the relative pattern of the individual types.

The first type, which we named *ambivalent* consisted of subjects who got into one level higher than the average in the case of four out of the five variables constituting the basis for the cluster category by the end of the training. With this in mind it is surprising that on the counseling impact questionnaire they reach the lowest score for each of the dimensions. This apparent contradiction can be resolved in our opinion: while the first measurement can be considered objective (as we measure them with validated tests along certain variables before and after the training and then compare these results), the counseling impact questionnaire, which focuses on the perceived change, is subjective in this sense: how much the subject feels he has developed. Here the level of self-awareness can be an important medium. The ones belonging to the first cluster find it to be the most likely to find a job (both at the beginning and at the end of the training); at the same time they find it least likely to want to change their lives once they find a job. (We named the cluster based on these two contradictory attitudes.) Unemployment had a positive effect on their passive entertainment, active recreation and their self-improvement, while it had a very negative effect on their financial situation.

The second cluster, which we denoted as the *reacting on emotional basis* has mostly average values along the five variables constituting the basis for the cluster category, and none of them changed as a result of the training. On the other hand, the members of this cluster reached far the highest values on all the dimensions of the counseling impact questionnaire, that is, they reported the most significant changes as a result of the training, which in our opinion can be considered a kind of enthusiastic attitude as well. The reason for our naming of the cluster is also that they received the highest score on the emotion-focus main factor in coping, and also on the asking for help, accommodation and withdrawing dimensions. It is an addition to their enthusiastic characteristic that they judged the training to be very useful, and they estimated it to be very likely both before and after the training that they will change their lives. Out of the dysfunctional attitudes outer control and perfectionism is characteristic of them.

We named the third cluster the *assertive problem solver* group. They started out with higher than average values to begin with, but in some of them they improved even more. As for coping, they scored highest on the problem-focus main factor as well as the goal-oriented action and the problem analysis dimensions; at the

same time they had the lowest scores on the emotion-focused, emotion-driven action, withdrawing and accommodation dimensions. It can be seen that this is a very pragmatic group with good capabilities. On the dysfunctional attitude scale they had negative results on the demand for achievement, being loved and the demand for outer acknowledgement dimensions, which shows some undersocialization or egotism. They have the best outer control value, around zero. On the counseling impact questionnaire they said that they improved a lot in the field of personal relationships, setting goals and realizing actions. They are the ones who think of unemployment as the least unpleasant state, and their unemployment burden index shows that unemployment positively affected their self-improvement, active recreation, passive entertainment and personal relationships.

The fourth cluster was named *blundering through coping*. They have lower than average values on all five variables, and these do not change at all except for depression, which changes from the very bad (significantly higher than the average) category to the best. As for the dysfunctional attitudes they are characterized by the highest outer control, and both before and after the training they are the ones who feel the smallest chance for finding a job. Out of all the clusters their experience of unemployment is the most unpleasant. On the counseling impact questionnaire on the knowledge and skills scale they reach a relatively high change (possibly partly because they arrive with such a low level of knowledge so they can have a relatively huge development at the training). As for coping, they reached the highest scores on the most unfortunate strategies: emotion-driven action and search for emotional balance, as opposed to getting the lowest scores for problem analysis and goal-oriented action, and as a whole on problem-focus coping as well. They also got high scores on the accommodation, withdrawal and asking for help dimensions. The effects of unemployment were only negative with them, in almost all areas, most of all: health, diet, personal relationships outside the family, financial status and relationships within the family.

In the **11th hypothesis** we focused on gender differences. It was an interesting and statistically significant result related to job values that good workplace atmosphere is more important for men than women. Concerning the expectations regarding the counseling level we got a clear and significant result, a linear relationship between the depth of counseling and gender: the deeper levels of counseling were demanded by increasingly more women than men. Informational counseling (level 1) was marked in fifty-fifty ratio by men and women as their expectation; for consultation this ratio was about 40-60% for men and women and for psychological counseling it was 30-70%. As for dysfunctional attitudes women had significantly higher scores for perfectionism, which can probably be traced back to their upbringing: it is many times expected of girls to be perfect in everything. On some of the scales of the counseling impact questionnaire women reached a significantly higher result: trust and openness, mood, contentedness, understanding attentiveness, the reframing of the problem and change of perspective, as well as planning.

Regarding the two presented results related to gender differences we would like to shed some light on a possible correlation: on the one hand, women demanded a deeper, psychological counseling more often, and on the other hand they scored higher on the contentedness and the counseling process main factors of the counseling impact questionnaire. We would like to emphasize that the dimensions where they had significantly higher scores than men were the attributes of the relationship with the counselor: process and rapport, trustworthy atmosphere, openness, mood and contentedness and understanding attentiveness - and these are exactly the main characteristics of a typical psychological counseling.

One of the major avails and innovation of our research could be the often mentioned **counseling impact questionnaire**. We constructed the questionnaire based on the indicator variables described in the professional literature. It tries to capture those individual level variables, along which relevant development can be expected after a job search competence development training. The questionnaire focuses on the changes ("Please, indicate the level of change you experienced as a result of the training in the following areas!"). Its goal is to get a picture of the changes experienced, the impact of the service and its patterns in the case of unemployed participants who took part in a (group or individual) counseling. The dimensions of the

questionnaire can be arranged into three larger factors: the process of the counseling, contentedness and the outcomes of the counseling.

the process of the counseling (process)	relationship with the counselor, emotional support
	reframing of the problem, change of perspective
the outcome of the counseling (outcome)	level of knowledge (knowledge)
	level of skills (skills)
	planning
	motivation, energy
	behavior
	personal relationships
	subjective well-being, self-esteem, general condition
	goals
	self-efficacy
	structuring of time
optimism	
contentedness	trust and openness
	mood and contentedness
	understanding attentiveness

The reliability indicator Cronbach alfa is above the desired 0.7 for all dimensions, with the exception of the behavior dimension, which is below it by a few thousandth.

THE EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH

Regarding our research we can say that it raises a few new aspects. Starting from the abstract and going towards the concrete these are as follows: on the level of theory and interpretation a new aspect is the approach of counseling as a problem solving, re-learning and re-structuring process. On the phenomenon level it can be stated that group counseling has been studied only rarely in Hungary so far. As for operationalizing and the realization of research I would mention two measurement tools: the unemployment burden index, which we have developed for the unemployed based on the health burden index, making a few modifications on it: instead of leaving room only for negative changes, we modified the scale so that it can go in the negative and positive direction as well. The other is the counseling impact questionnaire, which poses questions regarding the changes resulting from the individual and group counseling sessions.

Our research is profitable in several ways: as this is an applied field, it can lead to results that can be well recycled into practice and could even aid government policy changes regarding unemployment, so after all we hope it increases social profitability. The interpretation framework and theoretical approach of the research (counseling as problem solving, re-learning and re-structuring) on the other hand could have additional value in the area of theories because of its novelty. The impact assessment of group counseling and especially examining it on an unemployed sample has been an outfield, so getting to know the phenomenon and describing it via exact scientific methods could in itself be important.

We find it important to emphasize that counter to the convenient sampling of several researches here we worked in the field, with real unemployed; we had the registered unemployed complete the questionnaires at the site of the trainings. The reliability of the data is further increased by that this being a panel research, we

studied the same unemployed at different time points, so we could follow up on the changes of each of the individuals. Unfortunately this also meant negative consequences regarding the size of the sample.