

## Life Concepts of Business and Social Work Students – Influencing Factor for Sector Choice?

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It generally comes as no surprise that different sectors of society attract different types of employees. Indeed, studies have shown that self-selection into different employment sectors often occurs due to individual differences. The for-profit sector, for instance, has been shown to attract individuals interested in high salaries, while the nonprofit sector is found to appeal more to individuals less interested in payment levels (Tschirhart, Reed, Freeman, & Anker, 2008). In addition to differences in wage expectations, employees in nonprofit organizations are found to be more driven by values and are attracted by the doing-good nature of nonprofit work (Benz, 2005; Mirvis & Hackett, 1983). They are also more likely to be motivated by relational and intrinsic rewards, whereas their counterparts in for-profit firms are rather motivated extrinsically (Benz, 2005; Borzaga & Depedri, 2005; De Cooman, De Gieter, R., & Jegers, 2011). Similar differences apply to business students when compared to social work students: Business students are regarded as profit-seeking who, with an opportunistic and highly ambitious orientation, pursue their degree to be financially and materially successful (Buchanan, Kong-Hee Kim, & Basham, 2007). Social work students, on the other hand, often view their career-path as “calling” and wish to work with and help people (Marsh, 1988). They are regarded as being altruistic, intrinsically motivated and willing to accept low pay for their work (Csikai & Rozensky, 1997).

While looking into the reality of the nonprofit sector, however, we cannot find a homogenous workforce, but a highly heterogeneous mix of people (Burmester, 2005). Professions range from helping professions (e.g. nurses, social workers) to commercial employees (e.g. managers, administrators) (Neumann, 2004), with a tendency toward increasing the share of employees with degrees in business management (Boeßenecker, 2003; Gmür, 1999). Against the background of the heterogeneous mix of professions in the nonprofit sector, it is not clear why people holding professions characterized with high extrinsic motivation (e.g. business management) self-select in the nonprofit sector, and whether their stated extrinsic motivation is, in fact, the main factor contributing to their sector choice.

From past research we know that an individual’s sector choice depends on their perceived competence and the desire to work in a specific sector (Tschirhart, et al., 2008), personal values (Judge & Bretz, 1991), work motivations (Lee & Wilkins, 2011), and life experiences (Kunreuther, 2003). People choose a work sector according to their expectation, which sector will provide them with the rewards they consider to be most important. But other aspects of life might also influence the decision toward a particular employment sector, as Hall (2002) identifies a “growing reluctance to sacrifice personal and family gratifications for the sake of one’s career” (p.14). While professional ambition might seem to be a major factor choosing the employment sector, other considerations (e.g. a person’s private or family life) might play a role in those choices as well. Hence, current research lacks a holistic perspective on the person as a whole.

It is therefore important to consider all aspects of life that potentially contribute toward choosing an employment sector. This research builds on Ifflaender and Kletzing’s (2002) holistic approach of life concepts. Life concepts are defined as the expectations, wishes and fantasies about the content and role of one’s professional, family, and private life (Ifflaender & Kletzing, 2002). The aim is to better understand sector choice of students while considering a holistic perspective of a person’s life and his/her expectations of their future life. Using quantitative research methods, this study examines the following research questions: To what extent do life concepts of business and social work students differ? Is there a relationship between life concepts and sector choice?

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, we use this study as a pretest for developing an instrument assessing different aspects of life that might influence sector choice. The survey instrument was administered to a student population consisting of 97 social work/nonprofit management students and 84 business/ international business management students of a German University of Applied Sciences. The development sample (N=181) is representative of the target respondent population (Dawis, 1987). We aim toward achieving respectable reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha > .8$ ) through item analysis. Dimensionality of the 40 items, treated as a single set, will be examined using exploratory factor analysis. Second, we investigate potential differences in life concepts between family, private, and professional life of the student groups. Our aim is to better understand sector choice of students while considering a holistic perspective of a person’s life and his/her expectations of life. Having a scale that reliably assesses different life concepts of business and social work/nonprofit management students will inform both theory and practice with new insights into sector choice of students, their life expectations, and the relationship between different aspects of life.